

## By Alan Autry and Bob Whalen: Don't rob city budgets to fix state problems

By Alan Autry and Bob Whalen  
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Mayors and city council members throughout Fresno County are gravely concerned about the state budget stalemate gripping the Legislature.

Year after year, we watch our state leaders attempting to bring the pieces of the state budget together without ever doing the dirty work of real budget reform.

This year is no different, and it is disturbing that not even four years after the voters passed Proposition 1A imposing restrictions on the state's ability to take local money to close the state's budget, this irresponsible option is again on the table.

All 15 cities in Fresno County and California's other 465 cities cannot continue to be the state's credit card to borrow on when times are tight.

As local elected officials, we face many of the same budget challenges as our state colleagues. The downturn in the economy has dramatically stalled sales tax and property tax revenues, and rising energy costs are a great burden on city budgets. These factors have required cities to cut spending, raise additional revenues and focus on the basics of local government.

Our cities have already had to: delay hiring of essential police and fire safety employees; cut back on landscape and parks maintenance; cut back on services to seniors, children and families who rely on free or low-cost social and recreation opportunities; and delay repair of crumbling streets and sidewalks. Some cities have already asked voters to pay more to keep these local services intact.

California cities are still paying for the years that the state regularly took city and redevelopment property tax funds instead of making tough budget choices. The state then took transportation sales tax money, deepening the impacts locally.

Every time the state took from us, we were forced to defer maintenance and cut programs, straining city services and responsibilities -- roads, parks, public safety, libraries and our residents suffered. As the state took from cities to maintain or expand its spending, we were forced to shoulder deep budget cuts and in some cases tax increases that should have been the responsibility of the state.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger stood in 2004 with local government leaders and the people of California to end the reckless practice of taking local revenues. He spoke loudly, saying that the state had to stop taking local government funds to solve its budget problems.

Proposition 1A passed with support from 84% of voters, giving a clear mandate that local revenues should be left locally, not continuously high jacked by the state. Two years later, a second measure to protect transportation funds was supported by the governor and approved by 77% of the voters. The message of these two votes and an earlier one concerning local redevelopment funds was clear: Leave local funds local and use transportation funds for transportation.

Proposition 1A allows the state to borrow from local governments only in a "severe state of fiscal hardship." Today's situation doesn't qualify as that; it's a structural deficit resulting from spending more than you have, and the state must face this fact. The leaders of this state aren't facing a "severe state of fiscal hardship" as much as a lack of political will and leadership. We want our state leaders to be honest with Californians -- solving this budget deficit requires some sacrifice from every current state service, and it will affect every one of us.

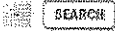
We appreciate the fact that the governor has continued to stand with cities, protecting local revenues and transportation funds from future raids. He said in April on national television that the state can't steal money from local governments or transportation anymore when it runs out. That is what the voters have said they want. That is as it should be.

State leaders need to understand that borrowing their way out of a financial hole or transferring the state deficit to local government doesn't address the real problem and is downright irresponsible. It also fails the true test of leadership: to leave the state or your city better off than when you arrived. This practice must stop once and for all if we have any hope of fixing California's structural deficit problems and rebuilding our golden state. Local funds should stay local, and the state should balance its budget with state funds.

Alan Autry is mayor of Fresno. Bob Whalen is mayor of Clovis. This commentary was also signed by every mayor in Fresno County.

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