



WHAT'S UP March 28, 2009

The Legislature is continuing down the path of denial as described last week by Governor Jan Brewer. Both the Senate and House are circulating **DRAFT** budgets among Majority members.

The only thing the Senate and House versions agree upon is "no tax increase." The House plan, for example, envisions a 7.3 percent, or \$739 million, cut to state agency budgets. The Senate plan called for an 8.3 percent or \$842 million cut to state agencies. Both acknowledge a yet-unresolved shortfall: \$465 million in the House version and \$313 million in the Senate draft.

The House plan includes more than \$103 million in cuts to the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), the state's Medicaid program. That agency already had about \$40 million in mid-year cuts. The Department of Economic Security, which lost about \$150 million in cash in January, would lose another \$99.5 million. In addition \$45 million would be cut from the Department of Health Services.

We haven't mentioned Kidscare and Kidscare Parents that apparently are not funded in either budget. (Recall this is a \$3 to \$1 federal to state matching program which means the federal dollars will be lost. All-Day Kindergarten would be left to struggle for some of the money left after nearly \$330 million in cuts to the public schools. This follows \$133 million in cuts made just two months ago to K-12 education.

House Majority Leader John McComish is quoted as saying, "How can you not cut it? K-12 has to participate in the solution."

The Senate and House are also confused and bewildered, or so they say, by the money available to the State from the federal Stimulus Package. They need to make some changes in the state's education programs and the unemployment insurance program in order to receive the stimulus money. Whether they can figure out how to do this, without just asking for exemptions, is something that needs to be done before passing a budget.

Neither the House nor the Senate proposal meets the Governor's request for a tax increase of some kind but depend upon borrowing against future lottery proceeds. It appears that neither house has the 31 and 16 votes to pass a budget. However, you can be sure that the arm-twisting is about to begin.

Remember to call, write or e-mail your legislators and ask them **not** to support the budget drafts being circulated. Tell them we need to support the state's social programs and education as a matter of common sense in looking at the future of this state.

## **BILLS**

HB2237 (AHCCCS; verification of eligibility) has passed out of House COW and awaits 3<sup>rd</sup> Read. Please ask your legislators to vote NAY on this one.

HB2091 (charitable organizations; solicitations; disclosures) is also awaiting 3<sup>rd</sup> Read. SVdP supports this one.

HB2269 (landlords; tenants; foreclosures) joins the above two awaiting 3<sup>rd</sup> Read. Ask those folks to vote for it.

I am including Senator Carolyn Allen's letter published in Saturday's Arizona Republic. She has always supported the needs of those who cannot help themselves. Since VOP members outside Maricopa County may not get the Republic, I thought it worthwhile to pass it on.

# **Arizona must not forget its moral responsibilities**

Mar. 28, 2009 12:00 AM

The current economic crisis reminds us that many hard-working, tax-paying citizens in our communities are one or two life-changing moments away from poverty and desperation. And it reminds me of my own family's experience.

When I was 6, my father died, leaving my mother no choice but to go on public assistance for three months to support our family until she could find a job as a maid, take in laundry and apply for my father's Social Security.

We didn't plan it; we didn't want it. My mother was a proud woman. But we needed it. And, thank God, the help was there.

Arizona's human-services safety net exists to support people - like my mother - with temporary services that help them work their way back to self-sufficiency. Today, Arizona's economic turndown is putting more people in my mother's position. The safety net is straining and is at risk of unraveling.

In order to close a \$1.6 billion shortfall in the 2009 budget, the state Legislature approved a lump-sum reduction in human services of more than \$100 million.

That decision has resulted in many Arizonans getting fewer essential services or losing them altogether.

Because of state staff layoffs and furloughs, many more children and families are facing longer waits to get needed services as the employees who remain struggle with ever-increasing caseloads.

The 2010 budget offers no relief. In fact, we are faced with at least a \$3 billion state-budget shortfall.

But, unlike the 2009 budget - where we had to make some very painful decisions very quickly - the 2010 budget gives us an opportunity to step back.

We have time to consider not only what these cuts mean in terms of dollars and cents but also what they mean to people who need services now and what they mean to our state in the future.

The research is clear about what happens when families do not get the services and support they need: educational failure for children, higher crime rates and economically depressed communities.

That's not the Arizona I know. It is not the Arizona many of us worked so hard to build. And it is not the Arizona I want to live in or leave to our children and grandchildren.

As elected officials, we have a duty to our constituents to be responsible administrators of taxpayer monies. But the state's bottom line should not be the only measure of our actions.

It has been said, "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life - the children; those who are in the twilight of life - the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life - the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

As we continue budget negotiations for 2010, may all of my colleagues at the Legislature - Republican and [Democrat](#) - consider both our fiscal and moral responsibility to Arizonans. Despite our challenges in Arizona, may we strive to leave our state in better shape than we found it. All of us!

As my mother's story reminds me and should remind us all - when we see a family struggling to pay for groceries, a person left homeless because of a job loss and eviction or a senior citizen having to be institutionalized because there is no one at home to help them - there, but for the grace of God, go I.

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