

Subject: District Taxes - Dr. Corrie Kost

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From: "Ernie Crist" <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

To: "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>, <Cagebc@yahoo.com>

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

Dr. Corrie Kost, a highly dedicated and hard working Community Activist whose scholastic and ethical standards are beyond reproach, recently produced a critique of the District of North Vancouver 2004 budget ("TAXES GONE WILD"). He also analyzed other District fiscal policies of recent years, including the District Heritage Fund.

Dr. Kost, via statistics and facts taken from the District's own published materials, showed that District taxes between 1994 and 2004 had increased faster than those of any other municipality in the Lower Mainland. They went from the second lowest in the region to the highest or second highest depending on interpretation. All the while the District, siphoned off huge sums from its Heritage Fund to supplement operational expenses. The same is true for the Infrastructure Reserve Funds which in 1997 stood at \$ 91 million or \$ 1,300 per capita and have all but disappeared. I am still looking for the official document authorizing the expenditure of this Fund.

The District responded to Dr. Kost's allegations stating that his figures were inaccurate. They made a big deal over his "failure" to include new construction in his calculations. I have calculated that this amounts to less than 1% of the budget.

I do not blame staff for the District debacle. Since they do not make decisions, it is unfair to criticize them. On the other hand, "facts are stubborn things". And the facts show a degree of fiscal irresponsibility by the District leadership that is mind boggling.

Suffice it to say that had the Heritage Fund been allowed to accumulate, as was planned in 1986, it would have reached close to 200 million in 2001. I leave it up to the intelligent taxpayers to determine what the interest generated by this Fund would mean to the annual budget. And this is not counting the money taken from the Fund and used for genuine capital projects - and something Don Bell continues to use as an alibi for having mismanaged the whole Fund.


Were the taxpayers asleep? Apathy demands an awesome price and the District of North Vancouver is surely the leading example of this. However, a quote from Faust comes to mind "In all my life there's nothing has given my heart so keen a pang of loathing, as their repulsive deeds have done".

I voted against the 2004 budget since, once again, only 5 % of the budget was debated. Under the leadership of Don Bell the other 95 % was effectively off the table. One Councillor made a big deal in the last minute of the debate over cutting \$ 250,000 from the \$ 120 million plus budget. Her suggestion would have meant eliminating any kind of Council emergency fund for the entire year. Not considered to be a very intelligent or responsible action by people with a business training although it got her honorable mention in the press.

The really big issues and the big ticket items were once again avoided. The District continues to subsidize the City. The City is building the high-rises and the District is building the playing fields free of charge. Council also ignored any and all attempts to reorganize the Rec Commission along the Parkgate model which would save the taxpayers millions of dollars annually even while its efficiency would improve.

All in all, it is business as usual in the District in 2004. But as Cethegus, a 5th century Roman nobleman attempting to restore Rome's Grandeur while suffering under Gothic oppression, stated, "even genius cannot arouse a people determined to sleep".

Ernie Crist.

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