

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
**WIN Columnist**

You know you're really deep in the doo-doo when Al DeBenedetti becomes Erie County's big voice of reason.

Who could imagine it was the lightning-rod of a legislator who recently offered reasonable discourse and clarity of thought – neither often associated with the colorful Democrat -- in finding a way through the county's fiscal mess.

“There is no miracle answer to this at all. There's just tough decisions on making cuts or sustaining cuts that are in the proposed budget and/or how to raise the revenue if we restore some of the cuts. These are the only decisions we can have. There's no miracle cure coming from Albany or Washington in time to approve this budget and anyone pursuing that is just living in la-la land.” said DeBenedetti a few weeks back.

Here's County Executive Joel Giambra's vision of leadership: “I've drawn the line in the sand...Life as we know it in Erie County comes to a halt.”

Simply put, Giambra's laments are reckless, childish, and desperate. His abdication of responsibility is not simply distasteful, but quite reprehensible, actually. And it's no less childish, popular as it may seem theoretically, to simply sit back and encourage Giambra to snap off the lights and hang out the closed for business sign come January 1.

Heck, even that isn't a “red” reality. Would it surprise you to know the 3,000 layoffs Giambra is threatening represents only about 30 percent of the county workforce? And even his preferred grab-all-the-tax-money-we-can-and-run spending plan (no wonder it's dubbed the “green” plan) reduces the 10,000 strong county workforce to 9,800, a “painful” number in Giambra's fantasy world.

Republicans have even stopped trying to insult its rank and file with heretofore stupefying rhetoric that at this moment would pass as some measure of leadership.

Something as vanilla as, “We know of the hardships this spending plan will inflict. We understand sacrifices will have to be made at all levels, in revenue and in expenses, from both taxpayers and county workers, and we're willing to work any hour of the day or night to craft a responsible budget,” would be welcome right about now.

Instead, we get semantical squabbling over office furniture and high-paid chauffeurs, with pathetic excuses from growingly pathetic figures that are callously playing with the emotions of virtually every one of their county constituents.

“It's not for office furniture. We got a new computer system. And we have to upgrade it. These are all for computer stands, not office furniture,” said Deputy County Executive Carl Calabrese in dopey defense of a \$58,000 budget item for now infamous fixtures.

“I don't have a driver. I have a senior executive assistant.” Giambra remarked about his well chronicled \$81,000-a-year wheel man. Interestingly, the road warrior and his family members haul in better than a half-million a year in salary in county jobs, two thirds of which would miraculously be saved even in Giambra's vindictive version of budget hell. To trivialize such matters – small as they may be – is as maddening and self-serving as his budget proposal itself.

And, just for a good laugh, Giambra continues to insist his sales tax hike is only temporary. To know he must compromise, but insist that he won't, is painful and embarrassing to watch.

Make no mistake, this is no game, despite Giambra's take-my ball-and-go-home tantrum. He's not wrong. Albany is the unslyable monster. But to ignore any option other than a \$130 million tax increase – sales, property, regressive, progressive, it's still \$130 million sapped from an already sapless electorate -- is nothing less than an egregious breach of public trust.

There's a man in these parts that we loved to hate, former Miami Dolphin Coach Don Shula, who knows a thing or two about success. “The superior man blames himself,” the Hall-of-Famer once said. “The inferior man blames others.”

Joel Giambra has never looked so small.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a paid weekly circulation of 75,000*

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