

The Rio Grande County Commissioners first of all would like to thank Rio Grande County residents and even some Saguache County residents who came to the meetings to discuss the 2010 budget. After weeks of working on the budget, the commissioners will present a final budget at budget hearing on December 9, 2009.

There is not a lot of good news for the budget. The State of Colorado continues taking monies away from the counties to balance the State budget. The latest from the State is that they will need to cut One Billion more dollars next year. About the only place they have left to cut is in Health and Human Services. This will mean that currently our DSS has a 20% match with State monies, and that will all change. The County will be left trying to fill the gap.

After reviewing the County's current income for 2009 which shows our sales tax revenue is down 7.5% from 2008, our Highway Users tax is down and interest on county investments is minimal, the Commissioners asked each department to cut expenses by 10% for a start on next year's budget. The revenue stream is limited, and our only way to balance the budget now is by cuts.

After the departments brought in their budgets, the County budget was still more than \$900,000 short of balancing. The commissioners met with each department head and elected official to go over their budget and see what else could be done to balance the total general fund budget. We want to thank each one of you for your hard work in trying to get to a balanced budget. It is not a fun thing, but sharing ideas and working together will help make this work.

Even after reworking, the budget was still out of balance by over \$500,000.00. The commissioners were left with tough choices to fund and things to cut. The final outcome of budget cuts ranges from 95% cut for the Museum, to a +8.5% (\$200.00) increase in the landfill budget. Our 2009 budget in General Fund was \$5,977,101.00 and requests for 2010 General Fund budget is \$5,414,802.00 a total decrease of \$562,299.00 or 9.4%. Even with these cuts, we will have to dip into our reserves for approximately \$267,000.00 to balance the 2010 budget. We do not want to lose our reserves.

It is not just our County, but most every county in the State that is dealing with budget cuts, and some are huge. Fremont County cut out the county match for employees for retirement. Our County match is 4%. Fremont County cut three holidays out of next year; we still have all holiday days. Fremont County added 6 unpaid furlough days, we have not done furlough days.

We did not add any cost of living or step increases for employees for 2010, nor did we pay for the health insurance rate increase. All of the health insurance increase will be on the shoulders of the county employees. That increase was 4%. So for a single the increase was \$20.00, a couple \$37.00 and family \$45.00.

The museum will be closed unless the Museum Foundation Board will operate it during the summer months on a volunteer basis from Memorial weekend through Labor

Day. The McMullen building will be closed unless anyone that uses it will pay the rental fee, and the annex fees will not be waived. Road and Bridge will be maintaining roads and as of now, no new paving projects in the near future. The county did purchase a new crack seal machine to help with this maintenance. The machine will help save on product used, safety for our employees, and a better finished product.

Road and Bridge may have to do to something like the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is now doing in posting roads that will only be plowed for snow removal at certain times. Hwy 15 going south of Monte Vista is posted now by CDOT that there will be no snow plowing from 7 p.m. – 5 a.m. Not sure how emergency vehicles respond if there is a fire or ambulance or sheriff needed.

The county budget 2010 includes a hiring freeze, some positions that will be left unfilled, and if any department loses an employee, that department must come before the commissioners to receive approval to advertise for the position. About the only thing left for the county to be able to balance the budget is cutting people's jobs, and we are trying our best to not have to do that. Our county employees are doing an amazing job with the limited resources they have.

So please understand the services the county offers may cause you to stand in a line for a longer period of time, they may be delayed, and may only be available on certain days. The county is also looking at a four day work week, to see if we can save with that, similar to what the SLV REC has done.

Big thanks again to all the county employees' dedication to helping make this budget work, and as we know, we WILL get through the tough times. A thank you to county residents for your understanding in these times as well.

On a happier note, the SLV Health Access Program is getting started. This is HB 1252 approved by the State legislature this spring. Three commissioners from the San Luis Valley; Crestina Martinez from Costilla County, John Sandoval from Conejos County and Robert Hagedorn from Rio Grande County testified before the Health committee on this bill. It is a pilot project similar to the one in Pueblo. It is NOT a health insurance, but it does help uninsured employer groups who do not have health insurance pay for basic medical services available in the San Luis Valley. It is funded 1/3 rd by employers, 1/3 rd employees, and 1/3rd community share (private grants and provider reduced reimbursement). A lot of the focus is on preventative care so that your employees will be healthy to be more productive. This program pulls many available avenues of health care together so that people can know where to go to get the help needed and what the costs are of various programs.

If you are an employer who wants to help your employees, but cannot afford health insurance, this might offer an alternative. The program requirements and what is offered can be found by calling either Gwen Heller at SLVRMC 719-589-8052 or Cindy Palmer at SLVHMO 719-589-3696. Benefits up to \$30,000 per year are allowed for hospital services. Care can only be accessed in the San Luis Valley. This program may

allow an employer and employee to each pay about \$40-50 per month for a premium to cover this program

Another new item for the San Luis Valley is the SLV Action Agency. This is starting now. Conejos County is the sponsor, and there are board members from five counties in the valley. The CSBG (Community Service Block Grant) monies are currently handled through this Agency. Their mission is to “Connect, Support, Refer, and Improve the at Risk Residents of the San Luis Valley.”

Currently, the Action Agency is looking for low income people to use ARRA (American Relief and Recovery Act) funds to help them attain more education for jobs, or part of the funds can be used for “internship” work. A part of qualification for funds is based on poverty level. If you have questions or want more information, call Carol A Gurule, the director at 719-274-4307.

For the commissioners, Robert Hagedorn