



LETTER: Mass. will benefit if politicians can get it together, 02-04-09

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It's hard to watch the nation's pundits and Washington politicians arguing over the Obama economic stimulus plan without visualizing Nero playing the fiddle as Rome burned. Literally, that seems to be what's happening to our nation's economy as Republicans fight for tax decreases while Democrats focus on targeted spending to fix the broken American economy.

When you tune out all of the extraneous shouting, one clear fact emerges. The Obama stimulus plan, crafted with the assistance of our own Gov. Deval Patrick, contains major wins for the citizens of the commonwealth.

The House-passed stimulus plan contains more than \$11 billion for Massachusetts, including more than \$2.5 billion, over three fiscal years, in increased Medicaid funding for our state's neediest citizens hardest hit by this economic crisis.

These dollars have the potential to reverse many of the devastating cuts Patrick was forced to include in his FY 2010 budget recommendation. Unsure of the amount of federal stimulus dollars coming to the state when the budget was put together, the governor's budget includes many program cuts that are anathema to the governor's own progressive agenda including:

— Cutting \$45 million from family support, residential, employment and transportation services for children and adults with disabilities. This cut eliminates services for more than 11,000 Massachusetts families.

— Eliminating \$7 million that funded a crucial program that provided jobs for hundreds of people with severe disabilities, in addition to a \$9 million cut that eliminated similar services to people with psychiatric disabilities in last year's budget.

— Denying a salary increase to the state's poorest workers who provide supports and services to people with disabilities.

Massachusetts citizens can be comforted by knowing that Sens. Ted Kennedy and John Kerry, as well as the Massachusetts House delegation, have been out front in support of the Obama stimulus plan.

So many lives are at risk. Let's hope that Congress gets down to business and works with the president. In Massachusetts, we understand what is at stake.

In the next few days, let's hope that the rest of the Washington stops fiddling while our economy burns.

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Editor's note: The witer is the executive director of the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers.