

Out of the many budget concerns our state government and local officials face, maintaining quality education should be a priority. In addition to the \$35 million Finance Commissioner Sawin Millett said is needed to be cut from state spending, Governor Paul LePage wants to find a way for legislators to cut spending by \$100 million. That's an ambitious goal at a time when the unemployment rate in Maine is around eight percent, and state programs that provide assistance to the elderly and unemployed are at risk.

The governor said he wants to reduce the waste and abuse of tax dollars in "duplicated government programs and purchasing, questionable travel reimbursements and departments that have little to show for the millions in tax dollars they receive." Who could argue with that, especially given the history of spending under the state's Turnpike Authority?

If the governor wants to find savings in state spending to help the most vulnerable with heating expenses this winter, that is a worthwhile goal. However, it seems the governor and his cabinet stubbornly ignores the possibility of raising revenue. The stance against raising taxes is an aspirin for a big headache; initially it makes sense because it alleviates a little pain, but in the long run we are still left with the same challenges. Somehow the state needs to raise revenue. The long-term solution lawmakers need to consider is the investment in education.

Given the governor's goal, the question will be: Where can these cuts be made? In addition to the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability, there is a bipartisan task force assigned to analyze and streamline the working processes of state departments and agencies, according to an August 6 front page Portland Press Herald story.

How will this process affect the Maine Department of Education and our public school system? The governor's legislation to allow public charter schools to operate in Maine and the formation of another task force to look at establishing a five-year curriculum for high schools will no doubt play an integral role in discussions as summer winds down, and as children, parents and teachers gear up for the beginning of another school year.

A lengthy discussion of where and how money to fund public schools will be allocated and how these new ideas will be funded has yet to come into play. While task force members look for places to cut, they should keep in mind the lasting value of maintaining quality education and support our public school system.