

# FORUM

EDITORIAL

## Final budget deal must move from Senate’s extremes

In a 24-7 party-line vote on Thursday, the GOP-run Ohio Senate passed a version of the next two-year state budget so extreme it drew zero support from the Senate’s Democrats. That’s a big warning sign in a budget process where there are generally at least nominal attempts to find middle ground.

Instead, the Senate’s budget, crafted under the direction of Senate President Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, and Senate Finance Committee Chair Matt Dolan, a Chagrin Falls Republican, reads like a wish list of the most extreme wing of the Ohio GOP. It opens the floodgates to even more tax cuts on top of those the Ohio House already proposed and expands school voucher eligibility to every student in Ohio, cleveland.com’s Jeremy Pelzer reports.

The Senate budget rewrite also sluices into its already towering length three controversial education-related bills that might not pass on their own — Senate Bill 1, stripping the citizen-created State Board of Education of its powers; Senate Bill 83, aiming to micromanage parts of what can be taught, said and done at Ohio’s publicly supported colleges and universities; and Senate Bill 117, seeking to use \$13 million in taxpayer money to create two presumably right-leaning institutes at Ohio State University and the University of Toledo, with separate hiring and tenure policies and a focus on civics, culture, society and the Constitution.

Substitute House Bill 33, the two-year budget bill as passed by the Senate, is now 9,198 pages long. That’s nearly three times the length of the current budget, which expires June 30, and more than double the length of HB 33 when it was introduced earlier this year.

The House’s substitute bill, weighing in at a hefty 5,559 pages, is a porker by comparison — although that’s probably part of the Senate’s design in ballooning its budget ante.

That’s because the most dangerous part of the budget process is about to start — when a small group of “conferees” from both chambers get together behind closed doors to work out differences until an amended substitute budget bill makes its appearance. And they need to do all this quickly — by June 30.

Conferees for the Ohio House, which added needed money to Gov. Mike DeWine’s measures to help the hungry get enough food and families get into affordable housing, and also provided a boost in teachers’ minimum pay, need to be the brake against this Ohio Senate overreach.

That extends to tax cuts, which the Senate exploded to \$1.65 billion, a 77% increase over the House’s \$930 million. Pelzer noted the House, unlike the Senate, limited its proposed tax cuts to less-affluent taxpayers.

Overall, the Senate’s budget plan, in proposing to prune the House’s already conservative spending proposal by 3% for the fiscal year starting July 1, and another 2.9% the following year, is notably blase about the needs of low-income Ohioans — even though Ohio’s cash balance is robust.

Especially egregious are the Senate’s attempt to add new photo ID requirements for food-stamp recipients and to bar the state from waiving work requirements to get food aid. The House budget had increased funding for the Ohio Association of Foodbanks to \$39.55 million a year; the Senate plan goes back to DeWine’s \$24.55 million proposal, which is the current annual funding level for the food banks association.

Then there’s school funding. As noted, the Senate Republican plan would expand the availability of private-school vouchers to every student in Ohio, with a sliding scale so that even affluent families could pocket money in private-school tuition savings. That wasn’t the aim of a voucher policy devised in the mid-1990s to help the parents of low-income pupils in failing public schools.

The Senate plan would explode Ohio voucher spending from a little over half a billion dollars a year now to about \$964.2 million annually starting July 1 and more than \$1 billion the next year.

If, as expected, the Ohio House rejects the Senate’s proposal, the budget will get a final rewrite from a Senate-House conference committee composed of three state senators and three state representatives, who will aim to fashion a compromise on which both chambers can agree by June 30, when Ohio’s current two-year budget expires.

As passed by the Senate, the budget is a partisan document, in contrast to the bipartisan vote the House gave its version of the budget. The conference committee now needs to reset the budget’s compass back toward the middle ground.

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COMMENTARY

## PayPal missed the opportunity to do the right thing for Palestinians

Sam Bahour

EL-BIREH, WEST BANK — I recently addressed the virtual PayPal annual shareholders meeting, during which I had five minutes to present a case for shareholders to pass a resolution requesting PayPal to open its services to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The resolution was titled “Provision of Services in Conflict Zones.”

I emphasized to PayPal’s shareholders that this is not a political issue. The political determination about Palestine was decided over a decade ago by the United Nations: “The State of Palestine” is today officially listed as a non-member observer state, a status exactly like the Holy See.

PayPal missed the opportunity to do the right thing, again. We’ve been at this for nearly a decade. I can never come up with a satisfactory answer to those who ask why PayPal refuses to follow the lead of technology giants like Google, Cisco, HP, Oracle, and many others, which all operate in Palestine.

Even PayPal’s competitors, Apple Pay and Stripe, operate in Palestine.

While PayPal operates in Israel and its illegal settlements, it has refused to extend its service to Palestinians.

Young Palestinian entrepreneurs, many of them women, like those in Gaza working with Gaza Sky Geeks, are struggling to make their start-ups a part of a future ecosystem where Palestinians can be active in the global economy. But without robust payment platforms, their chances for success are stifled.

PayPal could follow its stated commitment to democratize financial services, but instead shareholders took their cue from PayPal’s executive team to reject our proposal.

We expected that outcome, yet it stings. We did garner 10.99% of shareholders’ votes, which clearly passes the 5% threshold to be able to reintroduce the resolution at the next annual meeting.

It was encouraging to see that 11 members of Congress, led by Rep. Mark Pocan, sent a letter to PayPal’s CEO, Dan Schulman, stating concerns over PayPal’s discrimination and access.

“We have significant concerns that, because PayPal does provide services to Israeli citizens in illegal settlements across the West Bank, but does not provide services to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, PayPal’s current operating status may be infringing upon the rights of Palestinians,” the letter said.

Our resolution, on behalf of PayPal shareholder Harrington Investments, asked for a very specific decision, related to more than just Palestine: It requested PayPal establish a policy that ensures that “people in conflict zones do not suffer discriminatory exclusion from the



The PayPal logo is displayed outside company headquarters in San Jose, California, in 2015. While PayPal operates in Israel and its illegal settlements, it has refused to extend its service to Palestinians. Jeff Chiu, Associated Press

company’s financial services.” If there was reason not to provide services, the resolution asked for PayPal to provide their analysis for all to see.

Our resolution reminded PayPal shareholders that “Visa, Mastercard, and Western Union services have been available for years to these customers and Palestinian banks are part of SWIFT, the global system for secure cross-border payments.”

The Palestinian technology sector, one of the only bright spots in the overall economy, operates with enough Israeli restrictions; PayPal has the opportunity to do some good here, rather than follow an illegal military occupation’s cue.

It is unusual for a country’s private sector to be so persistent in requesting a firm to offer its services, but we know PayPal is not just another company. As PayPal is a global payment platform leader, we are fully aware of the boost its services would give our economy, especially the booming tech sector.

PayPal lost the opportunity, again, but we will keep calling for PayPal and other global platforms to treat Palestinians without discrimination.

*Bahour is a Palestinian American business consultant from Youngstown, working in Ramallah/El-Bireh in Occupied Palestine. He blogs at ePalestine.ps.*

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COMMENTARY FROM THE COMMUNITY

## Resisting authoritarian messaging

Barry Gordon

After World War II, social scientists recognized the need to understand how so many ordinary citizens could be drawn into and be accepting of the heinous policies of Nazism and fascism. Extensive research was conducted to uncover the personality traits that led to this frightening and destructive transformation.

The essence of this body of research was that there was not one defined personality associated with the rise of Nazism and Fascism but that the character traits most strongly interrelated in what was often termed the “Authoritarian Personality” were ethnocentrism, antisemitism, and potentiality for fascism. Over the past few years, we have seen a renewed flourishing of these qualities in our national psyche.

Interestingly, what most distinguishes authoritarian versus nonauthoritarian people is what will change their attitudes. Authoritarians will alter their thinking and beliefs based on the simple say-so of an authoritarian figure. The unsupported opinions or statements of an authority will outweigh factual information. This focus on single, enduring, powerful leaders is what defines a fascist state. Nonauthoritarians tend to not be so narrowly influenced.

Our world has changed drastically since 1945 in terms of the quantity of information we receive and how we receive it. We are subject to a virtually nonstop barrage of news. The purveyors of news must compete for the attention of a base of listeners much as politicians do. This competitive atmosphere often results in simplistic, repetitive messaging that will appeal to the base of established viewers, which can then tend to bend those viewers toward a more singular, authoritarian outlook.

As a society, we are faced with the reality that we are divided in what information we receive and not just in our outlook and opinions. Because we have a populace that is potentially so attentive to messaging from authority figures, we need to have a news media that is

not a megaphone for authoritarian dogma. Yet, our news presenters function at the mercy of their audience, even as the audience is at the mercy of these perceived authorities.

We need to be able to rely on media not to mistake neutrality for objectivity and to correct factual dishonesty put forth by authority figures. For example, when our ex-president says that no other country in the world would indict a former president, the news media need to go beyond playing him voicing this untruth and tell us that many countries around the globe have done this, e.g., Brazil, Israel, Italy, and now Scotland.

Being objective requires precision in reporting. Often imprecision plays into reinforcing singular beliefs based on the messaging of authoritarian leaders or political parties. As an example, recent reporting on polls taken about the ex-president’s indictment by a federal grand jury described as a “plurality” the 48% of respondents who believed he should have been indicted, which is technically correct, but can be interpreted as any number greater than the 35% who disagreed. Identifying the result as a near-majority conveys an accurate but more precise result less open to subjective interpretation.

As recipients of the news we are fed, we must strengthen our capacity to think in complex terms and to reject simplistic, polarized messaging. We need to recognize the media can only be a piece of how we become informed about our world and what we believe about it. We must not allow the media to do our thinking for us. But we also need the media to help us think with complexity and not be bound by the self-promotion of authoritarian figures. The “Authoritarian Personality” has not gone away; it now has a tsunami of messaging that can bolster it.

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