

THE NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION/ FIRE SAFETY BUDGET-Part 2

By Richard Schulte

Part 1 of this article suggested that perhaps it's time to think about how much is spent on fire protection and fire safety in the United States in the aggregate and look for ways to reduce our national fire protection/fire safety budget. Over the years, we've added layer-upon-layer of fire protection and fire safety measures to our building regulatory system without giving much thought to whether or not all of these measures are absolutely essential to our safety and as to the total cost of all of these measures.

Over the years, we've added layer-upon-layer of fire protection and fire safety measures to our building regulatory system without giving much thought to whether or not all of these measures are absolutely essential to our safety and as to the total cost of all of these measures.

With the "Great Recession" causing all sorts of budget problems at the Federal level, the state level and at the municipal level, what better time to give some thought to the issue of our national fire protection/fire safety budget? Is our national fire protection/fire safety budget "bloated"? To quote one politician, "You betcha."

On Sunday evening, December 19th (6 days before Christmas), "60 Minutes" (CBS) aired a segment by Steve Kroft titled "**State Budgets: The Day of Reckoning**". The following are a few excerpts from this segment:

“. . .But in the two years, since the "great recession" wrecked their economies and shriveled their income, the states have collectively spent nearly a half a trillion dollars more than they collected in taxes. There is also a trillion dollar hole in their public pension funds."

“. . .The debt crisis is already making Wall Street nervous, and some believe that it could derail the recovery, cost a million public employees their jobs and require another big bailout package that no one in Washington wants to talk about."

“And nowhere has the reckoning been as bad as it is in Illinois, a state that spends twice much as it collects in taxes and is unable to pay its bills.”

“Not all of the problems that Illinois and other states are facing right now can be traced to the recession. But the precipitous drop in tax revenues did expose decades of financial irresponsibility, reckless spending, unrealistic benefit packages for public employees, and the use of political gimmicks to cover up hidden deficits. It's forcing state governors and the public to confront some harsh realities.”

“No one is talking about it now, but the big test will come this spring. That's when \$160 billion in federal stimulus money, that has helped states and local governments limp through the great recession, will run out.”

“But the precipitous drop in tax revenues did expose decades of financial irresponsibility, reckless spending, unrealistic benefit packages for public employees, and the use of political gimmicks to cover up hidden deficits. It's forcing state governors and the public to confront some harsh realities.”

It would appear that “the party is over”. It’s time to start to do more with less everywhere, including in fire protection/fire safety field. Just throwing money at the “fire problem” doesn’t work when there is no money to throw at the problem anymore.

In the late 1970's, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed what is referred to as the “decision tree”. It’s time to open the file cabinet and dust off the “decision tree” and to replace the concept of “balanced fire protection” with the concept of “budgeted fire protection”. We can do more in the fire safety field with less and we owe it to the public to do so. That’s what public service is all about-being efficient with not only the public’s tax dollars, but with regulations developed to protect the public safety.

In the late 1970's, the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) developed what is referred to as the “decision tree”.

To paraphrase Martin Luther King, “I have a dream that some day the building code will get thinner, rather than thicker, with each passing year.” We’ve won the battle with fire in the United States, except in residential occupancies. It’s time to declare victory and figure out how to best to deliver fire safety most efficiently and effectively to the public. Something tells me that that solution was developed in the 1970's.

We’ve won the battle with fire in the United States, except in residential occupancies. It’s time to declare victory and figure out how to best to deliver fire safety most efficiently and effectively to the public. Something tells me that that solution was developed in the 1970's.

* * * * *

Copyright © 2010 Richard C. Schulte
All Rights Reserved