

PHOENIX RISING: THERE IS NO “THEY”

Lake County's Original Citizen stopped by last week. O.C. has been laid off from his job due to the recession. He wanted to know if I am hiring at the sawmill. I'm not. With home building, manufacturing and recreation all off, my markets have shrunk too.

Well" he said "They better start doing something about jobs around here. People are gonna get pretty mad."

"They" I wondered? Who exactly is "They"?

President Obama has signed the massive stimulus bill, which, when one looks at the total dollar figures is mind-boggling. Hundreds of Billions of dollars. But how much of it will wind up in Lake County? The simple answer: not very much. Consider this: for one segment that came to Minnesota, 2/3's of the money is earmarked for new city buses in the Metro area as well as paying the MTC operating deficit. The other 1/3's will be spread to the outstate area. By the time the population centers like Rochester, St Cloud, Duluth and Mankato get their share, we can pretty much forget stimulus money here.

I recently attended a seminar for Township Supervisors in St Cloud. In a room of about 400 other Supervisors from around the state, the speaker asked "How many of you have received Stimulus money for projects in your townships?"

Not a single hand went up. Not one. The Speaker continued "that doesn't surprise me. I would have been surprised if any of you HAD raised your hands."

When it comes to dealing with our economic problems, there is no "They". Help is not coming from Washington, St Paul or anywhere else. There is no "they". There is only Us.

In an old Jimmy Stewart movie, an oil drill crew attempts to fly out of the desert ahead of a bad storm, only to crash in the desert. For awhile they await rescue, only to be forced to the conclusion that no one is going to come and rescue them. These guys are on their own. If they are going to survive and get home alive, they are going to have to use the materials they have, and their own ingenuity, to cobble a plane together that can fly them out of the wasteland. Under the pressure of little water, intense heat,

limited materials and tools, as well as personal conflicts, opposing political and religious opinions, the group pulls together to save themselves

The Phoenix rises from the ashes. It's a great movie, and a great story. Perhaps the City Fathers who organize the Movies in the Park during the summer can show it. It may well be a metaphor we need to think about.

If we hope to come out of this economic struggle, and have a foundation upon which to build a measure of security that will carry us through future ones, we need to understand there is no "they" who will do the job for us. There is only Us.

It has been noted that successful political leaders who have an impact long beyond their service possess some common traits. They are Visionary as well as Inspirational. Beyond merely managing the routine issues of daily life, they have a mental picture of where they want to go. Sometimes the vision can be grand, sometimes more mundane. But they are headed somewhere beyond where we are now, and are not merely trying to return to some bygone "good ol' days".

Visionary leaders need to also have the ability to inspire. They need to have the capacity to communicate their plans and ideas in such a manner that motivates folks to rally behind them, causing them to pull together to accomplish more than anyone can do alone. After all, a vision without the capacity to inspire others is merely an empty dream

The folks at Fargo are joined together this week by a common vision: Save their city, save their homes and businesses. By working together, they are accomplishing more than anyone can do alone. For me, they stand in stark contrast to the New Orleans after Katrina. They didn't wait for the Federal Government to come and save them – they began the work themselves, and when the Fed's finally showed up, the work was already well underway.

Our present economic crisis could be every bit as serious as the flooded Red River, albeit a bit less dramatic photographically. For us the challenge is simple -- so we want to look like New Orleans, waiting for someone to come along and take care of us, or do we want to look like Fargo, with people working together to help each other?

Political leaders, regardless of the level of their office (Federal, State, County, Township) tend with time to lapse into one of two modes. One is they go into Crisis Mode, lurching from emergency to emergency, putting out the most threatening of fires. The other is Management Mentality, where they keep the systems of government operating, especially one in which their primary motivation is taking care of their own family, friends and supporters.

An example of Crisis Mode is the leadership of President Bush and Congress to the financial meltdown of last fall. An example of Management Mentality is the Nazi bureaucrats who were still calculating the number of paper clips and office supplies that would be needed for the coming years even as the regime was coming to an end.

Right now we need our elected and appointed leaders to rise above both Crisis Mode and Management Mentality. We need Visionary Leadership, from some quarter, for our region, for our area. We need a vision that will inspire, motivate and unite.

None of that is going to come from Washington. Or St Paul.



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