



Ohio Senate  
Statehouse  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

## **Widener, Jones Named to Budget Conference Committee**

*COLUMBUS* – Ohio Senate President Tom Niehaus formally appointed today Senator Chris Widener (R-Springfield) and Senate Majority Whip Shannon Jones (R-Springboro) to serve on the state budget conference committee.

Widener, who chairs the Senate Finance Committee, and Jones, who serves as vice chair of the committee, will represent the 23-member Senate Republican caucus on the panel, which is responsible for negotiating a compromise between the proposed House and Senate versions of the state's new, two-year operating budget.

"I look forward to representing my colleagues as we reach the final stage of the budgeting process," said Senator Widener. "We will work through some minor differences between the two legislative chambers, but I'm confident that we share a common goal of eliminating a historic shortfall without raising taxes. Ohioans understand this is a difficult budget that requires a lot of fiscal discipline and shared sacrifice. We are committed to maintaining the additional support for schools and local communities included in the Senate version of the budget, while letting Ohioans keep more of their hard-earned money in this tough economy through responsible tax relief. Those are the goals that will drive our negotiations."

Recognizing the importance of education, senators added an additional \$115 million to bolster school funding levels over the House version of the budget, ensuring that every school district in the state gets at least the same amount of basic state aid - with the exception of one-time federal stimulus funds - that they received in the current fiscal year. The Senate plan includes \$35 million in incentives for schools that receive a rating of excellent or excellent with distinction.

Senate Republican leadership also identified an additional \$100 million to support local governments, helping communities across the state sustain vital services in a tough economy.

"Seventy percent of this budget goes directly into students and federally-mandated health care programs for Ohioans in need," said Senator Jones. "That's not to say we didn't have to make

tough choices about cutting back, but we've done everything we can to fund our priorities and still come up with a balanced plan that reduces our tax burden."

Finally, the Senate budget preserves the last installment of a 21 percent across-the-board income tax reduction approved in 2005, which is estimated to save Ohioans \$800 million at a time when they need it most. The bill also includes tax incentives for job creation, community revitalization and economic development, as well as historic levels of property tax relief totaling \$1.7 billion for every Ohio homeowner annually over the biennium. Ohio's job-killing estate tax, often called the "Death Tax," would be eliminated by 2013.

Senators Widener and Jones said they would continue to advocate for those initiatives during the conference committee process. The General Assembly must meet a constitutional requirement to present a balanced budget to the governor by June 30<sup>th</sup>.

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