

## Fellow state lawmakers didn't have the stomach to make tough budget decisions

David Koon &bull; Guest essayist &bull; April 11, 2009 - Last year, as the worldwide economic downturn became more and more imminent, I stated that rather than a crisis, we faced an opportunity. I suggested that, after years of unsustainable spending, an overreliance on Wall Street at the expense of the rest of the state's economy, rising costs paralleled by rising taxes, expedient solutions and one-time budget fixes, jobs and families and children leaving our state for greener pastures, we reprioritize government and build a new foundation of fiscal responsibility.

This would not be easy. But not unlike a family &mdash; the families that I am elected to represent &mdash; making adjustments during difficult economic times, we would find the resolve to survive, thrive, and do more, better, with less. Done responsibly, in a spirit of shared sacrifice and with an eye toward a brighter future, the opportunity was there.

Yet budget negotiations proved that two Albany truisms ruled the day &mdash; no one wants to be cut and no one wants to do the cutting.

Under enormous pressure from too many vested interests, we lost the resolve to make difficult choices, we lost track of our responsibility to the and we bowed to the pressures of those who stood to gain from business as usual.

In the end, we lost our way, and with it our opportunity.

While the budget does restore \$1.1 billion to school districts at a time when cuts to education would have been devastating, not only to schools but to communities as well, and while certain components &mdash; like returning \$49.9 million to the EPIC program for seniors &mdash; the benefits of this budget cannot justify the end product.

The size of our deficit was enormous, and while cuts were made &mdash; to the tune of approximately \$6 billion &mdash; this must be measured against the \$17 billion deficit that we faced.

There are simply not enough spending cuts to put us back on track. Yes, the deficit seems to be mended. But that's because we used the one-time federal stimulus money to fill gaps, plug holes and prevent cuts.

Let's remember that the state has been collecting, on average, \$60 billion annually in revenue. This year, due to the tremendous losses suffered on Wall Street, that revenue will be 25 percent less. How do we make up that enormous loss? If the answer is the stimulus money, what then next year?

This is why it was imperative that we make the difficult decisions now. This is why, when we didn't, I voted "no."

I cast my vote on behalf of every constituent who voiced their disbelief that this budget was the best we could do. They knew we could do better. I know we can do better. We must do better.

Koon represents the 135th District in the state Assembly.

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