

May 2008

My apologies to the Gentle Reader: life and the press of juggling attorney talk to finalize the agreements connected to the Union Pacific Railroad double-track project, budget discussions, and parts of the business of Pinal County conspired to keep me from my usual commitment to submit this column to your news media outlet in a timely fashion. And now that it's the middle of May, I can promise you that this will be blessedly brief!

The life part of this distraction arrived at 9:54 a.m. on Thursday, May 1st – his name is Chandler Armand Andersen and his incredibly proud parents are Paul & Jill Andersen. And, although I'm a realist enough to admit that he may not be THE world's most perfect and cutest baby, his parents and grandmother certainly think so ... and who am I to argue with those folks. He is, however, very good looking and well behaved (for a newborn) and a delight to hold and cuddle. But I digress.

Meanwhile, back in the offices of the County, life has been focused on tracking the discussions about budgets, revenue shortfalls (at the State level) and how the various proposed legislative solutions will (or might) impact County budgets, programs, and/or residents, and other issues.

Let's focus on the County budget first. At this point in time, we appear to have taken all appropriate steps necessary to complete this current fiscal year (ending on June 30th) without any further remedial action. The same may not necessarily be said for the proposed budget for FY 2008-09. Budget planning for the coming year is playing against a background of a mandate from the County Board of Supervisors to lower the primary property tax rate to \$3.43 as well as a wary eye on county-related consequences resulting from the State Legislature's headlong plunge toward a state budget for the coming year.

The rolling 180 day hiring freeze is still very much a factor in the budgeting landscape for all departments and offices, along with instructions to plan on no significant capital projects or increases in new staff. Managers and staff were asked to submit proposed budgets with three scenarios – no increase, a 5% reduction and a 10% reduction. All of the County's rolling stock is being evaluated with an eye to seeing if we can continue on with minimum replacements. In the meantime, the Board of Supervisors has reinforced its statement of intent to adopt a budget that – if at all possible – will keep our workforce whole and avoid layoffs while seeking to minimize any increases in medical insurance premiums or employee contributions to the retirement system. However, cost-of-living and/or longevity adjustments may be in jeopardy – as may county personnel levels – if the state legislature's final budget for the FY '09 year substantially tinkers with state revenues or funding formulae that support services and/or programs that are mandated by the state.

So, all in all, it's been a busy month already and the pace of work for all us in Pinal County continues. Worries about the drought (both the water drought and the housing market) continue to be at the forefront of discussions and concerns as we move cautiously ahead with plans for FY 2008-09. Stay tuned for more next month after the State Legislature has (hopefully) adjourned.

David Snider

Pinal County District 3 Supervisor