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Blumenthal's Viewpoint: The time is now to work together

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With Congress and the White House failing to reach an agreement on desperately needed Covid-19 assistance funds, the stage is set for a bitter funding battle in Harrisburg as budget talks restart this month.

Even with a new Biden administration taking office on Jan. 20, 2021, states are facing an immediate crisis that can't wait for a new Congress or president to be sworn in.

Without assistance from the federal government, the commonwealth is facing a \$5 billion hole in its current year budget that cannot be repaired without deep and irreparable harm to our state's citizenry.

Choices facing legislators are bleak. How does one trim \$5 billion from the budget? Programs cut may include many human services. Budget cuts have traditionally disproportionately affected seniors, people with disabilities and the poor. This time every sector in the budget is at risk.

The intellectual disability and autism community rightfully is concerned about the future. About 13,000 people remain on a



INVISION HUMAN SERVICES

Gary Blumenthal, vice president,
governmental relations and
advocacy, InVision Human Services

state waiting list for needed services, including over 5,000 on a state emergency waiting list.

Federal and state officials have decried the effects of the pandemic and saluted front-line workers for their life-risking dedication to their jobs. The federal CARES Act has provided temporary hazard pay for front-line workers; however, that funding expires soon.

Surviving 2020 and fostering a positive outlook for the citizens of the commonwealth will require General Assembly Republicans, Democrats, and the governor to resist innate political instincts and act responsibly and collaboratively as the stewards of Pennsylvania's future.

To act in the best interest of Pennsylvania citizens, General Assembly leaders must form effective working relationships with each other and the governor to protect vulnerable people and the state's economic prospects.

The time for our political leaders to weigh each legislative proposal on only how it helps or harms the other party's next election performance must end.

Hopefully members of the General Assembly will work together during this crisis to find workable solutions to our state's budget and health crisis by developing a consensus on how to move forward, even if that means embracing ideas from both political parties.

Gary Blumenthal is vice president of InVision Human Services based in Wexford, Reading and Harrisburg. He served in the Clinton and Obama administrations as federal disability advisor and is a former member of the Kansas House of Representatives.