

COMMISSIONER JUDAH DIPS, FLIPS THEN TRIPS

NEXT WILL HE SAY “READ MY LIPS?”

I read Betty Parker’s recent column with amusement as she reported on Ray Judah’s comments at the BUPAC meeting. I’m amazed that through his financial wizardries the commissioner has been able to maintain services without burdening residents with more taxes or fees. And “his” frugal fiscal policies have stimulated economic development. That’s a lot to swallow. Does he really believe his “tax and spend” policies have saved money for county taxpayers?

I decided to check the record. First, I found that:

COMMISSIONER JUDAH DIPPED to an all time low when he described the main cost cutting measure. In his “Guest Opinion” in the *News-Press* on August 22, he gloated over cutting 400 positions (deleted or held vacant). Prudent management? Other than he and Don Stilwell no one thought those positions were needed in the first place. Besides, what about the 800 positions the two of them added?

Did anyone notice a cut in services? Other than the street light debacle, I haven’t heard anyone complaining about budget cuts. So, I checked further, then:

COMMISSIONER JUDAH DOUBLE DIPPED when he proclaimed that “his” economic development success had resulted in the foresight of being able to build the Red Sox Stadium. Didn’t he hear the uproar over the use of the bed tax funds for the construction of the stadium? Now beach renourishment is in jeopardy for the next twenty-five years.

Did he ever think that excessive commercial tax rates had deterred businesses from even considering Lee County? What about the bloated impact fees that stalled new construction projects? And, how about the elongated permitting processes that forced businesses elsewhere? Sad, then I studied the numbers:

COMMISSIONER JUDAH FLIPPED, again, when he claimed that through his prudent leadership in the good times, we’re better positioned for the future. Not even Ben Bernanke had that foresight. At least, Commissioner Bigelow (*News-Press*, October 12) challenged him on that one. Bigelow indicated that during the boom years, money was earmarked for projects and services. You can’t claim now you were saving for a rainy day. “That wasn’t known and wasn’t the argument they were making then. You can’t change your argument now.” Mr. Judah’s logic sounds like John Kerry. “I voted for the budget before I voted against the budget.”

COMMISSIONER JUDAH TRIPPED. In his “Guest Opinion” of September 15, 2007 he justified unrestricted cash reserves being at 17 percent (\$57 million) when responding to the Lee County Republican Party Golden Goose Committee’s claim that they should be in the \$15 million range (5%). On October 2, 2007, he justified the \$57 million by

emphasizing that “independent auditors felt comfortable with a 15 to 25 percent operating reserve.” I guess I’d be comfortable, too, if I had 25% of next year’s expenditures in a bloated savings account.

Then, recently, in his August 22, 2009 “Guest Opinion,” he reported the county had \$170 million in undesignated general fund reserves. Mr. Judah that’s over 40 percent of the current budget. Now commissioner what is the right number? 5 percent? 15 percent? 17 percent? 25 percent? Or, 40 percent? And, what about the state cap of 20 percent on undesignated reserve contingencies?

Unfortunately, through all of this he’s continued to miss the point. The reason Lee County has the highest level of reserves in the state is that bloated surpluses were created by a decade of excessive taxes and exorbitant impact fees. With his logic, am I suppose to feel better?

Next, he’ll probably say “no increased taxes: READ MY LIPS!”

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