

County continues to ignore fiscal reality

One year ago, we wrote explaining why we voted “no” on the county budget: It used one-shot revenues, raised property taxes by millions of dollars, deceptively shifted spending increases, poorly estimated revenue and expenses, failed to address the structural budget deficit, and was passed without any substantive changes to the executive proposal made by County Executive Maggie Brooks.

Unfortunately, we are writing again this year to say the recently adopted 2010 Monroe County Budget is another poor fiscal plan and we voted against it for those exact same reasons.

Yet again, the current Republican administration and legislative majority have refused to face fiscal reality. Instead they have continued the troubling trend of short-term fiscal gimmickry that increases the risk of long-term financial catastrophe once the one-shot high wire act inevitably ends.

This year, the one-shot bailout was \$33 million of federal stimulus funding. Even with the gift of stimulus dollars, this budget still raises taxes \$7.4 million, pushes other fee increases to separate lines of your property tax bill, and increases the estimated

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deficit to \$109 million in the next two years.

To some, it may be enough in difficult economic times that this budget has no service cuts and keeps the tax rate stable. This makes for a “painless” budget that maintains the status quo.

We believe it is not good enough to settle for the status quo — especially when it is unsustainable.

It is time to address the structural budget deficit head on before it drags our county's fiscal health — and economic future — down any further. It is time to stop blaming others. It is time to find real solutions to reduce government spending and provide property tax relief.

That is why we offered an amendment to cut property taxes. During the budget review period, it was discovered that historically low interest rates would save more than \$1.5 million on original

estimates for short-term debt payments. We proposed this extra spending be removed and the savings returned to taxpayers, while still leaving a cushion to handle likely payment delays from the state. In a year when we received \$33 million of stimulus funds, returning \$1.5 million of completely unnecessary spending to taxpayers was an obvious decision. Regrettably, our Republican colleagues refused.

It is bad enough that this budget makes no attempt whatsoever to address our serious long-term problems. But it adds to the dire financial picture with inadequate spending predictions. It grossly underestimates expected increases in pension costs, employee salaries, and even Medicaid costs if economic activity picks up next summer, as anticipated. By failing to properly forecast these big-ticket items, we will be several more millions of dollars in the red by next year, when the federal stimulus funding will be long gone.

If we allow this to happen then our budget deficit will explode and we will face drastic tax increases, draconian spending cuts, and insolvency — or all of the above in the form of a state-run fiscal

control board. We cannot let this happen.

In these difficult economic times, we must stop taking the path of least resistance. We must begin making the tough choices and listening to overburdened taxpayers. We must reduce spending during the course of this fiscal year in order to align this budget with reality. We will not get out of this dilemma overnight, but we must change course and immediately start taking steps that will restore the financial future of our community.

On another note ... We would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank outgoing Supervisor Mary Ellen Heyman and Town Board members Gail Bello and Debbie Evans for their four years of dedicated service to our town.

And we would like to congratulate and welcome incoming Supervisor Mary Joyce D'Aurizio and Town Board members Debbie Essley and Paul Marasco. We look forward to working with you in any way needed to help our fellow town residents. **Vincent Esposito and Ted O'Brien, both Democrats of Irondequoit, represent the 16th and 17th districts, respectively, in the Monroe County Legislature.**