

Lots of Smoke, Too Few Mirrors in Virginia's Budget Show

Magicians ply their trade with smoke and mirrors. The art of illusion makes a lie look like the truth. A good magic trick is better than reality. When politicians mimic magicians, they need the media to generate a lot of smoke. Unlike magicians, politicians don't want mirrors on the stage and especially not in the audience. When enough Virginians hold up a mirror to our politicians' words and numbers, it won't go well for the tax and spend Republicans.

The budget – choose your word – mess, crisis, embarrassment, foolishness, idiocy, etc – is the responsibility of twelve Republican Virginia Senators. Twelve Senators – Chichester, Blevins, Hanger, Hawkins, Norment, Potts, Quayle, Rerras, Stolle, Stosch, Wampler, and Watkins – want to raise your taxes. If the House of Delegates refuses to knuckle under to their demands, then they will have the government of the Commonwealth shut down on 1 July and blame it on the Republican majority in the House of Delegates. The media will agree. If nine of the Republicans-for-the-largest-tax-increase-in-Virginia-history voted with the other twelve, normal, Republicans the budget would pass.

Here are the numbers for you to look at in the mirror.

- 1 The budget for 2003-04 is \$52 billion (an increase over the last budget – despite the cries of budget cuts and crisis)
- 2 The budget would be \$56.6 billion, if NO TAXES were raised a penny. Because, ta da, the Bush tax cuts are improving the economy.
- 3 The House of Delegates offers a \$58 billion budget with a half billion tax increase closing corporate tax loopholes.
- 4 Democrat Gov. Warner's tax increase is a budget for \$59 billion.
- 5 The 12 Republican Senators' tax increase (\$3.8b) is a budget of \$61 billion.

Which number above compares to your ability to pay more taxes – the average family income will go up 4%? What will you give up to pay a thousand dollars in new taxes?

The House passed a continuing budget to keep government funded at the present levels. At the time of this paper's publication we will know if the Senate is responsible or is hell bent on shutting the government down.

The pro tax antagonists blow out numbers about an additional 72,000 Medicaid patients, 41,000 public school students, 3,800 prisoners, 11,580 college students, 28,600 state-federally supported childcare kids, and 726 foster children. Put up a mirror and see what is the cost to the Commonwealth? How much are the increases above the actual increase in population every year?

The numbers are pretty clear in the reflecting glass, so politicians try more word fog. Cuts = increases less than they want. Investments = more taxes. Who can afford to pay more = government covetousness and class warfare. And, my personal favorite...Where would you make the cuts = I am too stupid and so arrogant that I think you are even dumber than I am.

Put a mirror to the past and look at what the dozen Republican Senators said before. They loved the transportation tax referendum in 2002. Yet, now they call a referendum 'evading responsibility', 'passing the buck', and 'easy way out'. Funny, how when politicians think they can win, they want a referendum. Yet, when they know they

will lose, they gain a self-righteousness about a legislator's duty that you can take to the bank.

The Twelve Republicans who insist on raising your taxes, didn't campaign to raise your taxes a penny. Quite the contrary for Senators Norment, Chichester and Potts who had primary challenges. The People can show them their campaign promises in the mirror. Or, you can suspend reality to believe in the magic that an IMPROVING economy and increased tax revenues created this sudden funding 'crisis' blah-blah.

Finally, the Republican Senators call their detractors names. Their fog is weak.

Frankly, I am disgusted to write about these Republican Senators before Good Friday. But, we need to shine a mirror on this magical farce in Richmond. Let Mel Gibson tell a touch of the Good News for all humankind in the "Passion of the Christ". Hope you see it in the movie, hear it at least every Sunday, read it in the Bible every day and feel it in your heart and mind every second of your born again life. Happy Easter!

James Atticus Bowden