

BUDGET BATTLE

**Faith communities:
Have a say in the debate**

Our state leaders are engaged in the most challenging legislative session in recent history. The policy debate often moves between two poles: one that seeks smaller government and further reductions in taxes and spending on the state level, and one that seeks to recapture a larger role for state government by returning to previous levels of tax income and support for social programs and local governments. Partisan disagreements too often result in sound-bite posturing rather than thoughtful engagement with significant and complex issues.

Faith communities have a place in the public arena. There is a remarkable convergence of faith traditions around the fundamental value of caring for the neighbor. Though we might not be policy wonks or political strategists, and though we are not of one mind on specific solutions, we have a responsibility to be thoughtful citizens, holding our public leaders accountable for shaping public policy in a way that serves the neighbor, seeks a just

society, and cares especially for the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalized. This is a very different bottom line than the dominant "What will work most to my advantage?" outcome presumed by so many citizens and politicians. Values clarify decisions.

We invite prayer and conversation around the shape of our life together in this state. I hope it's a conversation that goes on for some time, in many ways. I hope, too, that we can remain committed to being the kind of state that is committed to caring for all its citizens.

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