

By BRIAN ACKLEY
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Opinionated lines, ominous signs and personal whines...

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News from the Buffalo Financial Control Board continues to be at best tepid, and at worse troubling.

Maybe they simply need to do a better job explaining the whys of their actions, but several recent developments are easily interpreted as a failure of the board's mission, further clouding what is already an opaque issue.

Executive Director Dorothy Johnson expressed "a lot of reluctance" in explaining the board's approval in hiring 100 city workers for previously unfilled positions. Chairman Thomas Baker was the only board member to vote against a \$15,000 raise for a paper-title promotion of a current city hall employee, noting "I have trouble" with the move in light of hundreds of city layoffs. Board member Robert Wilmers went even farther, saying he was "greatly troubled" in approving a teacher's aide contract which from last year to this increased the agreement's bottom line cost 13 percent.

The control board can't be all just adding machine tapes, chart-laced reports and contentious meetings. A big part of their job is to simply restore some confidence that Buffalo's finances can be reigned in. Can't *anyone* say no?

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The recent tax-amnesty week for clothing purchases offered an instructive snapshot of the ever-diminishing regard in which politicians hold the people they "serve".

A number of people interviewed on television and radio reacted positively, of course, to the waiving of the eight percent tariff. Oops, there we go again.

It's as if voters have already forgotten that the tax has been raised another quarter percent, siphoning tens of millions of dollars from taxpayer's pockets. One broadcaster ranted, "They just don't get it," referencing politicians who appear indifferent to ever increasing fees, taxes and general economic fragility. Au contraire. Politicians understand just fin. It is we are the ones who don't get it, since the same complaining public continually refuses to hold incumbents accountable where it really matters, in the voting booth.

Happy anniversary, baby. This will mark the 20th year of the temporary tax.

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Apparently 100 billion dollars – the amount George Pataki wants to spend in New York in the next budget year – isn't enough. The hand-out line forms to the right.

Buffalo, as expected, is at the head of the line. But Erie County didn't expect to be queuing up until the Guv decided not to include a buy-out retirement plan that figured heavily into Joel Giambra's spending blueprint. That, combined with an almost covert provision in the state legislature's latest temporary sales tax approval instructing the

county to share a portion of those funds with Buffalo in 2005, are the clearest indications yet that the state bloom, at least, is off the Giambra rose.

The line also will include Rochester, whose mayor hadn't even bothered showing up in Albany's legislative chambers for almost a decade, but who last week made a plea to lawmakers for an additional \$29 million in state aid, or the same boost Buffalo is seeking in the Pataki plan. "It will be an ugly picture. It will be devastation," Mayor Bill Johnson, said of the now projected budget shortfall.

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Readers may recall Jack Davis, founder and owner of an Akron-based manufacturing firm that has lost tens of millions of dollars in business to overseas markets, most notably China. Featured in this space last summer, it's now hard to pick up any newspaper or magazine or see any broadcast where the imbalance is front and center. Age 70, he's attacking the problem with the enthusiasm and vigor with which his business was founded and grew.

Davis has arranged for a special "town meeting" on Wednesday, February 11 at Williamsville Middle School titled "How to Save American Manufacturing." Featured will be Jim Scholbert, Director of Strategic Outreach for the American Manufacturing Trade Action Coalition. Scholbert will discuss jobless recovery, industry losses, outsourcing and how to stop the hemorrhage of industries and jobs. Davis is hoping to attract hundreds of business owners, managers, union leaders, and elected officials for the 7 p.m. gathering. If interested in attending, please make a reservation by calling 542-5511.

(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at www.wnynewspapers.com. Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)