

priorities right now, which one might expect also to be the case for the county and state. But are they?

The question keeps coming up — given discussions taking place during the county budgetary and state legislative processes, and efforts afoot indicating that rebuilding our economy is not necessarily the prime focus.

Competing needs for every dollar and lower revenues provide an opportunity for the state to help support the county's economic development, but obtaining such support has been a challenge.

Legislation was introduced at the state level to take away the counties' share of transient accommodations tax, or TAT: revenue that counties help generate and count on to provide county-level services. This bill later was revised to cap the amount of revenue the counties would receive at current levels, an amount that we at the chamber, the visitor industry and Maui County said we could live with. But then the bill morphed again to cut the county's

percent increase on a 4 percent tax would be a 25 percent increase; it is simple math. So how would that help boost the economy? It would not. Our expenses — food, gas, rent or mortgage — would go up, and we would have less money at home and in our pockets.

Also, the cost of doing business would increase, equating to fewer dollars spent on business development, salaries and job creation. A GET hike would hamper our economic recovery and stifle any economic growth. Lawmakers also are looking to increase the barrel tax on fuel by 3,000 percent, which would be a monstrous hit to our gas and power costs. While such efforts might help protect a large government at the expense of the people, they do not reflect that economic revitalization is a primary concern for our state.

Worldwide, the clear and consistent financial message is: "Live within your means." Residents and businesses are having to; government needs to do the same. Government cannot continue as it has without

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Core changes are needed in areas, such as the Department of Education (DOE), which takes a lion's share of the state budget. Overhauling the DOE certainly would send a strong message that our state is serious about improving the economy and that educated students are important to an economic turnaround. There is considerable room for cost savings in the DOE, yet there appears to be little legislative will to do it despite our long history of poor results and continued high costs.

On the county level, economic-development funding was viewed alongside funding for nonprofit social services. While this view is not new, economic-development efforts are very different from, and should not be compared in the same vein as, our social-services safety net. Likewise, we do not compare funding for capital-improvement projects with funding for social services. County budgeting and funding should be based on priorities and impact. Level cuts across the board are not the way to go. When the

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Since "action is more than words," we need to make our economic development a priority and we will add to our economic development completely crippling our road.

■ Pamela Tuohy
of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.