

Tax and spend is bipartisan problem, campaign reform is the solution

By Jack E. Lohman

The makeup of the recent budget vote clearly indicates that the special interests got their way with both political parties. The Senate was split, Democrats for and Republicans against, and it passed in the Assembly 60-39 with half of each party voting yes or no.

It all sounds a bit contrived, and it's shameful that special interests padded the pockets on both sides of the aisle. But they did, and the public will pay the price.

The tobacco industry dealt its usual share of campaign cash and bought some No votes in its attempt to block the \$1.00 per pack cigarette tax. The casino industry must love that they failed. And the road builders got their way with a Highway 23 expansion that even the Transportation Department said won't be needed until 2020. That's the kind of smart spending I like.

It's not so much what got passed and what didn't, it's that political money changed hands all during the budget process. And the longer they held out the more time the politicians had for fundraising and twisting arms of contributors. Could they not have made the corruption any more obvious?

Nobody likes taxes, especially if they are unnecessary and excessive. Taxes result from government spending, and excessive taxes result from excessive government spending. But it all starts when influenced politicians earmark pork barrel projects, tax breaks and subsidies at the behest of those who contribute cash to their campaigns, and the taxpayers pay the bill.

It's a quid pro quo, and the rhetoric the politicians spout is simply part of the game. They seek kudos when they spin against taxes, but then they vote on government spending anyway. Taxes go up and most voters never know how their legislator voted.

What I have yet to figure out -- if Republicans really do hate taxes -- is why they also hate the very campaign reform that would eliminate excessive spending and hence those excessive taxes.

The answer is pretty clear; they like getting re-elected even more and campaign contributions make that happen. All of their so-called "values" never make it into the discussion.

Republican leaders are extremely shortsighted, and so are many Dems. They could all get themselves re-elected easily and reduce taxes too, if they'd simply vote to clean up the political system. Their voting constituents support reform, but their cash constituents generally don't.

Political corruption is a nonpartisan issue, and Republican voters should want honest government as much as Democrats.

The best reform would be to enact public funding of campaigns -- as has Arizona and four other states -- which would cost the state about \$5 per taxpayer per year. It's voluntary so those opposing it could simply opt out. Of course they'll make every excuse when the only honest one is that it levels the playing field, and weak politicians don't like that.

In itself the \$5 would be a terrific bargain, and they wouldn't even have to use taxpayer funds. In Arizona they pay for it with a surcharge on criminal and traffic fines, so if you don't want to contribute to the political system, don't speed.

In the end, all fiscal conservatives, all Democrats, and all Republicans should support getting corruption out of the political system. Passing reform is the right thing to do for taxpayers, and it's up to the voters to make it the right thing for their legislators too. If the current legislature refuses to make the necessary changes, the voters must show them the door in 2008.

To see how your legislator voted go to www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=678235

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