



May 4, 2009

Municipal aid plan just another budget gimmick

The Corzine Administration will flood eight urban municipalities — with long histories of fiscal mismanagement and wasteful spending practices — with \$145 million in Special Municipal Aid this year while it plans to siphon \$4 million from the state's EMT Training Fund to plug another budget deficit.

The governor's move is reprehensible and an affront to each one of these everyday heroes who selflessly serve our communities by aiding the ill and injured. It is extremely troubling that Gov. Corzine has no problem finding money to send additional state aid to these urban centers that show little regard for how they spend taxpayer funds while at the same time raiding a fund so vital to the health and welfare of the vast majority of our residents.

Last year, during his budget address, Gov. Corzine promised he wouldn't use one-shot gimmicks to balance the budget. He reiterated the same in January. Yet we find him planning a raid, under the radar no less, in which he will quietly take millions from a designated fund and use it as a Band-aid fix for another irresponsible budget he crafted.

The potential ramifications of this move are chilling. Sixteen of the 17 municipalities in District 16 rely on all-volunteer EMT squads for emergency medical services. A similar scenario plays out throughout the state. It could force municipalities to replace volunteer EMTs with paid staff, which would result in higher property taxes for our middle-class families who are already reeling from highest-in-the nation property tax rates.

It could also require volunteers to pay for their own training, a move that would have a devastating effect on retention and recruitment efforts at a time when the ranks are dwindling.

We certainly understand the severity of the state's economic crisis, but stealing from Peter to pay Paul isn't the solution. In fact, it's exactly that type of governing that has created this fiscal dilemma. In this case, it will literally put millions of our residents at risk. We believe it's time to try something new. Let's eliminate the \$145 million in extra aid to cities that have come to treat it as an entitlement fund. That would be a good place to start.

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