

8-1-11 B7

On Phoenix's budget, we shouldn't rewrite history

Two years ago we were eye witnesses to the greatest economic train wreck in Phoenix history: the \$270 million deficit of 2009 that caused a tidal wave of fear, bitterness and divisiveness during the city's budget hearings. It resulted in massive reductions to city services across the board. And for citizens hit hardest by the cuts, feelings of betrayal lingered, even as they stretched themselves thinner to survive.

In 2010, we saw the train barreling down the track again with a \$277 million deficit, at the same time Phoenix was being hit by record unemployment and foreclosure rates. This train promised to lay off 350 police officers and would finish gutting core services, destroying the very fabric of our community.

Standing by and watching this potential carnage was unacceptable to us. So in February 2010, after having gone through the city manager's proposed cuts line by line, we arrived at a solution that would preserve public safety and



My Turn
Paul Barnes



My Turn
Ann Malone

those city services that the most vulnerable among us could not live without.

We then met with the heads of all of the city's employee unions, presented the plan to them, and told them we couldn't do it without their help. We needed them to make significant wage and benefit concessions or we would come up short.

We also met with community activists representing more than 100,000 households citywide, founding Citizens for Phoenix based upon our revised budget plan, the cooperation of the unions, and an agreement by all to accept a 2 percent temporary

food tax in exchange for a guarantee that the city would order efficiency and best-practices audits of every department so that we would never find ourselves in this position again.

We held a joint news conference to announce for the first time in the history of Phoenix that citizen groups and unions were standing together making the sacrifices necessary to solve this crisis.

What we want now is for the media and politicians in office and running for office to stop rewriting history and undermining the spirit of cooperation and sacrifices that were made, replacing them with infighting, division and union bashing.

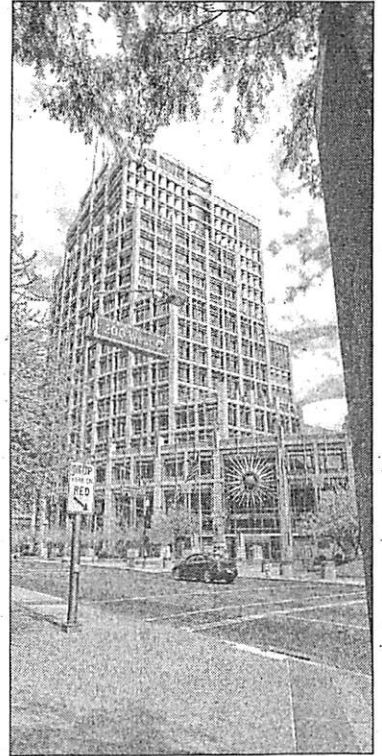
We're tired of hearing the scathing attacks on City Hall regarding supposed power plays by unions in the last budget cycle and what council people did and didn't know. What could have been legally negotiated was negotiated. Our employees were part of the solution, not the problem. No amount of partisan politics or re-

visionist history can change that. We fully expect the city manager to negotiate hard in 2012 and that the unions will be part of the solution again.

The Arizona Republic lauded Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel for saving only \$18 million in negotiations with his city's unions ("Union clout being targeted," Editorial, July 19). Yet, this same paper and many politicians are criticizing our city management and unions even as they cut employee pay by more than \$100 million over two years and saved another \$35 million through efficiencies, ensuring we kept our AAA bond rating.

Why are our city management and unions being attacked for accomplishing what Emanuel couldn't?

Paul Barnes and Ann Malone are the co-founders of CitizensforPhoenix.org, a coalition of more than 100,000 households represented in 60 neighborhood associations, churches and civic organizations throughout Phoenix.



Unions and City Hall are part of the budget fix. DAVE SEIBERT/REPUBLIC