

# THE PLAIN DEALER

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## State funding requests go on

### Budget mess fails to stop rally

AARON MARSHALL  
*Plain Dealer Bureau*

COLUMBUS — A day after state officials revealed that plummeting tax revenue had probably left Ohio's next budget shredded, mental-health advocates rallied Wednesday, crying out for more money.

But as the squeaky wheel clamored for the funding grease on the Statehouse lawn — as special-interest groups have done for decades every budget cycle — it was becoming increasingly clear that the budget game has changed in 2009. The usual pleas to find money for worthy programs are running headlong into a budget brick wall that rose Tuesday and won't be coming down soon.

Tuesday is when state Budget Director Pari Sabety broke the news that the state is at least \$600 million in the hole this year from slumping tax revenue — and will need to tap the \$948 million rainy-day fund to pay the 2009 bills.

That news has even worse implications for the 2010-11 budget, which relied on the state's rainy-day fund and much-too-rosy revenue estimates to make ends meet, placing it at least \$1.2 billion out of whack. The \$56 billion plan was passed last week by majority House Democrats and now sits in the Republican-controlled Senate, where lawmakers have about one month to figure out where to make drastic cuts to state agencies.

Gayle Channing Tenenbaum, a human-services advocate who has prowled the Statehouse halls for decades, said the budget mess means the usual pleas for money are falling on deaf ears.

"I just don't think they can hear that right now," she said. "I think what the Senate is thinking is that they have been left with a huge problem, and they have to figure out how to meet these immediate demands."

One prominent Senate Republican predicted that resetting the expectations of advocates will be a painful process in the coming weeks. Complicating that process is the fact that House Democrats made it look easy to find more money by adding \$622 million in spending to the budget, using revenue forecasts that now seem pie-in-the-sky.

"We have people coming to the state capital saying, 'Can you please fix these things?'" said State Sen. Jon Husted, a Dayton-area Republican who served for four years as House speaker.

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## RALLY

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"And they are under some unrealistic vision because the House found all of this money — and are saying, 'Aren't you guys going to find money so we can solve our needs?' Well, they didn't find it, because it wasn't real and it doesn't exist."

Jim Mauro, head of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio, one of more than 100 people rallying Wednesday at the Statehouse, said the budget news "absolutely" makes it tougher for advocates to make their case for more funding.

"We aren't asking them for

more money in the budget — what we really are asking for is a reprioritization of where the money is going to be spent," he said. Mental-health services are cut by \$65 million in the next budget over current levels in the plan passed last week.

In his first public comments since Tuesday's news, Gov. Ted Strickland told reporters his stances against raising taxes and legalizing slot machines to bring more money in the door haven't changed.

The Democrat defended the work of his budget analysts, saying they had been "credible" and done as good a job — or better — as many national economic forecasters.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:  
amarshall@plained.com,  
1-800-228-8272