

June 9, 2009

Howdy, Friends O'Farley...

Well, we passed a budget last Thursday night. It was the Republican leadership's budget, with many unwise components we lambasted for hours during floor debate.

I compared it to that children's book by Judith Viorst that my daughters used to love - The Terrible, Horrible, No Good Very Bad Budget.

But the Speaker is not handing the budget over to the Governor for her promised veto - he is keeping it in his back pocket for possible use later, maybe even on June 30, if negotiations don't go to his liking.

Which does have one advantage: The longer the budget's elements are out there in the public, the more problems crop up.

Problems like the fact that this budget, adopted by the bare minimum of votes needed to pass, would make us ineligible for almost all the stimulus money it depends upon in order to be balanced. And it would make us ineligible for the hundreds of millions of dollars in Medicaid stimulus money that we have already spent, forcing us to give it back.

How did they do this? In the case of the Medicaid money, there was a provision in the bill which would add another list of required documents needed to prove a recipient was actually a US citizen, thus restricting eligibility beyond federal guidelines for no good reason. Recipients already need to prove their citizenship. Even the Governor is on record agreeing that this would cause the feds to yank back more than a billion dollars in stimulus.

In the case of flex funds and education funds, the higher ed budget was cut another \$49 million plus another \$50 million in raids from important campus operation funds. These moves, in conjunction with the effective cut to Fiscal 09 of delaying a month's payment into Fiscal 10, would cause our higher education funding to fall below federal guidelines and throw away more than another billion stimulus dollars.

Beyond these stimulus problems, the legislature-approved budget would suspend development impact fees for three years and cripple them permanently when they return. There is no word on how we are to recover the cost of growth except to use the time-honored tradition of piling it on existing residents.

The majority budget would also privatize most of our prisons, including Death Row. And it would devastate the kids, disabled folks, and seniors who depend on services from DES and DHS even as it hands out corporate giveaways to the state's largest landowners. In another mean-spirited move, the budget bills would eliminate healthcare and other benefits from the domestic partners of state employees.

Actually, let me quote a senior Republican, Bill Konopnicki (R-Safford) who voted against the bill and wrote in this morning's Arizona Republic:

"This budget hurts hospitals (some may have to close), community colleges, community health centers and universities, and steals money from cities and counties. This budget also hurts seniors, taking away wheelchairs and other necessary items; many who are able to live at home will have to be moved to nursing homes. It also hurts individuals with developmental disabilities. It takes away vital services and leaves them without any help. Many may have to be placed in group homes at an even greater cost to the state."

Governor Brewer did promise a veto whenever the Speaker gets around to sending it to her, but now might be a good time to offer further encouragement in that direction by calling her at 800-253-0883.

You might also remind her that the Governor's budget is only marginally better, and that the only party she should be negotiating with right now is the House and Senate Democrats, whose budget is the only one that really looks to the future while solving our present problems.

In fact, the Democratic budget's centerpiece of broadening the sales tax base to services while lowering the overall rate to 3.4% is getting praise from some pretty unexpected circles to the far right. Byron Schlomach, director of the Goldwater Institute's Center for Economic Prosperity was quoted in the Star's political blog as saying "I congratulate the Democrats for having the courage to expand sales taxes into services. If the sales tax rate was lowered and the base broadened, it would have a net positive effect on the state's economy."

Hopefully, that can help provide some cover for some of our reluctant friends in the Republican caucus to come over to the side of reason and prosperity and push for Democratic ideas in the final budget.

Meanwhile over in the Senate, President Bob Burns has decided that voting on a budget (even though it is not a real budget that gets a Governor signature) is enough to allow him to claim that he has kept his January promise that non-budget bills would be heard only after a budget was adopted.

This means that - even though we still have no budget resolution with exactly three weeks left in the fiscal year - the Senate majority will be wasting our state's precious remaining time before government shutdown by launching a series of right-wing ideological attacks. They plan to work almost 24/7 to pump out a whole lot of really bad non-budget bills this week and next so that they can be sent over to the House who will do the same. This is not gonna be pretty.

Here are just a few of the outcomes being sought by sponsors of this week's bills.

- > Outlaw restrictions on carrying guns in restaurants & bars
- > Institute widespread abortion restrictions
- > Continue attacks on immigrants
- > Make Presidential candidates prove their U.S. citizenship
- > Force spending limitations like the ones that drove Colorado off a cliff (TABOR)
- > Allow the Legislature to raid voter-protected funds from approved citizen initiatives
- > Ban universal healthcare
- > and oodles of other affronts to reasonable Arizonans.

Looks like we will spend the next few weeks furiously fiddling Dixie while the state's fiscal house burns down.

Back in the real world of Tucson, the Drachman Institute released a great joint study with Chicago's Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) talking about the links between transportation and affordable housing.

The upshot of the report is that Southern Arizona households are now paying about a third of their net income on transportation. Investment in good public transit and good urban planning with walkable, multimodal, mixed-use urban villages close to workplaces not only creates a better quality of life for real people, it saves us real money as well.

You can read a strong editorial from the Star on the report here:
<http://www.azstarnet.com/opinion/295907>

and you can download the original report in PDF form here:
[http://www.drachmaninstitute.org/sites/default/files/FINAL H+T Report_1.pdf](http://www.drachmaninstitute.org/sites/default/files/FINAL_H+T_Report_1.pdf)

Soon I'll be writing more about how we can act together to create a more livable Tucson through smart urban planning and multimodal transit investments. Back in 2001, several of us founded Tucsonans for Sensible Transportation (TST) to make this happen. Within two years, we had attracted more than 1,600 members and successfully placed a multimodal transportation initiative on the Tucson ballot. As many of our ideas have become more widely accepted and put into place, we have been meeting again to re-energize TST into a new and active organization called Southern Arizona Transit Advocates. I'll let you know about our public rollout this fall.

Finally tonight, there is hope for the future. You may have read recently in the Star and Weekly about my 10-year-old daughter GiGi's Presidential campaign. Yes, that's U.S. President (in 2036). She is one of 35 young women featured in a just-released book ("She's Out There", published by Lifetime Media) about young women all over the country who are running for President, and you can meet her at a booksigning at Borders Books at Park Mall in Tucson this Saturday, June 13, at 2:00pm. Admission is free.

This event is also sponsored by Emerge, a great Arizona nonprofit that offers training and support for women who want to run for office at every level. An Emerge graduate and one of my favorite people in the world, the esteemed former District 26 Representative Lena Saradnik, will be M.C. at the booksigning. Hope to see you there!

Even if you can't come, you can sign up as a supporter on GiGi's Facebook fan page that her older sister Amelia set up for her. That page can be found at:
<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/pages/Genevieve-Farley/108431869851?ref=ts>

Thanks for staying involved and standing up for the people of this state,
Steve

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