



Hayward Daily Review My Word: Tough times call for responsible choices

By Ellen M. Corbett
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This year began with California confronting a \$26 billion budget deficit and Gov. Jerry Brown proposing to eliminate redevelopment agencies as one of the remedies.

Left with no other options, the Legislature begrudgingly passed two painful, cost-cutting plans -- one in March and another in June -- that slashed spending and gutted programs across the board, from ending adult day health care services to closing 70 state parks.

We were able, however, to salvage redevelopment agencies, allowing them to continue operating as long as they help pay for schools.

I know city officials were not happy to see these new revenue-sharing requirements, but it was the alternative to elimination.

Until now, redevelopment agencies have been able to divert property tax revenues in their areas that would normally be used by other local services, including schools, law enforcement and firefighting.

During these tough times, though, the state can no longer afford to backfill education funding that the redevelopment agencies use.

I believe in urban renewal. I fought very hard this year and was an outspoken advocate to save redevelopment agencies. We need redevelopment, but the reality is we need a new model for it that holds schools harmless and doesn't burden the state general fund.

To claim that schools would not be hurt -- that they would not be cut further if redevelopment agencies continued as they have without sharing resources -- is not true.

California's economy and budget revenues are ailing. After years of belt-tightening, our public schools are struggling.

As legislators, we had a difficult choice: Level another round of devastating cuts to K-12 public schools that could have reduced the school year by as much as two weeks or increased classes to unmanageable sizes, or demand more responsibility from redevelopment agencies.

The state's general fund is in such poor shape that higher education, the courts and many other vital functions of California state government had to be deeply cut as well. And, honestly, we are not out of the woods yet; more cuts could be coming next year.

The decision boiled down to protecting a basic level of public school funding -- and ensuring the children of Hayward have the opportunity to get an education versus allowing redevelopment agencies to continue operating without restrictions.

Hayward has used redevelopment well, and the Cannery project is a shining example of its value.

However, I also know Hayward's public schools are in desperate need of support, and to take more away from them would mean denying many students the chance of getting the education and skills they need to succeed.

I recently sent Hayward city officials a letter inviting them to work with me. I am sorry that some at City Hall apparently found that offensive. But that is part of being a public servant -- reaching out to work with others and make the best of the present circumstances.

My invitation still stands, and I hope Hayward city officials will reconsider. There is much work to be done, and now more than ever, we must work together to get the most out of our limited resources, educate our children and revitalize our communities.

Ellen Corbett, D-San Leandro, represents the 10th Senate District, which covers the city of Hayward and much of the East Bay. She previously served in the state Assembly and as mayor of San Leandro.