

Tax bill veto guarantees more pain in Greater Minnesota

Governor Pawlenty's veto of the tax bills slammed the door on \$462 million dollars of property tax relief for Minnesota businesses and homeowners this year. That is especially bad news for Greater Minnesota residents, who bore the brunt of the Governor's cuts to schools (9.9 percent) and local government aid (30.9 percent) during his first term.

Local officials have done their best to deliver basic services in the face of dramatic state cuts to schools, cities and counties. Local services have been reduced and per-pupil spending was dramatically cut in Pawlenty's first term and still lags behind 2003 levels.

As he sought our votes last year, Pawlenty was quick to blame the cities and schools for property tax hikes. But those increases have not even kept pace with Pawlenty's cuts to schools and local government, often resulting in budget shortfalls and further cuts to service.

Even while he vetoes \$70 million of Local Government Aid, \$15 million intended for counties and \$5 million to support townships, the Governor continues the blame game by suggesting that a cap on local taxes is the only real solution. That idea is not only insulting, it ignores that fact the Minnesotans believe that investments in our children, communities and public safety are priorities even if this Governor refuses to pay for them.

The facts are clear: Higher property taxes are not the result of excessive spending by schools and local governments. The tax burden has been shifted from state aid generated by income taxes to local property taxes. Greater Minnesota residents understand the nature of this shell game and want the state to uphold its responsibility for adequately funding schools and other local services.

Please check out our web site to see specific costs for your community; we show it by total local aid and by additional taxes to home owners and business owners: www.leagueofruralvoters.com.

Being against the things our communities need to succeed may be good politics for his national ambitions, but it will make life more difficult and expensive for the people of Greater Minnesota.

Niel Ritchie is the executive director of the League of Rural Voters, a non profit organization dedicated to increasing the representation of rural people in the public policy making process. He can be reached at nritchie@leagueofruralvoters.org.