

No safety with the Legislature in session

By Rep. VIC KOHRING

No man's life, liberty, or property are safe while the legislature is in session." - Judge Gideon J. Tucker, 1866.

New York Judge Gideon Tucker was strikingly correct in his famous 1866 aphorism, but no more than what almost happened during the 23rd Alaska Legislature, which ended May 11. Numerous taxes were proposed by both legislators and the governor. The individual Alaskan almost had his financial hide whooped if it were not for two main factors that saved him. Those two? The recent dramatic increase in oil prices which wiped out Alaska's deficit virtually overnight, and the fact that this is an election year and few politicians want to be on record for having voted for taxes.

Regardless of these reasons I commend my colleagues for rejecting at least the major taxes. I'm pleased I can return to the Mat-Su and inform my constituents that their wallets are safe for another year. We rejected a statewide sales tax, an income tax and additional oil industry taxes, all pushed frantically by the left wing media.

It's more obvious to me than ever after watching this year's legislative process in Juneau that if our goal is to stimulate the economy, we should provide a conducive climate for the private sector, which is where real wealth is created. If we want families and small businesses to be financially independent and successful, then the solution is definitely not new burdensome taxes but instead put government on a strict diet.

I heard many excuses to justify taking more of Alaskans' hard-earned money. One was that people would be "more connected" to government if they were taxed, and therefore would have more care and concern if they "contributed" more. The suggested theory of "contributing" your money to fuel big government is a smokescreen, because in reality, people are never asked to make "contributions." They are ordered by government backed up with the force of law to either pay up or have their property ultimately seized by armed government agents. Another excuse I heard was that Thomas Jefferson would think it proper that citizens become financially "involved" in government.

To twist Jefferson's advocacy of limited government into a pro-big government position is ridiculous. The proponents of this lunacy obviously have never studied Jefferson fully. If he were alive today, he would choke at all the government waste and inefficiency and the multitude of touchy-feely programs we have created in Alaska over a generation. Jefferson would have cut government spending and put an end to social engineering.

I don't know which is worse, using a famous American founding father to promote big government, directly contrary to his political philosophy, or repeating the mantra that "We have cut government spending to the bone, and can't go any further!" Dragging Thomas Jefferson through such mendacity and not being up front about what is needed - getting rid of the nonsense in our budget - is unfortunate.

We can trim further. We have over 24,000 government workers running a huge array of programs that spend billions a year, that could be comfortably reduced through natural attrition and get us back to a more manageable number. We could eliminate highly paid executives such as the numerous deputy directors, assistant commissioners, special assistants. We should get rid of shining examples of government wisdom like the Anchorage failed fish processing plant, which lost millions of our tax dollars before it thankfully was put out of its misery. We could also combine duplicating agencies and delete layers of unnecessary upper management.

Alaska's prosperity depends on the private sector being able to create, produce and deliver our food, clothing, shelter and jobs. Government frequently gets in the way of this eminently peaceful and important process. We need fire protection, police, roads, schools and a judicial system. Most other non-essential government programs are a drag on the economy. It's high time we recognized this and show the courage to trim, cut and make the government lean and useful. We can do the rest as individuals.

If we don't, then look forward to a lower standard of living for all in a government-dominated state. I love Alaska and wish to see it free and independent. New taxes are not part of this notion. Remember P.J. O'Rourke's line, "Giving money and power to the government is like giving car keys and whisky to teenage boys." He's right.

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