



## Pennsylvania unions form coalition to fight off attempts to cut state jobs, services

By JAN MURPHY, The Patriot-News

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Pennsylvania Capitol in Harrisburg

Labor unions representing Pennsylvania state and school employees are banding together to urge the state Legislature to look at raising revenue **to balance next year's budget instead of cutting employees and services**. "We think the cuts have gone far," said **Pennsylvania AFL-CIO** President-elect Rick Bloomingdale.

His union is part of the newly formed **Coalition for Labor Engagement and Accountable Revenue**, representing 1.1 million Pennsylvanians, that is pushing for passage of Gov. Ed Rendell's proposed tax on smokeless tobacco and cigars as well as on natural gas extraction and closing a corporate tax loophole.

Kathy Jellison, president of **SEIU Local 668**, said taxing "big tobacco, big oil" is a matter of tax fairness. "We're asking that everyone do the same to make sure public services are funded and funded at the full extent."

She said the Senate Republican's call for cutting Rendell's proposed \$29 billion budget by \$1.5 billion would equate to 45,000 state jobs — or about half the state work force.

The coalition is asking for state government to maintain the current level of employment, protect retirement security of public sector workers and ensure proper funding for all services that ease the life of the young, old and disabled.

But Senate Republican spokesman Erik Arneson said the message that the coalition is sounding is different from the one being sent by other Pennsylvanians.

Citizens across the state are asking their legislators to make state government live within its means, not hike taxes, Arneson said.

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