



Governor meets with business leaders in York County

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Gov. Ed Rendell visited York County, along with Lancaster and Gettysburg, on a bus tour Friday to drum up support directly from residents for his last state budget.

Rendell told a crowd at YorkCounts in York Township that such an overhaul plan likely needs to come from an outgoing governor as opposed to an incoming governor.

Among other measures, Rendell wants to lower the state sales tax from 6 percent to 4 percent, but at the same time pare down a list of 74 current categories of products and services that are exempt from the tax to a handful of remaining exemptions.

Food, clothing, pharmaceuticals and a few other categories would remain exempt, and the rest would be taxed.

When all factors are considered, the governor said, the effects of the sales tax provision would come out as a wash for the average Pennsylvania family.

But, he said, it would help provide revenue the state needs.

Other such shifting around of the tax burden, in addition to the sales tax measures, would result in about \$874 million through June 2011 for a Stimulus Transition Reserve Fund - for when the end of federal stimulus money hits the state.

Rendell also said the state is in trouble with its needed pension payments.

He said he does not believe the legislature would get it done on its own, so he was taking the issue to the people, including the event at YorkCounts.

The event was by invitation only and included a few dozen of YorkCounts and the local business community.

In addition to the sales tax idea, the governor's plan would tax smokeless tobacco and cigars, create a Natural Gas Severance Tax and overhaul business taxes.

As a former city official in York, Eric Menzer said he has an appreciation for pension issues - and an understanding that something must be done.

Menzer, senior vice president at Wagman Construction in York and chairman of YorkCounts, said he's hoping for a healthy dialogue on the matter.

Tom Bogart, of YorkCounts and York College, said that, in general, it sounds like a good idea to broaden the tax base and lower rates.

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"The difficulty is in the details," Bogart said.

RENDELL ON GETTYSBURG CASINO

Gov. Ed Rendell softened his opposition to a casino in Gettysburg during a Friday appearance in town with local business leaders.

Rendell called a proposed plan by local businessman David LeVan to bring a Category 3 resort casino to the Eisenhower Hotel and Conference Center south of Gettysburg "less objectionable" than the casino LeVan proposed building along Route 30 east of Gettysburg in 2005.

Rendell said a move south toward Maryland and away from the battlefield - as well as putting the casino in a pre-existing structure - makes more sense than the previous plan.

"Moving this farther out of town is a good thing," he said. "And while I'm not sure it totally cures my objections, it does mitigate them."

Rendell opposed LeVan's effort in 2005, saying on a call-in program on the Pennsylvania Cable Network, "I wouldn't want a casino two blocks from the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia and if it were my decision, I wouldn't want it anywhere close to the historic area of Gettysburg."

No Casino Gettysburg chairwoman Susan Star Paddock said she felt the governor was misinformed about the proposed new casino location, which is actually closer to the center of

the battlefield than LeVan's previous project.

During a call to clarify Rendell's position, press secretary Gary Tuma said Rendell finds the new site "less objectionable" because it's proposed to go in an existing structure, and because it's farther south and nearer to Maryland than the previous site along Route 30. Rendell was not speaking about the two sites' absolute distance from the battlefield, Tuma said.

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