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Budget Shortfalls Deserve Attention Today/The Games Are Here

- **Next Year's Budget Shortfalls Deserve Attention Today**- The County is forecasting a \$100M shortfall for next fiscal year and the school system is forecasting their own \$100M shortfall as well. One would think that the Board of Supervisors and the School Board would begin addressing the shortfall today while we have time to review our very complex organizations and budgets.

During our budget process I asked the Board to approve budget guidance to have additional budget committee meetings this summer and fall but the motion failed on a 7 to 3 vote with only Supervisors Cook and Frey supporting my request. To date only Superintendent Garza has moved forward in a responsible fashion, pulling together a task force including the business and community leaders as well as appointees of the school board and the public in the discussion.

- **The World Police and Fire Games are Here**- See below for information on the games, how to get free tickets to the opening ceremony and concert, the events and other information on the games.

Next Year's Budget Shortfall Deserves Attention Today

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I have received a lot of emails since the Superintendent sent out her newsletter on the school budget. In my conversations with the Superintendent after the email was sent, she indicated that her concern was primarily next year's budget. I reiterated my concern that we needed to start working the issue today and that I believe we needed to continue the work of the Joint Budget Development Committee (JBDC) of BOS and School Board members that we began last year. This was another recommendation I made during the Board of Supervisors budget discussions but so far no action on additional JBDC meetings. That is why I am happy to see the Superintendent moving forward with the task force. It will be a challenging task and is a group with very diverse opinions but I respect the effort.

A lot has been said about the school budget but let's take a look at some basic facts on enrollment growth, number of teachers and budget growth over the last 14 years:

Enrollment in FY2001: 161,000
Enrollment in FY2015: 185,000
Net Change: +15%

Employees in FY2001: 19,800
Employees in FY2015: 23,400
Net Change: +18%

Expenditures in FY2001: \$1.375 Billion
Expenditures in FY2015: \$2.498
Net Change: +82%

2000-2015 Inflation: +37% (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Interesting observation: In FY2001, FCPS spent \$240 million in benefits. In FY2015, they spent \$680 million. While every other budget category has roughly doubled since FY2001, benefits have tripled, while inflation has been 37%.

Budget growth and teacher growth has outpaced enrollment growth; however numbers are not always as simple as they appear. The schools are facing increased challenges, some under our control, some not: massive expansion in standardized testing, increase in the administrative overhead requirements on teachers, growth in students needing complex special educational services, increase in students needing English language instruction (ESOL), increase in students needing free or reduced meals (FRM), zoning and land use policies that do not synchronize with school growth projections, the federal government shirking its responsibility regarding unaccompanied minors, disproportionate growth in pension and benefits costs, and more.

The answers are not simple or easy but they begin with open and honest discussion and I hope that is what the Superintendent's task force will accomplish. Some of my initial thoughts, many you have heard before:

- Focus resources into the classroom - currently if you divide the number of students by the number of teachers you get an average class size of 12 - we need to get teachers back in the classroom teaching and not doing administration.
- Focus on eliminating the administrative and testing burden on our teachers before we lose more of them - see the Washington Post article [\(Metro Monday June 8, 2015 "What is making a first year teacher reconsider her future? Lots of testing."\)](#)
- Look at outsourcing basic functions - the Fairfax County Chamber of Commerce has offered to help with this effort - many functions in the school system can be more efficiently outsourced
- Address rising pension and benefit costs - look to put some of the savings into teacher salaries - while our salaries are not competitive with surrounding jurisdictions, our total compensation (salary plus benefits, plus pensions) exceeds many jurisdictions. I continue to believe we need to have the best paid teachers in the region in order to have the best school system - we need to look at the balance of the components of compensation.
- Need to look at the County's land use policies which are driving up the number of FRM and ESOL Students - starting with the North

Hill project which would put hundreds of these students in schools that are near failing because of the high FRM/ESOL populations

- We need to continue to seek changes to the state's funding formula to return more of our tax money to our schools
- Need to continue to seek reimbursement from the Federal government for the unaccompanied minor children they relocated here.

On the County side the focus has been on the Lines of Business (LOBs) review that is currently underway. While I expect the LOB reviews to be a worthwhile process, unfortunately the Board will not see the first results until January - too late to address next year's budget shortfall.

The key to addressing the collective budget shortfalls is to get to the hard work of addressing our shortfalls today. Both boards voted themselves pay raises - it is time we put the effort in and begin addressing this problem before the only option left on the table is to add to our residents' tax burden.

The Games Are Here

Fairfax County is hosting this year's biannually World Police and Fire Games, the second largest sporting event in the world based on number of participants. This competition will bring ten thousand athletes from around the globe that serve in the public safety sector together to compete in a variety of traditional and specialized competitions. This is going to be an exciting time and I encourage everyone to get out and watch some of the competitions.

The games begin with the opening ceremony Friday evening (June 26) at RFK and will conclude with the closing ceremony on July 5 at Wolf Trap. The events are free to spectators and except the opening and closing ceremonies no tickets are required. The athletes village is in Reston Town Center.

In order to find specific events and other information about the games:

Schedule of events [HERE](#)

Opening Ceremony Tickets [HERE](#)

To find out more about the WPGF [HERE](#)

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