

March 16, 2009

Villages May Lose Thousands In County Revenue Cut

Recently, the Nassau County Legislature inched a step closer to cutting \$1.2 million in aid from the sales tax revenue to its villages of which \$44,000 was being allotted this year to Floral Park. This proposed action is especially galling since these monies promised by the County had already been budgeted in our 2009-2010 budget. But to have the County potentially reverse course, at the eleventh hour, and instead of a just recompense, we find ourselves mugged, our pockets picked, with nothing to show in return but the cold blade of a stiletto in the back is nothing less than an outrage to propriety and the protocols of decency and fair play.

We are not unaware that the nation is shuddering down to its bootstraps by a financial earthquake whose tremors have not only rocked Nassau County but also produced a major seismic event in financial capitals throughout the world. Nor are we blinded to Nassau County's enormous budget gap that is in no small part responsible for a precipitous drop in sales tax revenue. As their budget was being heated, hammered and wrought into a malleable instrument of public finance, a catastrophic discovery of a \$130 million gap was lobbed like a live grenade into the budgetary trenches sending every interested party into a mad scramble for the facts. But what at first seemed an implausible gap in the County's finances has been borne out to be a disturbing and heartbreaking reflection of its shipwrecked economy at the turn of the millennium.

Indeed, from what I am hearing about the County's financial situation I wish I could say what Mark Twain said about Richard Wagner's music: "It's better than it sounds." But, alas, I cannot. Its fiscal status sounds awful and it is, God-awful. I recognize that the County needs to address these shortages but it is a poor excuse to confiscate legal tender that rightfully belongs to us. Our residents pay the same sales tax everyone else does and not an iota of a percentage less. The Minority Leader of the County Legislature, Peter Schmidt, was right when he stated that the villages had budgeted for that money and hence it is a contract, an obligation the County should meet.

When I first ran for trustee, one of my planks was to secure a percentage of the sales tax revenue for our village and, in 2002, we were successful in obtaining that elusive object. We believe, however, that despite its quandary, the County wants to act in good faith and live up to its obligation. We also find encouragement that the County obtained a tentative concession with their biggest unions on givebacks and, if they prove permanent, that this will relieve any urgency to commandeer those dollars intended for the villages.

Before it was cancelled, we were anxious to communicate these views at a March 9th hearing at the County regarding the distribution of sales tax revenue. Before any irrevocable action is taken, we are imploring the County to reschedule and afford us a

public forum to present, in these troubled times, our frank perspective on this critical issue.

Economic angst

Speaking to residents and business owners around the village one cannot help but sense the gnawing anxiety so many feel over the economy. We all have a stake in the health of our financial system and no matter the political faith, the idea of borrowing against tomorrow to live for today rubs against the grain of common sense. They know that spending borrowed money one cannot afford got us into this crisis and the fact that local and state politicians are craving more over the stimulus package than they are in Washington is alarming in itself.

When one sees how bad policy has driven the economy off the rails, the recent failures to calm the markets belabored with paralyzing uncertainty, the pandemic of fear sweeping through financial nerve centers and the muddled attempts of Washington to resurrect the economy by politicizing it with more wasteful spending is enough to make Dale Carnegie despair.

Rhetorically sugarcoating the “cradle to grave” social spending being proposed does little but provide a couple of good catchwords which, by the way, might be enough since no less a light than Oliver Wendell Holmes said a good catchword could obscure critical analysis for 50 years. Sooner or later, however, reality settles in like cement. Let’s hope there won’t be too much trial and error before the clueless mandarins in the nation’s capital figure out that prosperity depends on investment, on businesses buying new plants and employing new workers. But before that happens like a meticulous gardener you need to cultivate the environment, provide the right nutrients and make sure what you’re trying to grow gets enough sunlight. First step is to clear the banks of toxic assets (as nettlesome and difficult as that is) and then through tax policy incentivize the economy toward a pro-growth agenda.

Until happier days it does us no good to act like doomed characters in an Edgar Allen Poe story. What good did Poe’s dusky moodiness do him in his truncated, dissolute and tormented life? The inner gloom was so pervasive that Poe said he did not have to see, but could actually hear at sunset the darkness stealing over the horizon. Good grief. But let’s face it, when gripped by fear and uncertainty there is a vein of melancholy that undeniably courses through human nature and there are only two ways to combat it. The first is to think positively, have a sense of humor and believe there is an overarching meaning to the Universe. The second way is to go to Hofstra University and watch the Floral Park Memorial’s girl’s basketball team win the Long Island Championship for the second consecutive year.

Congratulations Girls!

Accompanied by my faithful, irrepressible colleague, Trustee Tom Tweedy, we entered beautiful Mack Stadium at Hofstra University to root on, with a host of other

village residents, the Floral Park Memorial's Girl's Basketball team to their second consecutive championship. The game, which was played against Harborfields High School, was exciting all the way. These were two great teams and they brought out the best in each other. Along with their arresting athleticism, the spirit and teamwork of our girls sparkled throughout the entire game.

The final score was 45-38 and Tom and I took pictures on the court with the team. Let me tell you, irrespective of their championship caliber, these are really nice girls: respectful, engaging, and hardworking.

Now they are off to the state championships in Troy where we wish Danielle Donohue, Lindsay Epstein, Samantha Epstein, Raquel Gonzales, Kate Hartnett, Shannon Ingram, Holly Judge, Caitlin Klaum, Katie Phelan, Ericka Re, Julia Schmidt, and Lauren Simicich all the luck in the world.

I also want to congratulate Coach Greg Mayerhofer who has really invested his soul into girl's basketball. This season is the coach's swan song. What a remarkable sendoff after 22 years and 394 victories. I was interviewed during the game, which was televised, and was asked now that I was concluding my term as mayor would I be interested in taking over for Coach Mayerhofer by coaching the girl's basketball team! I told them I could never fill such big shoes but I did think that Coach Mayerhofer had the leadership qualities to make a good mayor. Whatever he decides to do, we want wish Coach Mayerhofer happiness and success and thank him for being such a wonderful and enduring influence on the youth of our schools and community.