



Bluegrass Beacon

BY JIM WATERS

'Coach' Beshear needs new game plan

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Gov. Steve Beshear could learn something from University of Louisville basketball coach Rick Pitino's response to his team's recent dismal performance against Western Kentucky University.

I watched in amazement as the Hilltoppers de-feathered the previously No. 3-ranked Cards.

Following the game, Pitino didn't make excuses. He didn't blame injuries or suspensions or the janitor. He just admitted the team didn't practice or play well. That all will change, he said.

"We apologize to the fans that paid hard-earned money and had to witness such poor execution," Coach P. wrote on his Web site.

Even if the governor isn't a Cardinal fan, he could benefit politically by following Coach P's example. He might begin by acknowledging a less-than-stellar performance in dealing with Kentucky's economic challenges.

He should just concede that he was wrong to hoist our budget woes on the backs of the working poor and small retailers along Kentucky's border with his proposal to raise cigarette taxes.

To change his political playbook, Coach B. should quit hiding behind number crunchers who have the luxury of considering only how much money comes in while ignoring the much larger flow going out.

For example, the Consensus Forecasting Group estimates revenues are \$450 million short of what Frankfort planned to spend this year. The governor surmises that just because the state won't have it to spend, a "crisis is looming."

Nearly \$9 billion goes into state coffers this year. The only way that's not

enough money to adequately fund essential services is if government's stewards don't live within their means by determining spending priorities.

Families do it. They pay the mortgage, keep the power on, put food on the table and clothe the kids *first*. They save enough so that if revenues don't meet estimates, they still meet basic obligations. All of this is done before spending a dime on nonessentials.

However, too many of our political leaders believe in funding every pork project demanded by campaign-contributing cronies back home. Then if revenues fall short of projections, they want to punish the poor by raising cigarette taxes – one in four smokers lives below the poverty line – while claiming to covet a *decrease* in smoking rates.

The governor could be a hero to millions of hard-working Kentucky taxpayers by holding a press conference to announce the following measures, which could save millions without raising taxes:

Suspend prevailing wage on public projects and lessen the "crisis" by \$130 million. This wouldn't eliminate the deficit, but would symbolize a serious commitment to eliminating wasteful spending.

Start using a zero-based budgeting process, whereby every state agency must account for every dollar spent. The simple transparency of such an effort would eliminate millions of dollars in waste that could be used for essential services.

Create a bipartisan commission to establish the state's top-10 spending priorities. With the right group, the focus would be on needs that benefit the most Kentuckians, not some road to nowhere in Podunkville. If the state needs more money for Medicaid and unemployment insurance, perhaps even a worthy road project can wait until next year.

Condemn fear-mongering by those who oppose any change in the state pension system and immediately call for creating a 401(k)-type program for *new* workers and for part-time elected officials to give up their pensions.

For good measure, Gov. B. could conclude his press conference by apologizing, as Coach P. did, for taking our hard-earned money and forcing us to witness such a "poor execution" of leadership in handling our fiscal

challenges.

It doesn't take leadership to raise taxes on the working poor who don't have much clout in the halls of political power. That requires only cowardice and effective propaganda campaigns.

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