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Countdowntochaos.org returns: Time short for legislature to finish budget



While cities and school districts around the state have completed their budgets for 2009-10, while universities have their budgets done, while nonprofits wait to be reimbursed for the services they have provided, the State of Michigan continues to drag its feet with only days left before the Sept. 30 budget deadline.

Delays in completing the FY 2010 budget already has created stress for Michigan, as other governments have been forced to guess at the amount of state resources they can count on. Closing state government by failing to adopt a budget would create chaos for the people of Michigan. Nonprofits across the state have reported delays in government payments. So to help lawmakers focus their attention – and to help the public remind them to get the job done – the Michigan Fiscal Responsibility Project has revived its “Countdown to Chaos” web site and countdown clock, at www.countdowntochaos.org.

“We urge lawmakers to move swiftly to get their proposals out in front of the people of Michigan, so there can be transparency and understanding of the consequences of legislative action,” said Michael A. Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan. “Midnight dealmaking and closed doors meetings do not serve the public well in this time of crisis for our state.”

Dan Gilmartin, executive director and CEO of the Michigan Municipal League, urged lawmakers to remember that quality of life is a key factor in helping return Michigan’s prosperity. “Young college graduates are leaving Michigan primarily to find a lifestyle that they want. Cutting funds for police protection, parks, transit, arts and higher education is sending a message to our young people that we don’t care about their interests. Every grad who leaves our state is taking a piece of the Michigan economy with him or her.”

An extensive 2008 benchmarking report prepared for Detroit Renaissance by McKinsey Global Institute showed that while Michigan’s tax system and state spending is in line with competitors and national averages, our quality of life indicators are well below those states, thanks primarily to major state budget cuts approved since 2000. State income and business tax cuts this decade that have led to a 30 percent reduction in state revenue sharing funding, which helps our communities provide essential services including police and fire protection, and a 10 percent reduction in funding for Michigan universities have not helped revive our economy.

The McKinsey report created a culture index measuring arts and culture and leisure opportunities, with 100 being a top score. It scored Southeast Michigan at 67, while Chicago was at 96, Atlanta, 89, Boston 96, and Seattle, 93. The report found Michigan ranked highest in violent crimes per 100,000, at 723, with Houston second at 696.

Meanwhile, the report found that state spending per person in Michigan, at \$13,721 per household, was below the national average of \$13,901.

“If we want to return Michigan to prosperity, policymakers should spend more time thinking about how to restore our quality of life than about cutting state spending,” said Gilmartin.

Kyle Caldwell, president and CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit Association, said some of the state budget cuts under consideration would have dire consequences for seniors, children and veterans, many of whom are served today by nonprofit associations.

“Proposals to slash state support for transportation of seniors, Meals on Wheels, virtually eliminating early childhood programs and cutting out programs that help veterans should disturb every person in our state. Nonprofits leverage state and federal funding to provide the social safety net that protects life and health for thousands of Michigan communities. Without that state funding, our capabilities are seriously diminished. Michigan nonprofits need a reliable partner in state government to ensure our quality of life at the local level. ”

The countdown site provides a link that will allow concerned citizens to contact their lawmakers about the budget situation.

The Michigan Fiscal Responsibility Project seeks to provide factual information and thoughtful consideration of all aspects of state fiscal policy. Members are the Michigan Municipal League, Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan and Michigan Nonprofit Association. For more information, contact David Waymire at Martin Waymire Advocacy Communications at 517-485-6600.