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LOCAL LEADERS CHASTISE LEGISLATURE FOR CUTS

Legislators are overseeing the demise of the state, not its rebuilding, local government leaders said at a rally Thursday demanding reversal of revenue sharing cuts.

Flanked by police and fire fighters, local government leaders from across the state said they have made the cuts and implemented the efficiencies legislators have demanded and are now looking at shutting down services if revenue sharing payments do not return to mandated levels.

"Everyone takes this seriously except for the Legislature," said Jeff Jenks, mayor pro tem of Huntington Woods and president of the Michigan Municipal League. "After eight continuous years of cuts, we're down past bare bones."

And in a major shift, the Michigan Municipal League has abandoned its effort to have the governor veto the revenue sharing lines and send the issue back to the Legislature because there is no guarantee that would produce more money for local governments, Dan Gilmartin, executive director of the Michigan Municipal League, told Gongwer News Service after the rally. Indeed, the Senate has said it will not restore items Ms. Granholm vetoes.

Instead, the group is planning to work with legislators on supplemental appropriations later in the year to restore the funding, Mr. Gilmartin said.

But, echoing some of the speakers, he said legislators have to start looking beyond the current budget cycle. "We've got to look long term," he said. "We got to look farther than getting the budget passed, declaring victory and going home."

Dave Purchase, Norton Shores Fire Department chief, said legislators should not expect any better management from cities than they should of the state. "They want to tell us how to manage our communities," he said. "There's 140 people behind me that can't manage this building."

And Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero said the state owed the revenue sharing money. "This is a covenant that's been violated," he said.

"We just can't hold enough bake sales to pay for your cuts," said John Daher, Lansing Township supervisor. "State legislators have had 10 years to figure out how to deal with this financial situation. They've done nothing but posture."

All of the speakers said the cuts have meant loss of police and fire protection, the services that are essential to attracting new residents and businesses to the state.

"If we want to recover we have to provide quality of life and nothing is more foundational than safety,"

said David LaGrand, a member of the Grand Rapids City Commission.

And Troy City Council member Mary Kerwin said her community would, at the current rate of property tax losses and revenue sharing cuts, have to eliminate a third of its full-time staff by 2015. That would mean essentially eliminating or privatizing nearly all of the city's services and still having to cut some police and firefighters, she said.

East Lansing Police Chief Thomas Wibert said his department has essentially not hired any new officers in nearly a decade, leaving the youngest officer about to turn 30. "We're missing an entire generation of police officers graduating from our colleges and moving to other states," he said.

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