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OPINION



Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2008

Our View

Budgets commit violence

The problem with political budgets is that they are drafted and approved by politicians, that is, those whose primary aim is to look good enough to the public to get reelected or, in the case of lame ducks, to have history view their legacies in a favorable light.

Thus, the really difficult decisions — necessary but controversial decisions that only leaders have the fortitude to make — are left for others: either one's successor in office or the unfortunate counterpart one governmental level below.

Thus, the federal budget is balanced on the backs of states; state budgets are balanced on the backs of communities.

Unsolved problems are left to counties, municipalities and local school districts to deal with and pay for — sorry, no money is available — while state and national politicians smile for the cameras and issue platitudes about smaller government and tax cuts.

And people who desperately need help are left to fend for themselves.

A tragic example in the making is the Centre County Women's Resource Center, which operates an emergency shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.

Violence increases during times of economic stress. So when service organizations such as the resource center need more resources, their funding is inevitably cut by belt-tightening — slimmer looks much better on camera — politicians.

President Bush's proposed budget eliminates the Victims of Crime Act and cuts \$120 million from the Violence Against Women Act, both of which provide money for local violence-prevention programs. Service providers and law-enforcement officials say these programs work, but no matter.

Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed budget does nothing to pick up the federal slack.

"Couple those two things together, the cuts at the federal level and no increases at the state level, it's dire circumstances for us," Ann Ard, Centre County Women's Resource Center executive director, said.

More bad news: In a legal notice, the borough of State College has announced that, inasmuch as it is receiving less than it budgeted in federal Community Development Block Grant and Home Investment Partnership Grant money, it must cut by about 3.75 percent what it intended to give to the Centre County Women's Shelter, Housing Transitions and other organizations.

Those organizations do good work in the community and provide a safety net when the feds and Harrisburg pull the financial rug out from under the most vulnerable or, to mix metaphors, leave communities holding the bag or walk away from the table without paying the tab.

"This federal budget is insane, to cut out money that just is so critical," Judy Yupcavage, director of communications for the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said.

Ironic, isn't it, that domestic violence funds have to be cut to help pay for a foreign war?

But such is the nature of our government- by-politician and budget-by-government system.

Whatever it is, leave it for the next person to pay for or foist it upon whoever is lower on the ladder of power.

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