

"Cookie Monster thief, not liar."
-Cookie Monster



Greetings!

So much has happened since our last newsletter. A big change is coming. How will you handle it? Our new president is ready and awaiting his post while our current one continues working on his legacy of environmental protection by [banning offshore drilling in the Arctic](#)... something to be thankful for this holiday season.

Unsettling emails have been flooding our inboxes ever since election day. Environmental organizations are warning that current protections will be stripped down or even eliminated to allow for a total industry take-over of our natural resources. In these times, everything counts. For the next four years, it is more imperative than ever that we remain both vigilant and vocal; seeking, knowing, sharing and speaking truth to each other and to our elected officials at all levels of government.

Many Americans claim to be scared that the next four years may be full of bigotry, xenophobia, racism and hate, but it is up to each and every one of us to create the reality we choose. Government policy cannot dictate our personal beliefs about our fellow human beings. Every day we have the power to choose love and respect over negativity.

Sometimes things need to get worse in order to get better, so perhaps that is the phase our nation is entering into. As we work to "make America great again," we must work to help build the America we want to see. It's time to put our money where our mouth is & focus on the sectors of the economy that we want to see succeed and grow (eg. sustainable energy, organic/local food, affordable education, high-mileage vehicles). Everything we buy and consume directly affects the economy and supports one company/industry over another. We cast a vote with each dollar we spend, let's vote consciously and wisely; the future of our great nation depends on it.

As a follow-up to "Bunny with the Money" featured last month, Jim Dunn has created another entertaining way to think about utilization of our tax money with his feature story entitled "[Cookie Jar Finances](#)." Lycoming County's budget is now under consideration, with public meetings behind us and a vote quickly approaching. Jim explains how and why gas impact fees are filling in the gaps in the county budget rather than being utilized according to the Act 13 fund's intent.

Our final article "[Constructing our Energy Future](#)" highlights current energy news and provides further food for thought on the matter.

By paying attention, speaking out and working together for the health and well-being of

our fellow citizens, we can create the future we envision.

We are very grateful for YOU! Thank you for caring and staying informed. Have a safe and enjoyable holiday!

Cookie Jar Finances

by Jim Dunn, RDA Member

Magic is the art of illusion. Something will mysteriously appear or disappear right before your eyes, much in the same way our impact fee is allocated and spent. Politicians conjure up a recipe of sugar and spice and everything nice, describing how they manage to avoid tax increases, while dancing around the question of inflation with chagrin.

The cost of inflation is real. Something around three percent for COLA (cost of living allowance) and much higher are the rates of inflation from the rising costs of healthcare insurance and pensions. In addition, the substantial costs of unfunded mandates and infrastructure improvements are skyrocketing. It becomes glaringly obvious that it costs more every year to achieve the same results.

That's not late-breaking news for anyone. Many municipalities have been treading water for years. So how is it possible to believe that costs go up every year to maintain our government, yet no additional money is being spent?

Magic, of course. They wave their magic wand, exclaim "*Abracadabra!*" and voila, money appears.

These Houdinis are often a trio; some good, some bad and some in between. But their tricks are all the same. They create a distraction to draw your eye and retrieve a treasure from a secret compartment, the illusion complete.

These slights of hand are documented in the budget, if you can decipher it -- pages and pages of numbers in funds with un-intuitive names. Without knowledge of the accounts, definitions of terms or descriptions of purpose, these accounts and documents appear "Greek" to the typical citizen. But not to worry because elected officials do it all with transparency, right before your eyes.

The definition of transparent is, "Allowing light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly seen."

The way transparency is applied to government actions is quite amusing. The term is often used to create a perception of doing something right: "We were transparent in our decision making." Being transparent doesn't imply that you have made the right decision or even a good decision, but only that you made a decision; one that was heard or written down, effectively witnessed in some manner.

In government, magic is pulling money from one fund to pay for another and hoping nobody catches you with your hand in the cookie jar. The old saying is "Robbing Peter to pay Paul." If someone cries foul, seeing the hand in the jar: "You took my cookies when I wasn't looking," you'll hear "It's okay, the jar has been on the counter in plain view." Nothing is illegal with that process or outcome. It's just not the right thing to do.

We must make sure our leaders spend money according to the original, established intent of the funding source!

The Act 13 Impact Fee is Lycoming County's current "bunny in the hat" trick. Once upon a time "the bunny" was the general fund reserve, until it was tapped dry. The

unloading of landfill surplus leveled the gaps for a spell. But those days are gone and gas money fuels the current magicians.

If it were up to me, we would use this money as it was intended -- to cover the local impacts of drilling. I propose we mitigate the impacts to our forest and our recreational resources. Next we shall invest in our critical infrastructure -- rebuilding our bridges and roads, modernizing our transportation system and repairing and expanding our water and sewer lines, all at once, every year until we have built a solid foundation for the next generation to build upon.

A solid foundation could replace our current "house of cards" structure, cloaked in an illusion of transparency.

As we move forward pulling the bunnies out of the rabbit hole, we must also remember to keep our eyes on the cookie jar.

[Click here to view the full article as a separate document.](#)

Where Does Our Tax Money Go?



A bipartisan group known as the LYCOMING COUNTY CITIZENS FOR HOTEL TAX ACCOUNTABILITY is concerned about the lack of transparency and accountability in the use of millions of dollars generated through hotel tax. These public funds are paid by hotel customers.

If you agree that it is time for transparency in the use of our hotel tax, we invite you to sign on to a letter asking the Lycoming County Commissioners to hold the Chamber of Commerce accountable for appropriate use of this public tax money. Please SIGN ON at the link below.

[Click here to sign the request.](#)

Constructing our Energy Future

Much is happening in various parts of the country regarding our energy future. A few short years from now, the energy policy dictated by local and state officials will mean very different subsidies, landscapes and sustainable economies (or lack thereof) for different parts of America.

One Massachusetts town is in the process of [converting a coal-fired power plant into a solar facility](#). Meanwhile, Lycoming County's Panda Patriot [natural gas-fired power plant is complete](#). The new plant is currently providing power for nearly one million residences. [Panda Power Funds](#) has also built a "sister" generating facility in Bradford County which entered commercial service approximately two months prior to the Patriot plant. Panda is also building the Hummel Station plant in Sunbury, PA, which is one of the largest coal to natural gas power replacement projects in the country. Sadly, these facilities affirm PA's dependence on fossil fuel and delay any move to sustainable energy for at least the next 50 years.

Because these new facilities mean an increased demand for fracked gas, PA legislators (Scarnati, Baker and Yaw) are joining [the fight](#) against the Delaware River Basin's moratorium on gas drilling to allow fracking in the eastern region of PA. Hopefully the [river's current salt water issue](#) will push any such consideration much further down the line.

Pipeline protests are quickly becoming not only freedom of speech, but also human rights issues. Two documentary film-makers are [facing decades in prison](#) for filming such protests. North Dakota's governor is frustrated in [his unwavering stance](#) and the pipeline company claims there is no other way to re-route the Dakota Access Pipeline as [Native Americans and their supporters refuse to leave](#) their posts. [Click here if you would like to be directed to the Standing Rock Sioux's Action page.](#)

What kind of energy future do you wish to see for your community?

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