



November 2009 “A Month in Review”

- **Christmas/Holiday Greeting** – As we finish what has been a very difficult year we should take time to be thankful for what we do have. I hope that you and your loved ones have a Merry Christmas and the happiest of holidays. I wish you all the best in the New Year.
- **Increasing Taxes is the Easy Way Out** – We successfully defeated a proposal for a March 16, 2010 referendum on a meals tax as a solution to our budget shortfall rather than the more difficult road of reducing spending and making government more efficient. In reality, we have a spending problem in this county not a revenue problem.
- **Putting Our County Checkbook Online** – Since joining the Board in 2008, I have been pushing the county to put its checkbook online, as has been done across the country by governments big and small. Unfortunately, despite all of the fanfare about the county’s new transparency website, I have faced one hurdle after another from county staff and the Board. At the last Board Meeting I was forced to ask if tiny Goochland County, VA can put their checkbook online why can’t Fairfax County?
- **Fighting “Reverse Privatization” and Pushing for Competitive Procurement for County Trash Routes** – Putting trash and recycling services through a competitive bidding process is one area where the county can save money without impacting services to our citizens.

- **The School Budget - Changing the Equation** - It is the aim of every public official in Fairfax County to ensure that Fairfax County schools remain the best in the nation. However, the old equation repeated year after year is to exact pressure on the Board of Supervisors to give more money to schools by putting unpopular cuts and damaging reductions to children on the table. It's time for a new equation, one that relies on fiscal transparency, accountability, and efficiency.
- **Upcoming Events**
 - **Save the Date: Transportation Town Hall**

Christmas/Holiday Greeting

As we finish what was a very difficult year for our citizens, businesses and our county and also as we look towards another very difficult year, the holidays are a good time to take stock in what we do have. We are blessed to live in a county that has been largely sheltered from the economic crisis. We are also blessed to live in a great county with dedicated employees who are working hard to provide services to those who have been hit hardest by this economic crisis. Times are tough, no doubt, but I believe each and every one of us has something in our lives we can be thankful for. I hope during this holiday season you have a chance to take a moment and reflect on all the good things in your life.

I also hope during this holiday season we remember those among us who are most in need. For those who have the ability to do so, I hope that you take some time to give back to your community in any way that you can.

I want to thank Herrity Report readers for their attention and feedback throughout the year. I truly believe that getting feedback from you on the issues in the Report and other issues of importance to you helps me be a better public servant.

I hope that you and your loved ones have a Merry Christmas and the happiest of holidays. I wish you all the best in the New Year.

Increasing Taxes is the Easy Way Out

There has been a lot of talk about the return of the automobile decal fee or a new meals tax in Fairfax County as an answer to the county's budget shortfall. These proposals are being pushed as "revenue diversification" initiatives. "Revenue diversification" may sound good but the reality is someone has to pay these taxes. I see them as nothing more than different ways to increase the tax burden on our citizens in these tough economic times.

Simply put, Fairfax County has a spending problem not a revenue problem. This spending problem can be seen in the massive growth of the county budget over the past ten years which was fueled by a doubling of the real estate tax bills over the same time

period. We began to fix our spending problem last year when we cut the county budget for the first time in recent memory. The roughly \$100 million in reductions made last year have had no significant impact on county services and have resulted in no major increase in complaints about county services.

Even as we talk of cutting the county budget to deal with our shortfall, some on the Board are simultaneously proposing increasing the size and role of our county government. Last year we added a county version of a “czar” with the creation of the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness. While I certainly feel that the county has a role in helping those most in need, this office, which was created with a budget of \$500,000 for a Director, staff, and administrative costs, is nothing more than a new layer of bureaucracy. It provides no direct services (shelter, food, job training, for example) to our homeless population. Also last year, the Board passed 127 pages of regulations on trees without looking at the efficiency or fiscal impact of implementing and enforcing these regulations.

This year the Board is moving forward with a plan to add public art proffers to the County’s Comprehensive Plan. This plan is moving forward despite the fact there has been no effort to determine the cost impact to the county or our citizens of processing, reviewing and approving the additional requirements. Developers would now be pushed to provide proffers for public art which will directly compete with the other proffers that developers already contribute – including those for transportation, education, affordable housing, and environmental projects – all of which are county priorities. While I support public art (and there are some great examples in the Springfield District), I do not believe county staff should have a role in pushing public art over transportation or education projects.

These are just a few examples of the county attempting to do good things for its citizens while failing to look at the cost of implementing them. In doing so the Board has blindly increased the size and cost of the county bureaucracy. It is long over due for the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to focus on the priorities of our citizens as well as ways to make our county government more efficient and effective in addressing those priorities.

Clearly this is not the time for the county to be increasing the tax burden on our citizens. Revenue diversification and increasing the tax burden on our citizens is the easy way out. But as we have seen over the past decade taking the easy way out has drastically increased the size of our county government while doubling the tax burden on our citizens. It is long over due for this Board to take the more difficult route of focusing county spending on our priorities while working to increase the efficiency of our existing government programs.

At the December 7th Board Meeting there was a motion to force a meals tax referendum on March 16, 2010. I was a vocal opponent of the proposal and voted against it on a number of grounds. In addition to those objections I detailed above, a county wide referendum would cost the county approximately \$300,000 with little chance of success based on the results of a recent meals tax referendum in Loudoun and also the results of

previous meals tax referendums here in Fairfax. The motion for the meals tax referendum was defeated 7-3, but is likely to return.

Putting Our County Checkbook Online

One of my first actions as a member of the Board of Supervisors was to introduce a motion calling for the creation of an online budget and expenditure database so that all of Fairfax County's citizens would have a simple and easy way to examine how and where their tax dollars are being spent. This has been accomplished in a bipartisan fashion at all levels of government from the federal government to small school boards across the country. Initially I was told that the county did not have the technical ability to post this information online. After speaking directly with Department of Information Technology staff I discovered that we do indeed have the ability to post our check book online inexpensively.

Shortly after discovering putting our check book online was possible technically, the Board was informed by the County Attorney's office that posting the county's expenditure information on the internet would violate certain state privacy laws. Before we could move forward on an online expenditure database this legislation would have to be changed.

I proposed that the Board add support for this concept to the Board of Supervisors state legislative agenda. I was disappointed that the Board chose not to support such a legislative change in last year's General Assembly legislative package. I am very pleased to inform you that we have included it in this year's package.

The county has been promoting its new "fiscal transparency" web page with great fanfare. While it does represent a one stop shop for some of the county's fiscal data it is basically the same set of confusing documents provided primarily in PDF format and includes only summary data.

Based upon the history of this issue and the information we were given last year you can imagine my surprise when I discovered that Goochland County, located between Richmond and Charlottesville, recently put their county and school check registers online in an interactive excel format. These check registers give Goochland County residents a detailed listing of the county's monthly expenditures in Microsoft Excel format so that the data can be easily sorted and manipulated. Some confidential information, such as foster care payments, is excluded. This is exactly the type of website I have been asking the county to create but have been repeatedly told – we cannot.

The website created by Goochland County is a great step forward in fiscal transparency for Virginia counties but I have to think that any Fairfax County resident who looks at the Goochland County website would ask themselves a simple question: If tiny Goochland County can do it, why can't Fairfax?

At the December 7th Board Meeting I made a motion directing the County Executive to investigate what Goochland County has created and report back to the Board on the feasibility of creating a similar website for Fairfax County. My motion was passed unanimously and I hope that this recent development will allow us to finally put our checkbook online.

Fighting “Reverse Privatization” and Pushing for Competitive Procurement for County Trash Routes

Two months ago the Smart Savings Task Force, a group made up of three members of the Board of Supervisors and three School Board members, recommended that the school system could save money by terminating their private sector contract for trash collection at the schools and turning the work over to the county’s Department of Public Works (DPW). Essentially the task force recommended that “reverse privatization” could save us money. The task force made this recommendation because DPW had told them they could perform the service at a significantly lower cost than the private sector. While I am all for exploring creative ideas to save us tax payer dollars, I knew from the start that this call for “reverse privatization” would end up being a raw deal for the county.

Despite criticism from some Board Members who questioned why we need to do a “silly analysis” every time we identify potential savings, I knew this was a bad deal because the fiscal analysis that showed the “savings” was extremely flawed. For example, the dollar amounts used by DPW to show that they could do the service cheaper were the “not to exceed this price” dollar amounts included in the contract with the private company. The actual amounts that the private company had been charging the school system were significantly lower. This is just one of a few examples of how flawed the analysis was. I was able to put my business and financial experience to work and conduct my own fiscal analysis and use it to convince the stakeholders that this was a bad deal that would eventually end up costing the county money. Instead of just turning the service over to DPW and hoping that their numbers are correct, the school system will now be using a competitive bidding process, open to private companies and DPW, to determine who can provide them with the biggest savings.

The history of competitive bidding for trash services at the schools has demonstrated that the private sector provides this service for a much lower cost than the government. Prior to 1994 the DPW performed trash services for the schools. In 1993 the schools decided to undergo a competitive bidding process for their trash services which resulted in significant cost savings. The winning bid, from a private sector company, was 35% less than what DPW had charged the schools the previous year. The contract was re-competed in 1999 and again a private sector company provided the lowest bid and was awarded the contract.

There are sound reasons why the private sector can perform trash and recycling services more efficiently than the public sector. The main cost drivers in this industry are truck maintenance and labor costs. The private sector has more trucks on the road every day compared to the county. Therefore the private sector trucks drive far fewer miles

between pickups than county trucks which results in less wear and tear and much lower labor and maintenance costs.

We are in extremely difficult budget times and will be for the foreseeable future. We must look at every possible option to responsibly cut costs. Currently DPW does the trash pickup at county buildings. Putting trash and recycling services through a competitive bidding process is one area where the county can follow the school system's lead.

For FY 2010, \$1,593,429 is budgeted to pay for trash collection at county buildings. As history has shown over and over again the private sector can perform trash services at a lower cost. If we were able to match the experience at the schools, a 35% cost reduction would save us over \$500,000 a year.

I strongly believe that the private sector can perform this service better and at a lower price than the government. At the December 7, 2009 Board Meeting I made a motion that directs the County Executive to explore the feasibility of issuing a Request for Proposal for trash pickup at county buildings. This motion was unanimously supported by the rest of the Board. I will keep you updated as we move through this process which will hopefully save us some money.

The School Budget - Changing the Equation

Our world-class schools are the number one reason businesses and families are attracted to Fairfax County. That quality carries a price. The school system accounts for more than half (54 percent) of all county funding. The county is facing a funding shortfall of \$450 million this year. Still, even in this difficult economic climate we need to ensure the quality of our schools. However, this does not excuse the school budget from the healthy scrutiny these tough times dictate. It is past time to change the equation on how we discuss the school budget.

The old equation repeated year after year is to exact pressure on the Board of Supervisors to give more money to schools by putting unpopular cuts and damaging reductions to children on the table. Every budget cycle, we go through the same formula: the School Board and staff warn that if they don't get the money they requested, teacher salaries will be cut, the most popular programs will be cut, class sizes will be increased, and a sport will be eliminated.

It's time for a new equation, one that relies on fiscal transparency, accountability, and efficiency. We must direct resources to our students and their classrooms. We must be vigilant and evaluate administrative overhead and school operations to maximize money for teachers and classrooms. Clearly, there is need for an open dialogue on how to fund our priorities without asking for more from taxpayers.

Despite significant growth in both the county population and the demand for county services (police, human services, etc.) caused by these tough economic times, we have begun to "change the equation" on the county budget. The prior Board doubled taxes

homeowners actually paid and dramatically increased the size of the budget in the ten years before I joined the Board. Since then we have been able to hold the line on taxes and have actually reduced spending. This is a good start but there is more that needs to be done to reduce the burden on our taxpayers.

Our County Executive has worked hard to put spending reduction options on the table that limit the impact on the services that are critical to our residents. He has done a good job of protecting those areas that are the core functions of local government while also trying to foster a discussion about which programs are our “must haves” and which are our “nice to haves”. It is time for our school system to take the same approach. The Superintendent is using the same old equation with his “strawman” budget proposal that cuts the most popular programs but protects administration. The Superintendent needs to go back to the drawing board and focus on areas where the school system can be more efficient.

Increased class sizes and having our teachers fall further behind other area schools in salaries is not acceptable. We need to begin an open and honest discussion about the school budget. We missed a key opportunity to do this last year and I hope we don’t make that same mistake again this year.

It is the aim of every public official in Fairfax County to ensure that Fairfax County schools remain the best in the nation. Unfortunately, we too often overlook common sense solutions to our problems. I hope we use the current economic and budget challenges to start a discussion on changing the equation of the school budget and usher in an era of fiscal transparency, accountability, and efficiency. It is high time to renew our focus on teachers and improving class sizes. Please ask your School Board member to change the equation. Ask for the money that is needed to ensure the continued success of our schools. But also put the tough questions to the School Board and administrators to make sure your tax dollars are being used wisely—for our students, our teachers, and our classrooms.

Upcoming Events

Save the Date: Transportation Town Hall

Congressman Frank Wolf, Supervisor Michael Frey and I will be hosting a Transportation Town Hall on Saturday, February 6 at Chantilly High School from 10 a.m. -12 p.m. The public is invited to attend this discussion which will focus on solutions for the I-66 Corridor and the region. More details will follow in the next Herrity Report.

The *Herrity Report* is a monthly publication from the Office of Supervisor Pat Herrity to keep citizens informed on the issues facing Fairfax County. Communication is important to Supervisor Herrity and he encourages your feedback on the items in the *Report* or other issues that concern you. Past issues of the *Herrity Report* can be found at <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield/herrity-report-newsletter.htm>. To sign up for the Herrity Report please go to <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/springfield>. If you no longer wish to receive the *Herrity Report*, please send an e-mail to springfield@fairfaxcounty.gov with “Unsubscribe” in the subject line.