



THE RIDGEFIELD REVIEW



Volume I, Issue I

LIMITED GOVERNMENT, FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY, PERSONAL SUCCESS

April 8, 2009

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RIDGEFIELD, TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR GOVERNMENT

Citizen Journalists, Find Your Voice

The Ridgefield Republican Town Committee (RRTC) is pleased to announce the creation of *The Ridgefield Review*, a new periodical espousing the principles of Limited Government, Fiscal Accountability and Personal Success.

The *Review* will cover local, state and national issues with these core principles in evidence. The objective is to make government at all levels more responsive and to reflect these core values.

The editorial philosophy is based on accessibility, constructive dialogue, and solution-driven thinking. The editor will

work assiduously with "citizen journalists" to ensure their voices are heard. Contributors can tell Ridgefield what inspires them, what concerns them, and readers can be inspired to action. We invite all citizens to take ownership of this new publication.

In this issue, two Ridgefield moms —neither of them professional journalists — write eloquently about important issues: Cynthia Flood, mother of Corporal Chris Flood (who is serving in Iraq), prepares for his homecoming. Sue Feeser, a parishioner at St. Mary, takes on lawmakers in Hartford considering a bill to redistribute power in the Catholic Church.

On national issues, Skip March organized a 'Tea Party' protest of

the Obama administration's spending policies while John Frey discusses the structural deficit in the CT state budget. Keith Miller provides an analysis of the local budget.

The *Ridgefield Review* can be accessed on the web site:

<http://www.ridgefieldgop.org>.

Submissions: Sent to Chris Murray, editor@ridgefieldgop.org

"MY READING OF HISTORY CONVINCES ME MOST BAD GOVERNMENT RESULTS FROM TOO MUCH GOVERNMENT."

Thomas Jefferson

JOHN FREY ON THE STRUCTURAL DEFICIT IN THE CT STATE BUDGET

In 1991, when Connecticut first adopted an income tax, our State's annual spending was at \$4 billion. Now it is at \$18 billion. The income tax has become the largest source of revenue, 46.8% of which comes from Fairfield County.

Having rejected the Governor's efforts to address the fiscal crisis

entitlements together amount to half of State expenses. So any reductions are limited to the rest of the budget. Included there are programs that meet real needs and upon which many people depend. There are also strong political constituencies. Tough choices and political courage are necessary. Spending is where our trouble began. Spending is where solutions have to be found.



There is little enthusiasm for raising taxes, even among those legislators who usually rely on this approach. Income tax revenues are currently reported to be down 20%, corporate tax revenue is down 30% while sales tax returns have slumped 16%.

To increase the sales tax would delay recovery and increase a regressive tax on people who already can't afford it. The income tax comes mostly from the upper income levels. But there are fewer people at those levels, so the in-

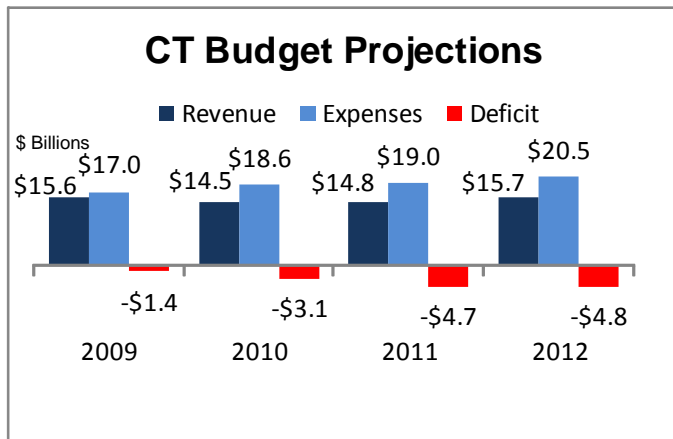
come tax would have to raise more money from a broader base. To find a broader solution in the income tax would require a major boost in the tax rate and its extension to more modest income levels.

Federal stimulus funds will help, but this does not address the structural gap between projected revenues and spending, which only reduced spending and political courage will solve.

"INCOME TAX REVENUES ARE DOWN 20%, YET SPENDING CONTINUES TO GO UP."

in three special sessions over the past six months, the democrat-controlled State Legislature can't duck it any longer. Since it is required to produce a balanced budget, there are really only three options: 1. Reduce spending, 2. Raise taxes, 3. Call Uncle Sam.

To reduce spending is a real challenge. Personnel costs, debt service and



BE INFORMED

See/Hear for Yourself

GOP Alternative Budget:
www.cbsnews.com/ntdocs/pdf/RealStimulus.pdf

Barney Frank: "Fannie Mae is fundamentally sound." :
www.mypetjawa.mu.nu/archives/194210.php

Nancy Pelosi: "Enforcing immigration law is un-American."
<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/03/18/pelosi-tells-illegal-immigrants-work-site>

BOF SEEKS A NEAR ZERO MILL RATE INCREASE

The Board of Finance has asked the town and schools to deliver a budget with a near zero – 0.47% – mill rate increase.

Last winter, revenues fell \$1M, so the town initiated budget cuts resulting in eight layoffs and savings of \$400,000. The schools found \$800,000 through increased turnover savings, one less contingent teacher hiring and anticipated additional state grants. Collectively, these savings offset the \$1M revenue loss and left a \$200,000 anticipated surplus, which is recycled through Fund Balance as a mill rate reduction.

At the end of 2008, the Fund Balance was \$9,104,484. The town, working with its bond ratings agencies, maintains this balance at 5-7% of expenses. This is the "rainy day" fund and also the checking account float, equaling about three weeks' expenses. About \$1.25M of this was used to reduce the 2008-09 mill rate. With \$1.25 million going out and \$200,000 in new surplus, the Fund Balance will decline \$1M to \$8M as of 6/30/2009.

The BOF allocated \$1M of Fund Balance to the 2009-10 budget, which will reduce Fund Balance to 5.84% of expenses. Lowering from the prior year was justified by the anticipated one-time state reimbursement on the school bundle.



PENSION FUND LOSS AT \$17 MILLION

Future budgets will have to allocate \$1.6 million additional expense.

TOWN BUDGET

Although the BOF did not cut town expenses *per se*, it did push \$87,450 of Capital Projects back onto operations. Town departments can make cuts or forego police cars, mowers, computers or road equipment. Also, \$107,000 of Other Post Employment-Benefits (OPEB) for school employees were transferred to the schools. The town will use an increase in Capital Projects financing from \$42,000 to \$100,000 to buy police cars. Savings came from the aforementioned layoffs, town employee wage freezes or equivalent benefits reductions or additional layoffs. The net result is Town Operating Expenses fall 1.1% from \$30,352,366 to \$30,041,066.

SCHOOL BUDGET

The BOF gave the schools a 1% increase over the prior year's budget, including absorbing \$107,000 for OPEB. In putting together their original budget, the BOE had offset about one-half of the \$3M increase in salaries and benefits, resulting in a requested 2% increase. The BOF re-

duced the original BOE requested budget by \$1,089,444. The schools have already identified \$221,000 in savings from diesel fuel, additional turnover, restructured administrative tasks and overtime reductions. They need to find an additional \$868,444.

**One solution:
restructure the elementary schools, save money and provide a better education.**

35% BUDGET INCREASE, YET SAME ENROLLMENT

Since 2003-04, when enrollment was essentially the same, school costs have risen 35% or twenty million dollars. Three quarters of this increase is salaries and benefits, including an additional 46 staff. About nine are elementary school teachers which were added at the peak but have proven hard to reduce as class sizes fall slowly in six elementary schools. The schools have some hard work to do. Undoubtedly they will consider a range of options, including asking union workers for salary and benefit changes, cutting programs across the system, and/or restructuring elementary schools.

LOOKING AHEAD

The use of non-recurring revenue to depress the mill rate increases the need for structural changes. If salaries, benefits and purchases grow at 4%, the pension loss is funded, and the grand list grows 0.5%, then the choice ranges from \$7 M in cost cuts (6% of expenses) to 6% tax increases. By comparison, windfalls like falling energy prices and structural cost reductions were only about 1 ½% this past year.

SURVEY SHOWS DECLINING SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT

A recent poll of mostly registered Republicans in Ridgefield revealed strong disagreement with Obama Administration economic policies. The poll was taken the day after President Obama's March 24th press conference defending his economic program. By a wide margin, respondents strongly disagreed that President Obama demonstrated leadership during the press conference and that the economy is "moving in the right direction".

When asked whether they agreed with the Administration's need for expanded authority to take over financially troubled companies, 81% strongly disagreed. Sixty percent

strongly disagreed that greatly expanded investment in healthcare, education and energy will reduce the cost burden on future national budgets.

The poll reflects national trends. The percentage of those who strongly approve of the Obama Administration policies has been decreasing, while those who strongly disapprove have been increasing. The poll also reflects some divergence in opinion on President Obama personally versus his policies, yet over 50% strongly disagree that he has demonstrated any leadership at all.

JUST IN: Quinnipiac Poll shows Senator Chris Dodd with a record low approval rating. Only 33%.

Dodd is behind all potential Republican challengers:

Rep. Rob Simmons 50%, Dodd 34%
Sen. Sam Caligiuri 41%, Dodd 37%
Amb. Tom Foley 42%, Dodd 35%
(Poll released April 2, 2009)

A RIDGEFIELD SON RETURNS FROM IRAQ

There is promise in the air; soon we will welcome home our son, Marine Corporal Christopher Flood. The count-down has begun but I remain cautious. It has been a long winter, and he remains in harm's way across the world in a barren desert in Iraq. He is never far from my thoughts as I arise each new day, wondering if he made it through the night okay, hoping that I do not see the Marine Corps officer in my driveway.

I worry so, though I am told not to. I try not to let my mind wander into "the black hole", but I am anxious. It is that feeling that starts in the throat, generates through the arms, and finally pools in the heart. It is sometimes a gripping fear, and sometimes a wistfulness that leaves one feeling empty and alone. Most often, it is a yearning, a desperate plea to God, "Please bring him home."

Christopher's absence has taught us patience, tenacity, and the power of hope and prayer. It has brought us together in more ways than we could ever articulate. It has taught us the "don't sweat the small stuff" lesson, as we face each day with a son at war and so many unknowns in our lives.

It has taught me to understand God's blessings, taking nothing for granted, but always appreciative of gestures of support.

It can be a friend's hug, a look that suggests, "yes, I know", a few kind words written in a card or an email, a care package item for Chris left on my front porch, a friend with a joke, a loving message, or a memory of days past. It can be lunch with a girlfriend, or a stranger that notices our blue star pins and asks about them.

It is friends gathered in my living room at Christmas, singing the Twelve Days of Christmas; it is the laughter and fellowship, and the friendly banter that those close to your heart can share. It is the patriot who appreciates our military, and lets everyone know. It is the one who hates this war, but quietly supports our soldiers. It is my children, who feel my pain, but make me laugh anyway.

It is my husband, the one who salutes the flag every day; he is my best friend, holding me up as we struggle to maintain normalcy. It is the people who sent the care packages, letters and cards, the little children and their clever artwork who took the time to write Chris and his



Corporal Christopher Flood in his humvee on patrol in Iraq

unit thanking them for serving their country. It is the unsung heroes in our midst who set aside their needs to help their community.

It is the woman named Doris who for over forty years has dutifully sent cards and letters once a month to all active duty servicemen and women in this community. It is the women in the post office behind the counter who affirm their support by smiling and asking about my son, as I send yet another care package overseas.

Almost nine months ago, I did not know what would lie ahead, and could not fathom the fear I would feel as I gave him that rosary, said good-bye, and sent him off to a strange land to fight a war that was not embraced by the majority of Americans.

"Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they've made a difference to this world...the Marines don't have that problem."
Ronald Reagan

So often, I have pondered my brave son's chosen path, agonizing over his decision, yet so proud that he stepped forward to serve. After all these months, I now understand. My son is a true patriot. He believes in liberty and justice. He wants Iraq to succeed, and he is proud of our military. He is a go-to type, the kind of leader the Marine Corps needs -- quietly passionate, strong, determined, and stubborn.

As his deployment winds down, I am beginning to relax. It is time to begin planning a homecoming celebration. What will he look like? Will he be battle-weary? Will he be thin? Will he still flash that smile and project that laid-back demeanor? How did this change his life, and what lies ahead, now that he is a veteran of a foreign war?

I will watch him, and I will drive him crazy with my enquiring mind, but I know that he will feel our love, and he will know that he is our hero.

Soon, he will walk through our kitchen door, say how good it smells in here, and ask, "When is it time for chow, mom?" I cannot wait for that day.

- Cynthia Flood

The Ridgefield Review

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Alternates:
 Skip March, Chris Murray, Keith Velia

STATE CENTRAL COMMITTEE NEWS:
The RRTC would like to thank Gian-Carlo Peressutti for his energetic and competent representation on the Connecticut Republican State Central Committee. Serving four years, he will be replaced by Alex Karsanidi.