

# TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

## Barney Bishop: Protecting services calls for bold thinking

BARNEY BISHOP • MY VIEW • FEBRUARY 5, 2009

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In January, legislators cut billions of dollars from our state's budget. Unfortunately, additional cuts are necessary to plug another \$4 billion budget deficit. Many cuts will affect critical health and human services that government provides our citizens.

Florida spends billions of tax dollars providing services for substance abuse, mental health, juvenile justice and corrections for adults and children.

Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) and its members have a keen interest in identifying creative ways to trim back the budget while still maintaining these vital programs. Why does a business association care about human services? We, its members, are humans, too. Our employees, families, friends, and even some of our employers, need help occasionally in the human service/health care arena. As a major provider of taxpayer dollars, AIF and the businesses we represent want to ensure that our tax dollars are being put to the best use possible.

During the special session, I had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee and share with it recommendations for future budget cuts that would protect front-line services:

- Cut state agency administration and not services. While many state agencies have already downsized staff to trim their budgets, more cuts will be necessary. I suggest cutting back middle-management positions, which will save significantly more dollars than cutting rank-and-file workers who make smaller salaries.
- Cut oversight costs. Oversight of private providers costs the state money and resources. We should continue to require that private human-services providers conduct annual certified audits and compliance measures. However, if those providers meet national accreditation standards equal to Florida's standards, then we should suspend annual oversight and monitoring visits. Instead, state agencies could conduct monitoring visits every two or three years.
- Delay new agency mandates to providers unless there are life/safety issues. Enforce only mandates that are life/safety related and if funding already exists to cover the costs imposed on the provider.
- Cut agency paperwork in half. A recent study of paperwork required in the outsourced child-welfare system revealed that more than a third of agency requests were for documents they already had. This duplicates efforts and is wasteful for both the agency and the provider.
- Agencies that compete with private providers for front-line services need to lower their costs. Independent analysis has demonstrated that state agencies pay higher prices to operate their programs than those operated by the private sector. To save dollars, agencies should either lower their own costs or outsource those programs.
- Increase state commitment to information technology (IT). Many state agencies are saddled with antiquated computer systems. It will not be long before it will be outrageously expensive, if

not impossible, to purchase hardware to support these systems. The small cadre of state employees who know how to run these systems will continue to dwindle. The most effective way to increase productivity and avoid costly nickel-and-dime repairs/updates is to invest in IT now.

- Streamline multi-agency oversight of private providers. Several state agencies serve similar clientele. Whenever possible, these state agencies should come together to share the duties of private provider monitoring and oversight. You'll cut down on the number of visits, save staff and save money. Then have one agency provide across-the-board oversight.
- Stop putting tobacco dollars into the Chiles Settlement Fund. Last year, tobacco companies paid \$392 million into the Chiles Settlement Fund. Right now, the fund's collective interest is turned over to the state. Instead of putting the money into the fund, give the money directly to the Legislature for general revenue purposes to help save mission-critical services to children, the elderly and the frail.
- Suspend the Federal Single Audit Act. Florida is one of only three states in the country that adheres to the FSAA, which unnecessarily complicates the management of providers. By providing some flexibility in this arena, we will streamline management of these providers.

These are the toughest times we are going to endure since the Great Depression. There will be plenty of folks who disagree with some or perhaps all of these ideas. However, if we are going to be a part of the solution, then we need to seriously start thinking outside of the box.