

Down to the wire, ready for the finish line, get out the checkered flag and “pause.” Just like the days before Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) – you made it through the first hour and fifty minutes of the movie and have to suddenly leave. You’re left wondering how the show is going to end. Some would say that’s how the South Dakota Legislature ended last Friday.

Normally, we would have rolled out the General Bill containing all increased expenditures and revenues to the State’s General Fund. Normally, the Appropriations Committee would decide the fate of any pending amendments and pass the General Bill out of Appropriations. Members of the Senate and House would have debate and take action on its final passage.

But, this year hasn’t exactly been normal. Going into this Session, everyone agreed the most pressing issue would be the budget. Once we heard the Governor’s budget in December, I believe everyone in the Legislature, both Republicans and Democrats, agreed we needed to make budget cuts and not use the \$31.8 million of our reserves to balance the 2011 budget.

Everyone agreed, that is, until tough decisions had to be made on ending the structural deficit through pragmatic cuts and eliminating inefficient government services. The minority is in constant campaign mode – promising the moon and delivering nothing. Every year when the budget is finished, the same group that proposes a 3% cap on the growth of state government proposes to increase education funding by 4% a year. What color is the sky in their world?

The Republicans I caucus with certainly don’t have a mission to go to Pierre and cut K-12 education, weaken our competitiveness at the university level, give no raises to our state employees or stifle economic development. However, at the end of the day, we are criticized because we have to come out of campaign mode, make the tough votes and deliver a balanced budget to the people of South Dakota. I won’t apologize for that.

I told you at the beginning of the Session that South Dakota will have over \$52 million dollars of additional mandatory Medicaid expenses that the Federal Government hasn’t reimbursed the state for. Now, there is talk of the Feds coming up with an additional \$35 million due to South Dakota. We have a budget that accomplishes our goal at the beginning of the year. The Republican proposal that I support contains the necessary cuts to balance our budget without raising your taxes, or using our limited reserves. However, I believe it is important to see if additional funds are coming from D.C. before we cast a vote on the final budget. If the funds come through, I am hopeful to restore funding to many deserving agencies and branches of state government. On the other hand, if the money doesn’t come through, I am also committed to living up to my promise to you to deliver a balanced budget while maintaining the integrity of our reserves.

I’d like to invite you to participate in the Legislative process by contacting me with any questions or concerns at [Sen.RussellOlson@state.sd.us](mailto:Sen.RussellOlson@state.sd.us) or (605) 773-3251.

I am proud to have the opportunity to serve you. Please pray for the men and women of the 211th serving our state and our country.

Respectfully,

Russell Olson  
District 8 Senator