

The challenges of small business and the County Council

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I don't want to talk about the Montgomery County Council.

I really don't.

But in point of fact, one must.

It's hard to talk about a group of people who individually you find intelligent, cogent and rational, but as a group you wonder if they're charter members of the "Flowers for Algernon" club.

(Look it up.)

County Executive Ike Leggett in the county's modest inauguration celebration this year pointed to the fact that "Some of those living close to the edge slipped over," and some have had dreams deferred if not lost.

Correct.

And congratulations to the council for its more modest display of celebration this year as the county suffers along with the rest of the country through a severe recession.

Leggett is correct too in saying that the county has been spared the extreme problems suffered elsewhere in the country.

Too true. Insulated by the tax dollars spewing into the economy from Washington D.C., Montgomery County has not and will rarely suffer the extremes the rest of the country suffers even during the worst economic times.

That does not, however, excuse some of the horrendous decisions made by the council.

Our proximity to the nation's capital does insulate our elected officials as much as the rest of the population.

It insulates them from poor decisions, poor leadership and poor judgments.

It enables us to scoff but do nothing about a security detail for the county executive that is unheard of in other counties of similar size around the country.

It enables us to be taxed beyond reason, and programs instituted under the county banner that neither help, but often harm the pocketbook of those as Leggett noted are "living close to the edge."

As the new county council assembles, with some new faces and some familiar faces, the challenges the group face in 2011 is dominated by the budget.

“It’s the economy stupid,” was James Carville’s colorful catchphrase when former President Bill Clinton ran successfully for the nation’s highest office for the first time.

From the ICC to the ICB, from Strathmore to Live Nation, from school budgets to infrastructure maintenance, the county as it assembles anew in the wonderful government chambers in Rockville, needs to address the budget in not an arbitrary fashion, but with a real eye toward rethinking what the county can and can’t do for its citizens.

We need roads.

We need schools.

We need fire and police protection.

We need sanitation, water, power and it’s really nice to have the trash picked up.

Do we need a central office delegating when local organizations can use school fields?

Probably not.

Do we need security for the county executive? Again, probably not.

Do we need additional taxes?

Definitely not.

What Montgomery County desperately needs is common sense in county government.

What it needs is a group of individuals who are ready to think anew the role of county government, what it can realistically supply to the populace and more importantly a way to sell it to the voters, the cash cow contributors and the businesses which need to thrive and survive in the county.

We need to support the small businessman in this county and that, perhaps is where our county government falls on its face the worst.

To list all the small businessmen in this county who believe the county has faltered in supporting them would take up more room in this paper that I care to admit.

Many use the phrase “I don’t want to be a county tax collector,” to describe the amount of money they are taxed by several taxing entities in order to stay in business.

The county could right this wrong immediately.

Supporting small business in this county would go a long way to curing the ills brought about by this recession.

It would also lead to a greater amount of money in the county coffers.

And isn't that what the county needs?