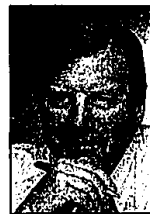


## Residents need to wake up to Michigan's poor budget

Nobody's paying attention just yet. After all, the primary election isn't till August and the general falls in November.

But once voters start paying attention and the various candidates for governor and both houses of the state legislature get focused, they're all going to recoil with alarm at the state of Michigan finances.

Don't take my word for it. Instead, consider what the thoughtful and non-partisan Citizens Research Council of Michigan says in its report on the state budget, issued last week: "The proposed level of General Fund (for 2003) spending exceeds base revenues by \$600 million and it is likely the Medicaid program is roughly \$100 to \$150 million short of financing the level of services proposed in the budget."



Phil Power

Translated, the numbers are way, way out of whack. Given the Constitutional prohibition against deficit spending, how do Gov. John Engler and the Legislature propose to balance the budget for the coming year? By glomming onto \$600 million in "nonrecurrent revenues," i.e. one-time accounting tricks to find the money somewhere. The state's Rainy Day Fund, for example, which had a healthy balance of \$1.264 billion in FY 2000, will be tapped down to \$255 million at the end of 2003.

In future years, using conservative assumptions about state revenue growth and pressures for increased spending like inflation, the Council estimates state spending gaps of more than \$1 billion — that's 10 percent of the total general fund budget — from 2004 through 2009!

Moreover, the Council concludes, "traditional retrenchment methods such as hiring restrictions and other expenditure controls will not solve the problem." That's accountant language for saying that the usual fixes available to a governor and Legislature aren't going to work this time around.

Reducing reimbursement rates paid to Medicaid providers, for example, can't be done because the payment amounts are already well below cost levels for doctors and hospitals. Cutting the prison budget (the most rapidly growing part of the state budget) can only come through changing sentencing policy (i.e. shortening sentences), while cutting higher education outlays will only provoke big tuition increases. Both steps are certain to be deeply unpopular with the voters.

In other words, the people who will be taking office to lead our state in January, 2003, are going to find that the net financial result of Gov. Engler's third term in office will be to have left the financial cupboard bare.

The Council's only faintly hopeful comments had to do with delaying or eliminating future rate cuts in the Single Business Tax and Personal Income Tax, now scheduled to cut in beginning on Jan. 1, 2003. This "would produce substantial revenues to address a portion of the projected future gaps."

True, no doubt. But if you want to get some fun out of an otherwise boring political meet-

**The fact is that state's budget crisis is real and it's big, and people need to start waking up to it.**

ing, ask candidates (any candidate) running for state office how they feel about postponing or eliminating scheduled tax cuts.

All this is not mere political gamesmanship, although Gov. Engler is no doubt pleased his reputation as a tax cutter is assured and comforted at the financial booby trap he has laid for his — likely Democratic — successor. Maybe he really has bought into the longtime conservative argument that the only way to cut government expenditures is to "cut off their air," i.e. arranging such a terrible budget deficit that there is no choice other than accept truly draconian cuts in spending.

The fact is that state's budget crisis is real and it's big. And people need to start waking up to it.

Voters should start asking Lt. Gov. and Republican gubernatorial candidate Dick Posthumus exactly how he proposes to solve the budget dilemma that his service in public office helped create. He says he won't raise taxes, no matter what. So what's he gonna cut?

And the three Democratic candidates for governor ought to quit sniping at each other long enough to stage a joint appearance to highlight the looming budget crisis we are facing. They might disagree about what to do about it, but at least they can pin the blame squarely on the folks who created the problem in the first place.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net.



Joni Hubred

When it comes to volunteering, Dee Josnitis wrote the book.

Well, not literally.

The Farmington Hills resident was just one of more than 80 men and women of all ages honored at last week's Volunteer Recognition lunch, held in the downtown Farmington branch's meeting room.

The Hills library is a little ... disheveled ... right now. It won't be long before the expansion and remodeling of the 12 Mile Road facility is complete, and volunteers will be needed more than ever.

But clearly the library staff and board of directors already values these generous folks.

"The staff likes to call you our margin of excellence," said executive director Bev Papai. "We can do good things, but what you give us allows us that margin."

"To me, the volunteers are the frosting on the cake," said long-time library board member Ernie Sauter.

And cake there was at the May 2 event, which was catered by Luigi's of downtown Farmington. I can tell you from direct experience the main course was wonderful, but the dessert table — now there was a work of art, genuinely appreciated by the volunteers, along with the token gifts they received and one last, very special honor.

"Each of the volunteers has a book given in his or her name," Papai explained.

Librarians select the books based somewhat on the volunteer's interests. For instance, they picked out a children's book in honor of volunteer Kay Briggs, who piloted the Junior Gardeners program.

Josnitis is the library's most senior volunteer, having worked with books in Braille locally for more than 25 years. She began her work in Braille at the Michigan School for the Blind.

"When I started there, Stevie Wonder was a student," she said.

She has taught and transcribed Braille through the Nardin Park Braille Transcribers and Tri-County Braille Volunteers. In 1974, the Farmington library offered space in its lower level for the program.

"I was always interested in the blind, and I wanted to do something with my time," Josnitis said. "You can only shop so much. You have to do something with your mind."

That is, after all, what libraries and reading are all about. I was struck by that reality in a profound way during an interview with incum-

## Library staff honors their 'margin of excellence'

bent school board member Jack Inch.

Considered the board's elder statesman, Inch is an educator. As he talked about his life, he emphasized how important reading was to him. They door to his future was education, and the key he used to open it was reading.

"I really get excited about reading," he said. "Somebody taught me to read well, and it expanded my world."

Post-Depression America was a drab world, but reading opened up a "technicolor" world for Inch. He likened it to the "Wizard of Oz," a 1930s-era movie that begins black and white in the real world, then switches to color as Dorothy enters the surreal Land of Oz.

The same thing happens, I think, when people step forward to volunteer, whatever the cause. New experiences provide new windows to the world. You meet people you never would have known, do things you'd never dreamed of doing.

When the new library addition opens in the Hills, a great many things will change. Papai went through a long list, but the most remarkable will be the automated system within the library, which will free up staff members to do more work with patrons.

Once a book is dropped off, it'll be scanned by a machine that will, in turn, sort materials by their Dewey Decimal System numbers. The new technology means human hands won't touch any item until it's time to put it back on the shelf.

For a library system that processes more than a million items a year, that's going to save a huge amount of time. Will that eliminate the need for volunteers?

Of course not.

Volunteering is about more than the 7,498 hours that add the equivalent of more than three full-time employees to the staff. It's about the smiles on faces, the gratitude in hearts, the joy of giving.

"We couldn't exist without these people," Papai said.

And as she worked her way through the crowded meeting room doling out hugs and words of thanks, I got the distinct impression she meant every word.

Joni Hubred is editor of the Farmington Observer and Farmington Library patron. She welcomes your comments at 33411 Grand River, Farmington MI 48335; by phone (248) 477-5450; by FAX, (248) 477-9722 or via email, jhubred@oe.homecomm.net

Celebrate  
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Spend A Weekend in Downtown Birmingham!

Friday, May 17

**Tiger Hot Dog Day**  
11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m., Shain Park



**Exhibition Birmingham**  
**A GALLERY TOUR**  
6 - 9:30 p.m. Galleries throughout town

Saturday, May 18

**Build A Bouquet**  
10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Participating Merchants

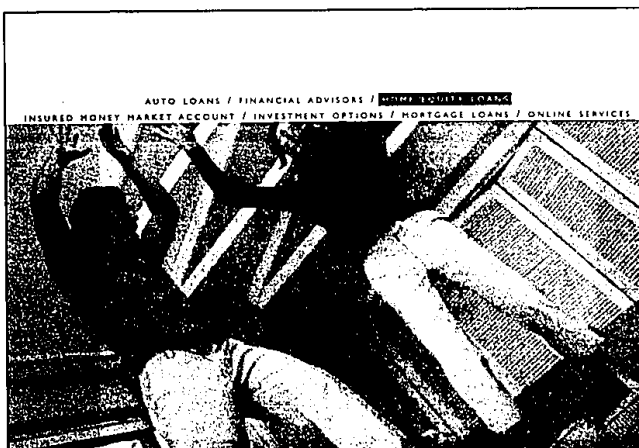


**Museum Anniversary**  
12 - 2 p.m. Birmingham Historical Museum

Sunday, May 19

**Celebrate Birmingham Parade**  
1 p.m. Booth Park to Shain Park  
Family Fun in Shain Park  
immediately following the parade

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