

It's lost in history, other than to note it might be some kind of German proverb, who first noted that the devil is in the details.

Equally lost is the message taxpayers might be trying to send to any one of our political dens of dizzying dysfunction, a notion painfully reinforced last week by Governor George Pataki's release of his 2005-06 spending plan.

There were, to be sure, the prerequisite pledges of reform and more responsive government, refrains so tired that the time it took to get negative feedback from Albany lawmakers could be timed in literally seconds.

The most obvious of reform ideas, like Medicaid and the budget process, were immediately fraught with furtive fine print. And as usual, you had to dig a little deeper to find the most revealing parts of the Pataki plan, the parts that show the true colors and small-minded thinking of lawmakers virtually everywhere. Like an Anderson's custard cone in July, hidden costs were dripping off the Pataki plan everywhere one looked.

For example, Pataki has proposed oh, about a 400 percent increase in the state's wine tax. Because we can't stand to be near the bottom in anything, especially taxes, such an increase would move New York's from 46 to 11th in ranking the cost such a liquor levy. One Finger Lakes vintner figures his small business will have to cough up about \$40,000 more under the plan, just to pay the tax.

It's a happy day for gamblers, of which there are three quarter of a million problem ones in New York. Pataki believes playing quick draw 24 hours a day, instead of the eight it is currently offered, will pave the way to wealth and well being. His hope is that New York will now realize better than \$2 billion a year in gambling revenue to help balance it's books. As suburban Rochester senator James Alesi proudly declared, eager to jump on virtually any new form of sweepstakes he can find, "We are a gambling state. We just don't have the neon signs all over the place."

Despite a budget deficit somewhere between four and six billion dollars, Pataki used the age-old and ever-popular "one shot" budget tricks to the tune of \$860 million in his 500 pages of dredged up dreck and dreariness.

Remember when the State University of New York used to offer some of the most valued bargains in higher education? With his latest tuition hike proposal, the cost to attend a SUNY school will have gone up 80 percent since Pataki took office. Medicaid costs, in his decade in power, have fully doubled.

Here's a politician's favorite – don't keep your eyes on the shells please – the good ol' temporary tax game. Apparently Pataki forgot his promise that collecting state sales tax on clothing purchases under \$110 was to end this summer. It's not. That will cost you a half billion this year. His plan increases overall state debt by more than a billion dollars, while increasing overall spending by some \$3.5 billion. .

And in a little reported Pataki piece de resistance – the one that philosophically screams the most loudly about his "vision" – his 2005-06 plan actually increases the legislature's spending on itself by about \$6 million. The same "personal services" budget line for Pataki's own office shows an increase of three-quarters of a million. Those billion dollars in new fees and taxes has to be spent somehow, right?

Only in the world of a politician does any of it qualify as "decisive, sensible" action, words Pataki used in selling his repackaged snake oil. For good measure, just in case he thought anyone was paying attention, he also sprinkled in bold and sweeping to characterize his blueprint. Pataki's dizzying array of cheery charts, assuring acronyms and sugary slogans ran the gambit of "Ensuring Fiscal Integrity" to "Advancing Economic Freedom."

History knows exactly who observed, "Details are always vulgar." It was playwright Oscar Wilde; ironic since when it comes to reform and spending, Pataki has never learned the importance of being earnest.

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