

Last Tuesday the Weber County Commission voted to approve a 21% property tax increase. Most of us know that Commissioners Ebert and Bell voted in favor of the increase, while Commissioner Gibson was the lone dissenting vote; in addition, he also helped strip another \$0.5mil off of the budget the vote. While I absolutely think that Commissioner Gibson should be commended for ultimately voting the right way, I don't think we should overlook the support he gave the tax increase in the months and weeks leading up to this vote. As with the Library Bond that the county was strapped with under his watch 3 years ago, this tax increase could have been killed long before last night's vote, and I think any elected official who ever supported the increase needs to be held accountable for that support.

There has a lot been construed over comments made during the commissioner hearing to pass the tax increase, but let me reiterate what I spent the majority of my two minutes that night telling the commissioners: the county has been mismanaged for quite some time. In the last 3 months, myself and several others have spent countless volunteer hours meeting with commissioners, the clerk/auditor, the comptroller, and combing through budgets, county financial reports, and over 160,000 lines of expenditures for the past two years. A few things stand out in this data: 1) There is a substantial amount of spending on items that I believe the average Weber County resident would not consider to be essential government services, 2) the amount of money spent on the increased cost of benefits is absolutely ridiculous and 3) the lack of top down incentives for increased efficiency is appalling.

While it is true the county employees have gotten what some might consider "minimal" salary increases in the last 5 years (10% per employee on average from 2010 to 2015), they have received an increase of over 40% in in benefits in that same time, which amounts to over a 30% increase in total compensation in that time. So while a large majority of private sector employees were having their employers pass on the increased cost of insurance to the employee (or shopping for other less expensive insurance providers), the county taxpayers were just eating most, if not all, of those costs for the employees. Yes, the commissioners have said they are working on correcting the benefit issues, but it sure feels an awful lot like "too little, too late", especially when several commissioners and other elected officials have been in office long enough to correct the problem.

Anyone who works in the private sector knows that a lack of efficiency is a management and leadership issue, not a work force problem. A prime example is both Ricky Hatch's and the Commissioners' response to my questioning why the Surveyor/Recorder budget is up 14% from 2007 with a decrease in workload of almost 30% from that same year. Their response was, and in fact Kerry Gibson's exact response was that I was using numbers that were "wrong" (even though those numbers were provided by Rick Hatch) and it was unfair to utilize 2007 as an example because it was an outlier with a lower budget than both 2006 and 2008. This is a HUGE part of the problem. We have elected county officials saying that their employees should not be held to the standard of an "efficient" year, that they need to be held to the standard of inefficient years so that they look good when they've cut the

budget 3% from one of those years! I cannot fathom that happening in the private sector: "Hey boss, I had a rough year this year compared to last, so for my annual review, can you compare me to my first year of employment when I didn't know anything, so that this last year makes me look like I improved?!". I think with responses like that from sitting commissioners and the clerk/auditor, it is VERY clear that there is a systemic issue with the way efficiency and cost savings are looked at by our elected official. It is clear to me that our commissioners and the other elected officials have created (or at the very least perpetuated) a culture that does little, if anything, to encourage the average county employee to work more efficiently or save Weber County Tax dollars.

I have recently been accused of calling county employees both "lazy" and "slackers", which is entirely untrue. What I did imply, which was later reinforced by an individual currently employed by the Weber County attorney's office when he said that the "horrendous hours (of) the private sector...didn't appeal to (him)" was that work environment at the county is different than the private sector. This is to be expected to some degree; for the most part Weber County employees have historically received less pay but greater benefits, including more standard hours, than their private sector counter parts. However, when the separation between the way government and the private sector are running leads to inexplicable tax increases, eventually we need to take an honest look on how our tax dollars are being spent.

I believe I, and others, have taken that "honest" look, and I can tell you with certainty that things need to change. Management styles need to change. The lack of top down incentives for increased efficiencies need to change; and most importantly the transparency of how our money is being spent needs to change.

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