



Kasich to tout 'reform budget' on road

State tour, trips to N.Y., D.C. planned; Sunday-morning TV news spot likely

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By Joe Vardon

MINSTER, Ohio - Gov. John Kasich strode into a conference room at the Dannon Company yogurt plant clad in a lab coat, while many in the audience donned hair nets.

If you favor the \$55.8 billion budget passed by the Senate yesterday - a budget that largely resembles the policy-driven document that Kasich unveiled on March 15 - then the governor looked like a surgeon emerging from the operating room having stitched together what he said was "as great a reform budget as the state has ever seen."

But if you oppose the budget's cuts in funding for schools, local governments, nursing homes and others that depend on state cash, you might say the lab coat and hair nets were there to keep everyone clean from the splattering of budget blood.

Kasich was in western Ohio to announce Dannon's pledge of 100 new jobs and an \$88 million investment in the plant in return for more than \$1 million in state-issued tax credits and grants. There, he unofficially launched what will morph into a national campaign touting his first budget as governor.

After a family vacation next week, Kasich will officially kick off a statewide budget-championing tour that will also include trips to New York to speak with bond-rating agencies and to Washington to speak as a guest of U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Thomas Donohue.

Kasich also said he probably will appear on a national Sunday-morning TV news program.

"Once you do good things like this, you want people to know," the Republican governor said, later telling *The Dispatch* that his trips outside Ohio are meant solely to "tell people about Ohio and attract jobs here."

Kasich, who expects to sign the budget on Thursday night and commemorate its passage in a Friday ceremony, said he has viewed the "veto list" of items he could scratch from the budget.

"But we had such a good process that the number of vetoes will be limited," he said. "It may be historic by the notion that there's just not a lot of things we need to veto."

Kasich's week won't be entirely about back slaps and celebratory toasts. We Are Ohio, the coalition leading the opposition to Senate Bill 5, will parade through downtown Columbus today

en route to dropping off hundreds of thousands of signatures toward placing the bill on November's ballot.

Many see the referendum on Senate Bill 5 - which weakens collective bargaining for public employees - as a referendum on the governor and his agenda.

Some Democrats also believe this budget will hurt Kasich and other Republicans as they attempt to defend Senate Bill 5 this fall.

"Ohio has had 14 straight months of declining unemployment, but that could soon change as a result of the deep cuts and partisan priorities in this budget," said Keary McCarthy, chief of staff for Ohio House Democrats.

Kasich didn't get everything he wanted in this budget. The \$5 million threshold he set for paying prevailing wages on new public construction projects was reduced to \$125,000 next year.

Left out was Kasich's proposal for public employees to contribute an additional 2 percent of their pay toward their pensions.

A budget conference committee also dropped Senate language that would've allowed the state to privatize the lottery - language that had received lukewarm support from Kasich.

"This was one of the few things they got right," said Dale Butland, spokesman for the liberal policy group Innovation Ohio.

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