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We lose any way you look at it

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It is always interesting to watch opposites look at the same thing and come to different conclusions.

Bond rating agencies and professional anti-tax organizations want to have a say on the merits of a state's finances. Delaware's treatment is a good example.

The ratings agencies Fitch and Moody's gave Delaware top marks for managing its finances. The Cato Institute, on the other hand, flunked Gov. Jack Markell on the same topic.

Of course, Fitch and Moody's are in the business of credit ratings. If all the states in the country stopped borrowing money, Fitch and Moody's would be laying people off by the hundreds. Remember they did get rather close to those banks and mortgage writers during the housing bubble.

Cato, on the other hand, is a severe critic of government action. It espouses a libertarian outlook and wants government activity curtailed.

Cato would never be happy with Gov. Markell or any other Democrat. He is trying to get the Delaware government to do a lot on a limited budget. The overwhelming majority of Delaware taxpayers want the governor to do even more – at least for them. The tax savings can be taken away from the guy down the street.

Several things are wrong with these analyses. Governors, for the most part, do not create jobs. Governors do claim they are responsible for them. So do presidents, mayors, senators and state representatives. However, jobs spring from the ups and downs of small and large businesses. Few of them look at themselves as employment agencies. They are just trying to make a profit. When it works, everybody is happy. When it doesn't, governors and the others get the blame.

The great difficulty today is that no one has a good handle on the economy. States don't control it. National and international trends and movements of goods and services play a far bigger part. Governors have little say where corporations build their next factory. They can try to persuade with smiles or entice with tax rates and other promises, but they do not make the decisions.

In addition, governors have little control over tax revenue either. Delaware is not as dependent as other states on the income tax, but the stagnant wages of the middle class and the ability of the very rich to shelter their money puts a pinch on state revenue. On the other hand, Delaware, like other state governments, has not shown much ingenuity in cutting the cost of government or making it more effective.

Delaware is not alone. Look at all of the governors up for re-election. Practically all of them are in trouble – with the right or the left. Standard & Poors, another credit rating agency, recently reported on the problem of tax revenues in several states. It noted that more and more the income tax is being supported by the wealthy. They also are the most affected by any volatility in the economy. Any downturn means the richer folks are less rich and pay less in taxes.

The rest of us are not making enough to support the government we have become accustomed to. Yes, jobs are coming back. Slowly but surely, of course. But they are paying a lot less.

Health benefits and retirement costs are being pushed onto the workers. So you make less, work more hours and pay more for your insurance premium and prescription drugs. And good luck with your defined-contribution pension plan.

According to Standard & Poors, this is a structural problem.

Tax policies will not help much.

In the meantime, state governments are footing bigger and bigger bills for K-12 education and health care for the poor and elderly.

Those costs, however, don't go up and down with the economy. They just seem to go up.

What's our choice? Start cutting to please Cato? Or borrow more to keep Fitch and Moody's happy?