

In the end, the only thing colorful about Erie County's 2005 budget fiasco – in some politician's worlds it actually passes for a plan -- was the performance of those responsible for crafting it.

Most colorful, and creative, were the ways County Executive Joel Giambra and his money-grubbing cronies found to spin the impact of another staggering tax increase into something less than the naked money grab it turned out to be. That, and the fact lawmakers – in their most audaciously arrogant act -- relegated the Erie County Charter to the status of a used Kleenex. All that was missing was a collective nose blow before they tossed it into a Rath Building trash can.

Not once could Giambra actually use the word tax, of course, nor could those who looked reform in the face and blanched. Funny how it sounds so less appealing, and a lot tougher to vote for, when "Medicaid penny" or "new revenue source" or "solution" is substituted with the practical application of their actions.

"I'm prepared to go red because the legislature can not find ten people for extra revenue," offered Giambra shortly before the cave-in. "I'm prepared to go red because the legislature can not find ten people ... to suck more than 100 million additional dollars out of local taxpayers," doesn't have quite the same appeal, does it?

Or perhaps Joel could have said, in another defense of his vote-buying budget, "The real bottom line is we need to have ten people prepared to vote to suck the more than 100 million additional dollars out of local taxpayers so we can keep the quality of life issues in this community intact."

Giambra was far from alone in doling out deceitful, delusional diatribes.

"I believe we should move forward, suck more than 100 million of additional dollars out of local taxpayers, and then I think we should focus our energy to reform Medicaid in Albany," offered Erie County Budget Director Joe Passafiume. Surely that's what he meant to say, instead of "get the additional one percent sales tax", right?

"We have to rise as a community, and stand up and say 'we are going to maintain the quality of life in this community, and we are going to suck more than 100 million additional dollars out of local taxpayers necessary to do that,'" said Giambra Planning Commissioner Larry Rubin, obviously forgetting that he meant to say "raise the taxes necessary" instead.

"They had their bumps, don't get me wrong, this was not easy, but at least most of the people could check their anger at the door when they came in to try and sit down to find a way to suck more than 100 million additional dollars out of local taxpayers," is doubtlessly what Chuck Swanick intended about his suddenly-found solution.

"This is the time to roll up the sleeves and suck more than 100 million additional dollars out of local taxpayers," is what Democratic Majority Leader Lynn Marinelli meant when she euphemized about it being time to "get the work done." After approving the sales tax increase, she bizarrely voted against the budget.

So it went in a battle that would have made Webster proud. For those keeping score at home, Erie County will be collecting about a quarter of a billion dollars in "temporary" taxes, er, new revenues, come 2006.

Green? Red? Forget one word making a difference, try one letter.

"It's time to end the theater. It's time to end the theatrics. My message is that it's time to go greed," is what Giambra knew to be true. Just think of it as a little less colorful way to express and share something else in all too short supply: the truth.

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