

Albert Lea Tribune Editorial: New GOP legislators face big choices

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Many major decisions concerning local government aid and the future of cities rests on the shoulders of new Republican state legislators from Greater Minnesota, including our own Rich Murray.

We urge all of them to make educated decisions concerning reductions to local government aid. Don't vote based on ideology. Don't vote based on what the suburban Republicans say.

LGA is not a welfare program for cities. It is a property-tax-equalization program. It was never just for police and fire. Started in 1971, it was to equalize all city services.

Historically, it has had bipartisan support, with the last modification of the formula happening under the Tim Pawlenty administration as recently as 2003.

So despite the propaganda, there is nothing outdated or faulty with formula. The main problem is that the state keeps making cities have a greater burden when fixing the state budget than the state itself does.

Meanwhile, cuts to LGA have resulted in increased local property taxes for Greater Minnesota.

What Republican legislator wants to shackle constituents with more property taxes? The suburban lawmakers are quick to call for cuts to LGA because the suburbs they represent have the property wealth that many places in the rest of the state do not have.

The suburban lawmakers often fail to realize that what's good for all of Minnesota is good for them, too. Sensible government makes economic use of all the territory it governs. St. Paul cannot destroy Greater Minnesota communities bit-by-bit and expect the state to return to the economic excellence it once enjoyed.

This isn't a matter of independence, either. Plenty of residents in your districts pay an array of taxes to St. Paul; local government aid is a fair return on those taxes. Losing LGA would result in cutting many government services businesses rely on. Less business means less state revenue, which means more budget woes.

We realize that all areas of the state budget are going to see some reductions. But we only think it is fair to consider that the cities have taken a greater brunt of the balancing efforts in the past years. It's time for the state legislators to really look at state government, issues such as the state still funding Metro Transit, which was taken over in 2001 as a temporary solution yet still remains on the state welfare dole. Even little things need examining, such as discovering just exactly who is benefiting from the "circuit-breaker" property-tax-relief program. Do they really face a hardship living in that nice of a place?

That's the sort of line-item-by-line-item leadership we need in St. Paul to fix the state budget.

That's the sort of eye for savings and cuts Republicans should be staking their reputations on.

The cities already have done that level of slimming. Now, it's the state's turn.

We urge the new GOP legislators from Greater Minnesota to do what's right for their communities and support local government aid.