

Remember 1991

By Sen. Mike 'Citizen Mike' Folmer

Governor Ed Rendell has proposed a budget that would increase state spending by more than triple the rate of inflation, which would require a painful array of new and higher taxes, and still more borrowing for future generations to pay off. This unfortunately sets the stage for a potentially long and dragged out fight with the General Assembly.

This possible budget showdown reminds me of the battle 16 years ago with another liberal Democratic Governor, which resulted in the largest tax increase in Pennsylvania's history.

In 1991, Robert P. Casey was at the helm. Like Rendell, Governor Casey easily rode into a second term with an overwhelming re-election victory. Then, like now, the estimated budget deficit was about \$1.5 billion.

For months, Casey and the General Assembly fought with one another. In late summer, the standoff was resolved – with a whopping \$3.2 billion tax increase from which Pennsylvania has yet to fully recover.

Just how did a \$1.5 billion deficit become a \$3.2 billion tax increase – a difference of \$1.7 billion dollars? The answer is that the governor “bought votes.”

It wasn't pretty. “Yes” votes on the budget were exchanged for “pork barrel” projects in various legislators' districts. Each deal that was cut between the governor and a legislator ultimately increased the overall amount of state spending and the resulting size of the tax hike necessary to pay for it.

Fast-forward to 2007 and remember the admonition of George Santayana: “Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.”

My platform in running for office was “The Promise to Pennsylvania,” in which I stated that we need to reduce the size, scope, cost, and inefficiency of state government.

That's why Senator Bob Regola and I recently drafted the Taxpayer Protection Act, which would limit any annual increase in state spending to the combined rates of inflation and population growth. If my Taxpayer Protection Act was already in force today, state spending could increase by no more than 3.2 percent this year, which is in stark contrast to Gov. Rendell's proposal to skyrocket spending by 9.8 percent, and impose seven new tax increases.

I believe that government – like people – must live within its means. In fact, studies indicate that fiscal responsibility is a key factor in a state's ability to create jobs and sustain its economic health.

Therefore, we cannot repeat 1991!

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