

BALANCING THE MICHIGAN BUDGET

One surefire solution to the crisis

For some reason it seems many citizens don't want to save themselves from higher taxes or from the specter of reduced state services. Perhaps it's the same reason some people don't want to believe the emperor is naked!

The State of Michigan, which by law cannot run a deficit, faced a \$1.75 billion deficit by the deadline of October 1, 2007. Under threat of a shutdown by Governor Jennifer Granholm —by the way, I understand that welfare recipients would still receive their checks—a "compromise" resulted in raising the state income tax from 3.9% to 4.35% and extension of the 6% sales tax to a large portion of the service sector.

In late September I mailed the following letter to the editor which ran in the Oakland Press on 9/21 (I'm reprinting it below as it was originally composed):

Editor:

The headline on this morning's paper is "State Shutdown Looms." Most of us know people who do an honest day's work for an honest day's pay under auspices of the State of Michigan; we also know people in the private sector who work conscientiously to make a living. And let's face it, the public sector depends on the private sector to generate the wealth required to provide state services.

According to the accountants, the state of Michigan is falling short of paying for these state services by roughly \$1.7 billion. In a previous letter I suggested we decriminalize drugs, especially marijuana, thereby eliminating roughly \$1.2 billion in unnecessary costs immediately. Then by legalizing agricultural hemp (the natural strain of cannabis that does not get anyone high) you create a lot more revenue from thousands of new family farm operations.

Budget problem solved: not a single state worker or teacher or even policeman needs to be let go (though quite candidly, particularly at the higher administrative functions in government social services, law enforcement, and education there is a lot of dead weight that could be trimmed). So do we lay off teachers or prison guards? You make the call.

That's the contextual Libertarian solution, and for the life of me I cannot understand why the Republicans and Democrats aren't putting that on the table. I really think a few Republicans will cross over and Lansing will reach some kind of compromise tax hike or shift. Either way the state goes—tax hikes or cuts in service—my fear is the hikes or cuts won't fall on the unproductive fat cats (whether in the private sector or in the public sector) but on the average worker trying to make an honest living.

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Michigan's budget for prisons is approximately \$2 billion per year. As with other state jurisdictions in the so-called Union, roughly half the people languishing in Michigan prisons have committed no acts of aggression on others.[2] If you cut the prison population in half by freeing the nonaggressors—to be fair you must also expunge the convictions of all victimless "criminals"—you easily save more than a billion dollars.

Note: An additional benefit of the drug laws is you need roughly 50% fewer cops, prosecutors, judges, and other political drains on the productive class.

The budget numbers are favorable if all we do is simply repeal these cruelminded drug laws that actually violate the United States Constitution.[3] Let's see a show of hands.

A book I'm going to be reviewing soon has the title "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." The author of this splendid book, Robert Fulghum, spells out this thesis in one of several amusing and enlightening short narratives. Condensing his political rules:

- 1) Don't hit people
- 2) Don't steal people's stuff
- 3) Keep your promises

The drug laws fall in the category of #1—and if you're a public official on the easy take, #2 as well—because the Royal You decides it will clobber anyone who dares to be defiant: "How dare you make your own decisions?!" Hit.

My libertarian friends have it all figured out: the sacred nonaggression principle. For others, it may be time to go back to kindergarten. Playing dictator to people's pharmaceutical choices is expensive; more important, it's barbarically unconscious. As rational beings we need to raise our consciousness and take a baby step toward civil society: quit beating up individuals who like to use substances you don't. Simple as that. How would you like it if the State beat you up for being unwieldy, or blue... or a Detroit Lions' fan?!

And while we're at it, let's look into agricultural hemp as a vibrant new enterprise that promises to destroy the Cartel, save the planet, and open up vast new fields (no pun intended) to family farming.

It will also contribute to balancing the Michigan budget.

- [1] Though I'm now a Free Stater (citizen of New Hampshire), Michigan is my origin state. I have friends and relatives in the area, I visit frequently, and keep track of what happens.
- [2] Check out <http://www.drugwarfacts.org/prison.htm>. It's interesting to note, as well, that in federal prisons nearly 3/4 of the prisoners are nonviolent offenders... i.e. individuals who have committed no crime of property or person. Further, these statistics do not reveal the violent crimes committed as a consequence of the drug laws: turf wars, crimes by police (whether legal or illegal). It's reasonable to argue that without Drug Prohibition, true crime in the United States and incarceration rates would be less than 25% of what exists today.
- [3] Drug prohibition violates most of the Bill of Rights: it is an imposition of a state religion (with drug use a "sin"), therefore, it violates the 1st Amendment, it also contradicts the 4th Amendment guaranteeing the right to be "secure in our persons, papers, and effects," the 5th Amendment that guarantees liberty by due process, the 8th Amendment prohibiting cruel and unusual punishments, the 9th Amendment which states all liberties not spelled out in the Constitution remain with the people, and the 10th Amendment that states the government has no power not specifically stated therein.

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