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A Matter of Opinion

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Editorial: Governor, lawmakers failing Ohio

By the Dayton Daily News | Monday, July 6, 2009, 12:00 AM

Gov. Ted Strickland and Ohio lawmakers have become spectacles.

Last week the Ohio Senate held hearings to ask legitimate questions about how the process of adding 17,500 slot machines at Ohio's seven horse race tracks would really work and how the governor's people concluded that gamblers would feed the state almost \$1 billion in the next two years.

Notwithstanding all the emphatic assurances that the money really will materialize, that bad things won't happen if the tracks set up temporary gambling facilities in their parking lots, and that the Ohio Lottery Commission can run de facto casinos, the governor's plan is absurd.

The Senate's motive behind the hearing — to expose the uncertainties and risks associated with slots — was partly pure. But the Republicans running that show also are playing games.

While they're all too happy to punch holes in the slots proposal, they refuse to say how the state should go about raising or cutting \$1 billion. They want the easy and politically cheap way out.

On the other side of the Statehouse, House Democrats were bringing out people who work in social services to tell how vulnerable Ohioans would be hurt if the state balances the budget with more cuts. The problems they spoke of are real.

But the Democrats are wrong that slots are the ticket out of this mess.

The stereo effect that was created by the competing testimony was a loud reminder that both Democrats and Republicans are not serious about getting the state through a historic economic slump.

Rather, they are focused solely and selfishly on trying to score political points with voters who don't want to pay more in taxes, but who also are going to be mad if their prison guard son-in-law is laid off, or their daughter's tuition goes up, or their aunt doesn't get the help she needs to stay out of a nursing home.

In December, the tax department estimated that state income-tax revenue would drop 9 percent in this fiscal year as compared with last year. That projection — if it proves true — will represent the largest such drop in the history of the tax. But by April, receipts were 15 percent lower than the year before.

We're headed nowhere good, and unprecedented times require unprecedented leadership.

Considering that so much of what the state does is obligatory — keeping the schools running, locking up prisoners and matching the federal money that ensures that poor people have Medicaid benefits —

ABOUT A MATTER OF OPINION

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