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LEGISLATIVE CAR LEASING
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IN THE WEEKS AHEAD, MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE AND SENATE ARE GOING TO BE FACED WITH SOME VERY TOUGH CHOICES.

THE STATE IS FACING A HUGE BUDGET SHORTFALL, CAUSED PRIMARILY BY THE NATIONAL RECESSION, AND THERE IS TALK OF PASSING WHAT MAY BE THE LARGEST TAX INCREASE IN THE STATE'S HISTORY AND OF MAKING DRASTIC AND PAINFUL CUTS IN MANY STATE PROGRAMS.

THIS IS A REMARKABLE TIME AND IT DEMANDS REMARKABLE ACTION BY THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO MEET THE CHALLENGE.

TODAY I AM GOING TO DISCUSS SEVERAL COST-SAVING MEASURES WHICH, ADMITTEDLY, WOULD HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON OUR BUDGET SHORTFALL. BY THEMSELVES, AND EVEN ALL TOGETHER, THESE MEASURES WILL NOT BALANCE THE BUDGET.

BUT THEY WILL SEND A MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE -- THAT THE HOUSE AND SENATE ARE WILLING TO SHARE THE BURDEN OF MAKING GOVERNMENT WORK BY LIMITING THEIR OWN SPENDING AND ACTING RESPONSIBLY. THAT IS A MESSAGE OUR CONSTITUENTS NEED TO HEAR.

IT WOULD NOT BE FAIR FOR US IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO MAKE PAINFUL DECISIONS THAT DEMAND SACRIFICE FROM PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS THROUGHOUT OUR STATE, UNLESS WE LOOK AT OURSELVES FIRST AND SHARE IN THE CUTBACKS.

WE HEAR FROM THE LEADERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THAT "EVERYTHING IS ON THE TABLE" WHEN IT COMES TO BALANCING THE STATE BUDGET. THIS IS A GOOD PHILOSOPHY AND I SUPPORT IT. BUT I SAY, LET'S TRULY PUT EVERYTHING ON THE TABLE.

ISSUE ONE:

AUTOMOBILE LEASING BY STATE LEGISLATORS IS ONE AREA WHERE BIG SAVINGS COULD BE ACHIEVED. THE LEADERSHIP OF THE HOUSE DEMOCRATIC CAUCUS IS ALREADY LOOKING INTO POSSIBLE IMPROVEMENTS ON THE CURRENT SYSTEM AND TODAY I WANT TO RECOMMEND ONE CHANGE THAT WOULD SAVE HALF A MILLION DOLLARS A YEAR.

SEVERAL NEWS STORIES A YEAR AGO GAVE A SET OF FIGURES FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1989, WHICH SHOW THE POTENTIAL SAVINGS.

IN 1989, 241 OF THE 253 SENATORS AND HOUSE MEMBERS LEASED CARS. THE TOTAL BILL FOR ALL THEIR LEASES CAME TO \$1.5 MILLION DOLLARS.

A SPOKESPERSON FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF GENERAL SERVICES SAID THE STATE LEASES 12,000 CARS OF ITS OWN FOR ALL OTHER STATE DEPARTMENTS, AND THAT MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WOULD BE WELCOME TO LEASE CARS FROM THE DEPARTMENT ALSO.

EVEN IF THE MEMBERS TOOK ONE OF THE NICEST CARS AVAILABLE, SUCH AS THE ONES LEASED BY CABINET SECRETARIES, THE TOTAL TAB FOR LEGISLATIVE CAR LEASING UNDER THIS PLAN WOULD BE \$500,000 LESS THAN IT IS NOW.

THUS BY LEASING IDENTICAL CARS FROM THE CENTRAL FLEET HERE IN HARRISBURG, RATHER THAN VARIOUS MODELS FROM DEALERS ALL OVER THE STATE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY COULD SAVE ITSELF HALF A MILLION DOLLARS EVERY YEAR.

LEGISLATORS COULD ALL BE GIVEN THE SAME BASIC CAR, A NO-FRILLS MID-SIZE MODEL, WITH RADIO AND AIR CONDITIONING. NOTHING FANCY ... JUST THE KIND OF CAR THAT WILL SAFELY GET YOU WHERE YOU WANT TO GO AND THAT YOU CAN BE COMFORTABLE IN.

ISSUE TWO:

DISTRICT OFFICE EXPENDITURES ARE ANOTHER AREA TO LOOK AT. WHILE GOVERNOR CASEY IS ASKING STATE UNIVERSITIES, WELFARE OFFICES AND ROAD CREWS TO ACCEPT A THREE PERCENT BUDGET CUT THIS YEAR AND A POSSIBLE BUDGET FREEZE NEXT YEAR, HOUSE AND SENATE OFFICE EXPENSES HAVE STAYED AT THE SAME LEVEL, OR EVEN RISEN.

LAST MONTH, I MADE A PERSONAL DECISION TO CUT MY OWN DISTRICT OFFICE EXPENSES BY 5 PERCENT, WITHOUT CUTTING ANY OF THE SERVICES I GIVE TO CONSTITUENTS.

THIS HAS MEANT TIGHTENING MY BELT, ASKING MY STAFF TO WORK HARDER AND MAKING OUR WHOLE OPERATION MORE ECONOMICAL. IT'S DIFFICULT, BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE ... AND IT'S WORKING WELL.

TODAY I WANT TO ASK MY COLLEAGUES IN THE HOUSE AND SENATE TO CONSIDER JOINING ME IN THIS EFFORT TO CUT COSTS AND DO OUR PART. WE MUST BE SURE WE ARE SPENDING TAXPAYERS' MONEY WISELY, IF WE ARE TO RESTORE PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT.

ISSUE THREE:

ALONG THESE LINES, I ALSO ASKED LEGISLATIVE LEADERS TO SUSPEND REIMBURSEMENT FOR TRAVEL TO OUT-OF-STATE CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS UNTIL THE CURRENT BUDGET CRISIS IS RESOLVED.

THAT KIND OF TRAVEL HAS ITS PLACE AND IS OFTEN VERY BENEFICIAL, BUT DURING THIS REMARKABLE TIME OF FISCAL TROUBLES IN PENNSYLVANIA, OUR LEGISLATORS AND LEGISLATIVE STAFF CAN SERVE US BEST BY REMAINING HERE AND NOT INCURRING ADDITIONAL EXPENSES.

THIS MEASURE, LIKE THE OTHERS I'VE TALKED ABOUT, WOULD NOT HAVE IMMEDIATE OR SIGNIFICANT BUDGET BENEFITS. BUT DOLLARS AND CENTS ARE JUST PART OF WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT.

WHAT I THINK IS NEEDED IS AN APPROACH -- A PHILOSOPHY OF DOING THINGS -- BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE GOOD FAITH TO THE PEOPLE OF PENNSYLVANIA. WE CANNOT ASK THE PEOPLE TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF THE STATE'S FISCAL TROUBLE, UNLESS WE OURSELVES ALSO CONTROL SPENDING AND LOOK FOR WAYS TO CUT BACK.

IN MY WORK AS STATE REPRESENTATIVE, I AM OFTEN REMINDED OF A PHRASE ATTRIBUTED TO ONE OF OUR GREAT PRESIDENTS, ANDREW JACKSON, WHO SAID: "EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL ... SPECIAL PRIVILEGE FOR NONE."

THAT'S A GOOD PHILOSOPHY TO GOVERN BY, AND I THINK WE LEGISLATORS CAN BEGIN BY TAKING SOME STEPS TO STRAIGHTEN OUT OUR OWN HOUSE.

FROM CAR LEASES TO DISTRICT OFFICE EXPENSES, TO OUT OF STATE TRAVEL, THERE IS SPENDING THAT CAN BE CUT, DOLLARS THAT CAN BE SAVED.

I'M NOT ADVOCATING WHOLESAL CHANGE IN THE WAY WE DO THINGS. I JUST THINK A COMMON SENSE APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT BY ALL OF US WHO SERVE IN IT WOULD BENEFIT OUR CONSTITUENTS. LET'S GET STARTED NOW.