

Massachusetts Should Start Its Own Version of a CBO

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Last Tuesday, the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office announced that President Obama's proposal to increase the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$10.10 would result in a net loss of 500,000 jobs, potentially as many as 1 million jobs.

According to its website, CBO was founded in 1974 to "produce independent analyses of budgetary and economic issues to support the Congressional budget process. The agency is strictly nonpartisan and conducts objective, impartial analysis, which is evident in each of the dozens of reports and hundreds of cost estimates that its economists and policy analysts produce each year."

For decades, the CBO has been serving the public, members of Congress and presidents of both parties to better understand how policies will impact the country. In Massachusetts, when the governor and the Legislature propose major tax policies, such as the annual budget, the public is usually left with pundits and some academics for analysis. One could see why Massachusetts would be wise to adopt its own version of the CBO. I am not one to advocate often for creating an additional layer of taxpayer-funded state bureaucracy, but establishing a Massachusetts version of a CBO would be a far better use of taxpayer money than some of the projects the state currently funds.

If a Massachusetts version of a CBO were in place, it could be used right now, on Gov. Deval Patrick's recently proposed budget. It calls for a 5 percent increase in state spending and an additional \$97 million in new taxes on items such as soda, candy, travel websites, vacation rentals and bed and breakfasts.

Last year, the governor proposed an additional \$1.9 million in new and higher taxes. At the time, the Legislature pushed for a \$500 million tax increase in its budget and in the end, state leaders agreed to the \$500 million in new and higher taxes.

Three Democratic lawmakers in the House, a unified Republican House caucus and a majority in the Senate Republican caucus voted against last year's budget. There weren't enough votes to defeat the Democratic Legislature and governor, but enough to bring a sense of urgency to the public that something wasn't right.

The tech tax was hidden in the budget and soon after its passage, an effort to repeal the tech tax was born and carried through with all but one House member voting for its repeal.

Last year, Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, and House Minority Leader Brad Jones, R-North Reading, sounded the alarm. This year, they have an opportunity to articulate to the public how they would govern if in power. When every Republican in the House voted against the Speaker's budget, they set a precedent, and this year they should propose their own budget. Tarr should do the same with his caucus of four.

State Rep. Shaunna O'Connell, R-Taunton, along with several other Republican House members, recently proposed a "Small Business Bill of Rights." It's a good start at voicing their alternative ideas, and many of them should be adopted into a Republican House and Senate budget.

In 2011, Jones led a Republican jobs tour across the state and identified reform ideas that would help our state economy grow. It's time these ideas came together in a form of an alternative budget by Republicans in the legislature. It's of little doubt that Charlie Baker, the current Republican frontrunner in the governor's race, would benefit from a Republican budget as a platform of alternative ideas and policies.

When Republicans propose their own budget, they provide a clear reason for voters to support their ideas. With their ideas comes a debate. When there is a debate of ideas, the need for a Massachusetts version of a CBO is more compelling.

Beacon Hill should adopt its own version of it and it should be needed because Republicans are proposing their own budget this year. It's time taxpayers heard how the other side of the aisle would govern.

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