



Recently, several of my colleagues on the Phoenix City Council held a news conference about repealing the current food tax. First, I want to point out that it is inappropriate to hold a news conference about eliminating the food tax in front of a memorial commemorating the lives of fallen Phoenix police officers, firefighters and other city employees who have lost their lives while working for the residents of Phoenix. This temporary tax has enabled Phoenix to keep 117 sworn Police positions and 62 sworn Fire positions.

Second, my wife and I have five children of our own. For every \$100 we spend in groceries, we are taxed \$2. It's a very small price to pay to maintain our high quality of life we expect for our communities. Two of my boys play pee-wee football at Manzanita Park. Without the food tax, Manzanita would not have been able to re-open earlier this year. Without the tax, the city would not be able to open the new public library at South Mountain Community College. All of our libraries would have been severely impacted in terms of available resources, operational hours, staffing and educational programs. More than ever, the libraries are becoming a resource for adults looking for help in career development, as well as providing a safe, friendly environment for children.

When I attended the public budget hearing sessions last year to discuss the proposed food tax, a mother with a stack of files on registered sex offenders in her neighborhood asked who would protect her children when they walked home from school. This woman had two jobs, and no way to protect her children if their after-school program was cut. At these budget hearings, many hard-working residents showed up in support of the two percent tax. Residents who would be most impacted by tax, supported it to keep vital services in place. And when the Council voted to approve the food tax, it was understood that this was going to preserve valuable and critical resources for neighborhoods and families. Also, in Maricopa County, Phoenix and 22 of the other 24 cities have a food tax. Phoenix is the only city with a temporary sales tax on food that will expire in 2015.

It is easy to attack the temporary food tax, but I invite my colleagues, and others, in opposition of the tax to go out and experience these services. It is no secret and should come of no surprise that when the economy is down, like it is now, the demand on city services increases. The libraries more than ever are vital resources for their communities. Students visit because they need to do their homework, but have no Internet access. Parents and adults are finding career help from resume building workshops to comprehensive job searches. We should not deny people the opportunity to better themselves.

The money allocated to public safety has kept 54 neighborhood officers, six Community Action Officers, 20 first responders, five drug enforcement officers and 32 other sworn positions in other crime divisions. It has restored three Fire engine companies, one ladder company and one full time rescue response unit.

Another vitally important service saved by the food tax worth mentioning is in the city's transit services. Without the tax, the Dial-A-Ride service would not be operational. My constituents are avid consumers of public transit. This tax has dedicated \$12.7 million to improving and maintaining bus routes and the light rail. It has restored early morning and late evening services. Not everyone is lucky enough to hold an 8 to 5 job, and I can tell you my district appreciates having the extended services and hours.

An additional \$14.1 million also has gone to libraries, senior and youth programs, improving parks and community enrichment programs, which are keeping five community centers open full time. Let's look at the numbers. Let's humanize the impact that the lost revenue would have on the city.

If after all that, my colleagues feel the best course of action is still to repeal the tax, then I ask those in opposition of the tax to show me a plan. I want them to tell me which programs do not deserve to be funded. I want them to tell me why residents no longer deserve the quality of life they are used to and have enjoyed. I want them to find the \$50 million and not throw it back on staff. Our city employees have already voluntarily given back more than \$100 million for this present and the past fiscal year. Without displacing our residents, I want to see how we can continue to provide the world-class services that make Phoenix great, without the aid of the food tax. Phoenix is the nation's sixth largest city. We also have the best credit rating out of the nation's top 10 cities, and a better overall credit rating than the United States. As one of the largest cities with the best credit score, why should we deny our residents the services they need? All I am asking for is a plan. Show me a plan.

Councilman DiCiccio's plan to make up the funds raised by the food tax is to eliminate pay raises for city staff, continue the 3.2 percent compensation cut and eliminate tax payer funding for union activity. His proposal is flawed. The 3.2 percent reductions agreed to by all of city employee groups saved the city more than \$100 million over the two-year contract. But maintaining that saves us \$0 in future years. The step compensation system is part of the negotiated, binding contracts with employee groups for 2010-11 and 2011-12. Personally, I don't believe that a first-year police officer should be paid the same as a 20-year veteran, which is what DiCiccio's proposal suggests.

So, how do Councilmembers DiCiccio, Gates, Waring, Williams and mayoral candidate Wes Gullett propose to keep all of the following open and operational?

### **Public Safety**

- Restored 117 sworn and civilian positions within the Police Department
- Restored 62 sworn Fire positions

## **Community Enrichment**

- Restored five community centers providing youth and adult recreational programming, classes and community activities
  - Deer Valley
  - Desert West
  - Devonshire
  - Mountain View
  - Washington Activity Center

## **Seniors**

- Restored five senior centers that provide communal meals, social activities and advocacy services
  - Goelet A.C. Beuf
  - Sunnyslope
  - Pecos
  - Desert West
  - Marcos de Niza

## **Youth**

- Restored seven youth recreation centers open year-round
  - Harmon
  - Hayden
  - Marc Atkinson
  - Playa Margarita
  - Sunnyslope Youth Center
  - University
  - Verde
- Restored seven youth recreation centers open for the summer
  - Barrios Unidos
  - Central
  - Grant
  - Holiday
  - Smith
  - South Phoenix Youth Center
  - Thunderbird Teen Center
- Continued grant-funded programming for adults with disabilities and violence prevention education

## **Libraries and Learning**

- Restored after school programming at 21 existing libraries throughout the city.
- Restored grand-funded nutritional programs at the libraries
- Restored three library branches (but still at reduced hours)
  - Desert Sage
  - Saguaro
  - Yucca

## **Transportation**

- Restored street crews responsible for patching potholes and other repairs
- Restored resources to maintain ongoing bus operations and to address infrastructure needs
- Restored resources to sustain daytime light rail operations
- Restored services for the disabled and seniors through Dial-A- Ride
- Restored critical bus routes and early morning bus services
- Restored late night light rail service on Fridays and Saturdays

## **Fiscal Responsibility**

- Grew our contingency fund to withstand the continued down economy

If you are concerned about keeping these services open and operating, please contact my colleagues. It is high time they stop playing politics with the lives of our children, our parents, our friends and our neighbors. Write to them, email them, call them and DEMAND A PLAN to recoup the \$50 million!

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Sincerely,



Councilman Michael Nowakowski

District 7

City of Phoenix