

School Funding Activities:

You are the Governor!

OK, so you want to be Governor...here's your chance. You have to raise \$25 billion to pay for schools in Illinois next year. Decide how you want to raise this money from your citizens, and explain your decision to them. Here are some of your choices. You can:

- **Tax people's income** – you decide to take a percentage of the money everyone makes. This plan winds up taxing wealthy folks more because they make more money. It is not very popular, though, because people don't like to see their paychecks shrink due to new taxes.
- **Tax people's property** – you decide to tax people's housing, businesses, and land. Currently, this tax is used by cities/municipalities to pay for the majority of schools. Wealthy people still pay more (as do businesses), but the tax revenue usually stays in the local area where it was raised. Many people in Illinois are very angry about the high cost of property taxes already.
- **Sales tax** – This tax affects any purchase of food, clothes, music, or whatever thing anyone buys. It is called a flat tax because it does not target wealthy people for increased taxes – it taxes everyone similarly. Advocates for the poor say this puts too much of the tax burden on poor people.
- **Tax businesses** – Currently, Gov. Blagojevich is proposing what's called a Gross Receipts Tax that businesses would have to pay. He says large businesses and corporations do not pay their fair share. Businesses say this will cause tremendous harm to the Illinois economy, chase business away from the state, and cause a loss of jobs.
- **Sin taxes/traveler taxes** – Alcohol, cigarettes, hotels, travel—all are popular areas that the government targets for additional taxes, either because the product has a negative effect (i.e. cigarettes), or the people being taxed are from out of state (hotel tax). It would be hard to raise \$25 billion from these taxes alone, though, and some people argue that these taxes chase businesses and consumers across the border to Indiana, Wisconsin, and other states.

This Governor's job is not as easy as you thought, is it? A lot of tough and unpopular choices are involved in the job. Now, you have to decide how you will raise \$25 billion. What percent of your revenue will come from each of these taxes above (remember, the total should equal 100%)

_____ Income Tax _____ Property Tax _____ Sales Tax
_____ Business Tax _____ Targeted Taxes

Explain why you chose this tax approach in a short speech (one or two paragraphs).

Persuade a School Funding Critic

Being a student, you are probably in favor of school funding reform in Illinois, but it is important to understand why some people and lawmakers are opposed to funding reform. Pair up with a partner. One of you should be a lawmaker from a wealthy school district and another from a poor school district. The lawmaker from the poor school district has to persuade the lawmaker from the rich district to be in favor of school funding reform.

Remember a couple of things when you discuss/debate:

- 1) All lawmakers want to be re-elected, and raising taxes is rarely popular with voters.
- 2) In most school funding reform plans, wealthier districts will have to send some of their funding to poorer school districts (do you like giving your money away?).

Create a Slogan and Rally Chant

Get in groups of three or four and think of good slogans for products that you like. List 5 of them. For example, Nike's slogan used to be "Just Do It." McDonald's is "I'm Loving It."

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

Now, think of three good slogans for why lawmakers should support school funding reform.

1)

2)

3)

Now, think of a rally chant. For example: "2, 4, 6, 8, we want to educate!" That's kind of a weak example. Hope your chant is better.

If you have poster board and markers:

Try to turn your slogan into a sign. "A picture is worth a thousand words" is a famous expression. A good sign can have a big impact at a rally.

Remember, good signs:

- Have just a few words or symbols
- Use letters that are big and colored in (so you can see them from far away)
- Are sometimes funny
- Use direct but intelligent language and symbols (nothing crude please)

Writing a Letter to a Lawmaker

Letters are powerful! Most people don't realize the power of a good letter, but powerful activists do. Letters to lawmakers from their home districts are particularly powerful.

Your letter does not have to be long, but it does need to be clear, polite, and honest.

Here are 5 tips to writing a good letter to your lawmakers:

- 1) Hand-written letters are better than typed letters if you can write neatly.
- 2) Address the letter – Dear Honorable (Smith, Jones, etc.).
- 3) Tell the lawmaker who you are and why you care about your issue.
- 4) Tell the lawmaker what you want from him or her.
- 5) Finish politely by thanking the lawmaker for his/her attention to your letter.

Don't forget to sign your letter! Use "Sincerely," followed by your full name.

You should also include your mailing address and/or other contact information (phone number, email address, etc.) so that the lawmaker can contact you.