

Minnick: Next governor, Legislature face major budget crisis

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When did it become acceptable to just "get by?" When are we going to develop a vision of our priorities, then develop a budget around those?

These are some of the questions left unanswered when Michigan lawmakers wrapped up the 2011 budget. Undoubtedly, there was some good budget news - it included no further cuts to funding for communities and no further cuts to fire protection grants. The Legislature successfully cobbled together transportation funding to avoid leaving half a billion of federal match money in Washington, D.C. In a year when Michigan faced a starting deficit of nearly \$2 billion, these ought to seem like victories. Yet, they aren't.

It is not good enough to simply go year to year patching budgets together in order to "get by." If we are to succeed, we must have a vision of what our priorities are, and those priorities need to be reflected in the state budget and in policy. We have a structural deficit that is going to continue to challenge the next governor and Legislature. We can't create the type of communities and infrastructure we need in this state to attract and maintain residents and businesses by working feverishly each year to "hold the line"

It is critical the next administration and Legislature define what will turn around the state's economic condition. Both gubernatorial candidates have stated that strong central cities are a key component of that goal. If that's true then they need to address some fundamental issues when they present their first budget in the beginning of 2011.

Local communities have lost more than \$4 billion in the last 10 years in revenue sharing; a significant source of funding for Michigan communities. This is money that has come into the state through sales tax collections, but instead of going to support your local roads and police and fire protection has instead been siphoned away to fill other budget holes.

The gap in transportation funding required to get our federal match will grow by hundreds of millions

each year ... making "cobbling funding together" increasingly more difficult. And, with the drastic reductions in property values (both real and personal), our communities are struggling to "hold the line" themselves. Due to the property tax caps in place, those property values will be down at lower levels for decades in some instances. The best leaders in the world can't revitalize our communities in those circumstances.

If we really want to compete in the 21st century we need to realize that we are never going to get there by maintaining the status quo. We must have a vision of how we want to strengthen our communities, which should include infrastructure, cultural economic development and design and walkability to name a few. Many regions across the country have made the public investments which are necessary for long term growth and are reaping the rewards. There is no reason we can't either.

We need the willingness to implement that vision. It starts with the 2012 state budget.

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