



Make Sacrifices in Tough Times

By Mary Ann Miller

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It's a common enough scenario. The mother in Target telling her young child that they can't afford the expensive toy he/she so desperately wants. The family that only patronizes restaurants where "kids eat free." The friend who chooses the used Honda over the new Lexus. I'm sure you've not only seen it in others, you've made those decisions yourself. In good times and in bad, very few people can afford everything they want. We all make choices.

Sometimes those choices are easy: the \$25 steak or the \$8 hamburger? Sometimes, not so easy: move to a cheaper apartment or try to get a second job? And sometimes people put off those decisions by burning through their savings and borrowing on their credit cards.

And that's where we are in Arizona. And in Tempe. And in Phoenix and in just about every other city in this state.

The State is facing a \$2 billion budget shortfall for this fiscal year – the next seven months -- with the rosier projections showing another deficit next year. There is absolutely no way for the State to continue all of its current programs and serve the same number of people it does today. Raising taxes is a limited option. Even if we could raise taxes soon enough to affect this year's deficit, sales taxes would need to be nearly doubled to clear the deficit without cutting programs.

Tempe is predicting a shortfall of about \$20 million. It's fortunate to still have reserves, but you can't keep dipping into those while spending at the same rate. Eventually the reserves will dry up, resulting in more drastic cuts at a later date.

All signs point to an economic recovery, but it's going to be very slow; it's much harder to climb a mountain than to fall off one. So the debate begins.

It's time we all started looking at all the choices and prioritize. What are the programs and services that are absolutely necessary, whether or not they directly impact us? What are the things that we've come to expect that we can do without for awhile? What are the things we must have, and what are the things we'd just like to have? What are the things that will cost us in the long run if we forego them today?

The Legislature will be heading into a special session, and the City Council will be discussing the budget soon. Let us all be open about our needs, and be ready and willing to make sacrifices to get through these tough times.