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Proposed budget meets needs of the moment, but opportunities exist

Gov. Minner proposed a cautious, no-surprises budget on Thursday. It was a good thing.

On the same day, President Bush joined forces with a bipartisan team of U.S. House leaders to endorse a hefty tax rebate to bolster a flagging U.S. economy.

Elsewhere in Washington, the Government Accountability Office issued a dire warning that state and local governments everywhere are headed for fiscal trouble in the next decade. Earlier this week the Rockefeller Institute of Government warned that all 50 states face a continuing loss of revenue, pointing to particular troubles in New Jersey and Maryland. And up Interstate 95, the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia set off an alarm about that city's clouded fiscal future.

So Gov. Minner's timing was good. This is a year to watch expenditures and to monitor revenue estimates. And the governor's budget proposal sets the stage for such an outlook.

The budget calls for a 3.8 percent increase, bringing the budget to \$3.4 billion. Those figures may be changed by the Legislature between now and the deadline for passing a final budget on June 30.

In keeping with the rocky economic outlook and the fact this is the governor's last year in office, the budget did not set forth any major initiatives. Nor did she call for any new taxes. It is, after all, an election year.

This is prudent — up to a point. The governor-appointed Leadership for Education Achievement in Delaware, or LEAD Committee, wasn't able to make its cost-savings recommendations in time for Gov. Minner's budget request. But the General Assembly should seriously look at the committee's suggestions from earlier this week for saving money in the state's education expenditures.

It would be a tight turnaround, but some of those suggested savings could be used to push forward plans to boost the quality of education in Delaware. It's not necessary to endorse all of the proposed \$86 million to \$158 million in savings, but with the right leadership and commitment, a portion of that money would go a long way in preparing the state's students for a rapidly changing world economy.

Such a move wouldn't be out of line with the overall thrust of the budget request or the reigning economic mood. It would be a good investment.