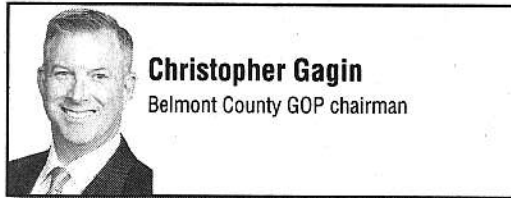


Republicans respond to Favede press conference

As the new Belmont County Republican chairman, one of my duties is to contribute to the public debate. That means presenting issues and ideas we support, as well as presenting opposing views to the issues and ideas our Democrat friends raise for discussion. Today, I offer a rebuttal to outgoing Belmont County Commissioner, and current Ohio House candidate, Democrat Ginny Favede, who recently held a press conference complaining of cuts to the state's Local Government Fund.

Favede is in a difficult race against incumbent state Rep. Andy Thompson, R-Marietta. In fact, in the primary election last March when neither Thompson nor Favede faced opposition, Thompson received more votes than Favede in Belmont County by a margin of nearly 2:1 — 4,306 for Thompson and 2,411 for Favede. Thus the press conference, and her effort to make LGF a central campaign issue.

Ironically for Democrats, the ultimate responsibility for the LGF reduction falls at the feet of former Gov. Ted Strickland. Democrats must remember the reductions were part of Gov. John Kasich's plan to erase the \$8 billion budget deficit Strickland left the people of Ohio at the end of



Christopher Gagin
Belmont County GOP chairman

his term in 2011.

Plus, this argument is hardly new. Favede's now tired argument was front and center during Gov. Kasich's re-election campaign in 2014. It didn't work then (Kasich won 86 of Ohio's 88 counties), and it's not a winning argument today.

Why? Because, in his first term, not only did Gov. Kasich balance Ohio's budget by eliminating Strickland's \$8 billion deficit, he did so while cutting taxes by \$3 billion after reducing income tax rates 10 percent. Kasich resurrected Ohio's economy by cutting small business income tax by 50 percent (increased to 75 percent for 2014), and by eliminating the estate tax and giving targeted tax relief to low- and middle-income workers. That's a record we Republicans are quite proud of, and one we are happy to defend.

But, Favede's negative attack on Kasich and LGF are contrasted with her own fiscal

record of increased spending.

For example, county budget records show commissioners budgeted \$288,000 for employees' salaries in 2015. In 2016,

that line item exploded to \$390,510, an increase of 36 percent. The commissioners could have transferred that extra \$102,510 to local governments. Instead, they chose to spend it themselves to create more county government — a new Human Resource Department. The new HR director was given \$85,000 per year (plus two assistants), even though the previous county HR director was paid \$48,000 and had no assistants. Add in two new Chevy SUVs purchased in 2015 and commissioner travel to Las Vegas for "economic development" purposes, and it's clear "fiscal restraint" is not a phrase any of the commissioners is particularly fond of.

Likewise, Favede's record does not indicate a willingness to make tough decisions in the same way Gov. Kasich has done. Take a recent example at the commissioners' meeting on March 30.

On that date, the Board planned to vote on the re-financ-

ing of \$3.2 million for the Senior Services Community Center — one of the largest debt offerings during her tenure.

Yet, according to The Times Leader article the next day, "... Commissioner Ginny Favede abstained from voting on this motion and consulted with Belmont County Auditor Andrew Satak and Bond Counsel ... to clarify the status of the \$3.2 million senior services note." Wait, what?! Clarify the status? The status of what? And, even if clarification was needed, why wasn't that done prior to this important meeting to allow her to vote "Yea" or "Ney?" Is this what she intends to do if elected to the General Assembly, simply abstain from difficult votes?

Either Commissioner Favede came completely unprepared to this vital meeting, or she used the consultation as an excuse not to go on record and vote on what might become a controversial issue.

Rather than tired attack lines, perhaps our Democratic friends should take the time to read the state's current budget. The truth is Gov. Kasich and Ohio's GOP-led General Assembly approved Ohio's FY2016-2017 budget, which increased local government funding. For example, it divides

\$10 million in each fiscal year among the townships and another \$2 million is divided among small villages with less than 5,000 people. The budget establishes a Local Government Safety Capital Grant Program, which distributes \$20 million for the purchase of vehicles, equipment, facilities or systems needed to enhance public safety at the county and local levels. The budget also provides \$4 million for a Community Police Relations Fund, as well as increased funding to the Public Library Fund, plus additional funds for county boards of developmental disabilities and county agricultural societies, just to name a few of the LGF assistance areas.

In short, Ohio's budget makes difficult choices — regarding LGF and many other funding priorities, just as all public budgets must. And, so too, must Commissioner Favede. If Commissioner Favede — whose fiscal record above is telling — does not believe she or the county or the state can do more with less in spite of the evidence, then she might want to re-think her efforts to represent Belmont County in Columbus, or perhaps she should simply look to Gov. Kasich and Ohio's current budget for inspiration and a reality check.