



THE CARBON VALLEY HERALD'S ELECTION 2008

Amendment 51: State Sales Tax Increase for Services for People with Developmental Disabilities

By Jen Reeder
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Amendment 51 proposes an amendment to the Colorado statutes – not the constitution – that would add a sales tax to pay for services for people with developmental disabilities and to help eliminate the waiting lists for services. The increase would raise the state sales and use tax from its current 2.9 percent to 3 percent on July 1, 2009, and from 3 percent to 3.1 percent on July 1, 2010. Therefore, after two years of implementation, a person making a \$10 purchase would pay 2 cents of tax for this initiative.

It is estimated that the measure would raise approximately \$89 million for people with developmental disabilities such as autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy in the first year of the tax increase and \$186 million in the second.

The ballot question is: "Shall state taxes be increased \$186.1

million annually after full implementation by an amendment to the Colorado revised statutes concerning an increase in the state sales and use tax to provide funding for long-term services for persons with developmental disabilities, and, in connection therewith, increasing the rate of the state sales and use tax beginning on July 1, 2009, by one-tenth of one percent in each of the next two fiscal years; permitting the state to retain and spend all revenues from the new tax, notwithstanding the state spending limit; requiring an amount equal to the net revenue from the new tax to be deposited in the newly created developmental disabilities long-term services cash fund; requiring the money in the fund to be used to provide long-term services for persons with developmental disabilities; and prohibiting reductions in the level of state appropriations in the annual general appropriation bill existing on the effective date of this

measure for long-term services for persons with developmental disabilities?"

The case for:

"The motivation behind Amendment 51 is the potential crisis because of the waiting list for services for people with developmental disabilities, that includes people who have a diagnosis of mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome and other chromosomal disorders," said Marijo Rymer, executive director of Arc of Colorado, a nonprofit organization dedicated to advocacy for people with developmental disabilities.

Rymer said there are at least 12,400 people in Colorado who are eligible for services but are on the waitlist, which can take 10 or 15 years. There are currently about 11,500 people in Colorado who do receive services, she said.

"As our state grows, as services and resources are more and more compressed, the waiting list grows because we have not been able even remotely to keep up with the demand," Rymer said.

Services for children include speech and language therapy, nursing services and feeding tube management. Services for adults include transportation, job training and employment. Some people require comprehensive 24/7 services to avoid institutionalization.

"That's even a bigger problem now because there are no real institutional services in the state to begin with," Rymer said, noting that there is an admissions freeze at the state-run regional centers for emergency cases in Pueblo, Grand Junction and Wheat Ridge.

Another part of the problem is the "disaster waiting to happen" because of the over 9,000 children and adults with developmental disabilities who are living with caregivers over the age of 60.

"We get calls constantly from people who say things like, 'I'm 83 years old and my son is 60 – I don't know what I'm going to do,'" Rymer said. "There's no safety net for those people. It doesn't exist."

She added that getting people eligible for services off the waitlist would allow the caregivers to work full-time; often they are under- or unemployed because they need to be at home to care for their loved ones.

"So there are economic benefits to the state as well," she said.

Rymer pointed out that Coloradans do not pay sales tax on necessities like groceries, gas, utilities, prescription drugs or medical services.

"For the things that we basically need to live, there's no (tax) increase," she said. "We're asking voters to raise their taxes a very little bit – 2 cents on \$10."

Rymer said that the measure is worded so that the money raised would be dedicated to providing services to people with disabilities, rather than administration.

"It's directly to serve people," she said.

There is a bipartisan effort to pass Amendment 51, she said, and former First Lady Frances Owens is the honorary chair of the campaign. Numerous organizations have joined the coalition to pass the initiative, including churches, the Colorado Nurses' Association and Foster Care and Adoption Agencies of Colorado.

"These people are our neighbors and our kids," Rymer said. "We can't wait."

For more information, visit www.EndColoradoWaitlist.org.

The case against:

State Rep. Douglas Bruce, the author of TABOR, opposes Amendment 51 because he opposes raising taxes.

"We have the three largest state tax hikes in history on the ballot: 51, 58 and 59. (Amendment) 51 doesn't have vocal opposition because people are afraid of looking mean," Bruce said. "They're trying to slip this through by laying a guilt trip on people."

He said there are numerous diseases, and wondered if all of them should also be funded by taxes.

"Cancer's bad, should we have a cancer tax? This is earmarking an illness," Bruce said.

The state budget has increased 426 percent since 1984, Bruce said, citing his frustration that so much revenue isn't considered sufficient.

"It's never enough for socialists. They always say, 'This is for the children' or 'This is for people with mental problems.' It is dangerous and insidious to allow a private corporation to try to buy a ballot issue that will give them over \$100 million a year," Bruce said.

He charged that passing Amendment 51 would further

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GLENN VAAD - KNOWS COUNTY AND STATE GOVERNMENT!

Glenn Vaad is currently the State House Representative for House District 48.

Proudly served as District 2's Weld County Commissioner (2 Terms)

Past coordinator for the Department of Public Health and Environment, Social Services, Planning Services and Public Works.

Member of the St. Vrain Valley School Board for 9 years.

CDOT Legislative Liason to the State General Assembly for 7 years.

Secretary, Colorado Transportation Commission (5 Years)

Weld County Planning Commission (2 Years - Past Chair)

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"It has been a pleasure serving the people of this northern Colorado district and I hope to continue in that service."

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Fire board supports mill levy increase

By Mountain View Fire District

Mountain View Fire District's board of directors has adopted a resolution that will ask voters to approve a mill levy increase in the general election to be held Nov. 4.

The ballot question will ask voters for 3.93 mills and equates to \$3,347,245 annually in the first full fiscal year. The new mill levy, if approved, would be 11.747 mills, increased from the District's current 7.817 mills.

A 3.93 mill equates to approximately \$6.55 a month or \$78.60 per year for a home with an assessed value of \$200,000; and \$9.83 month or \$117.90 per year for a home with an assessed value of \$300,000.

The district has determined that a tax increase is required to offset the increasing costs of fire protection due to rapidly increasing operational costs and will enable the district to effectively meet the increasing demands resulting from a 79 percent increase in population and more-than-double emergency call volume within the district since its last mill levy increase. It will also allow the district to hire enough

personnel to ensure a nationally-recognized safe staffing level for its fire trucks.

Mountain View points out that they have not had a mill levy increase in 17 years and has asked twice in the past few years – both times the measure was defeated.

"Opponents of this increase may assert that even if needed this is not the time, given the economy.

Certainly, we are neither insensitive to, nor are we immune to the effects of a slowed economy and increased costs. But, the last two times the district has proposed an increase, the economy was in good to very good shape. We hope the voters recognize the district's need and share our optimism that any current economic slowdown is temporary, and that investing in safety services is the right thing to," said District Spokesman Jesse Hodgson.



If approved, the funds will hire additional firefighters to meet National Safety Standards, purchase additional lifesaving medical and rescue equipment, provide necessary improvements to reduce response times and

provide additional revenue to meet increasing vehicle maintenance costs.

Mountain View Fire Chief Randy Templeton said that

changes must be made whether the measure passes or fails.

"The public has the absolute right to choose the level of service they want, whether fire protection or emergency medical response. They will indicate that level by their vote. If voters approve the measure, we will be able to improve and provide the services that we, in our professional judgment, believe they deserve," Templeton said.

"But, if (the mill levy) is defeated,

it is still my duty to ensure the safety of my firefighters as much as practically possible. Study after study – including National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards – affirms a safe staffing level to be no fewer than four firefighters per fire truck. Our current staffing of two firefighters per truck is both inadequate and dangerous."

Templeton said that the status quo is not acceptable – given the safety studies conducted by the United States Fire Administration and others – and changes will have to be made to increase staffing.

"Without the funds to hire more firefighters to ensure safe staffing, we will have to examine taking some fire trucks and stations out of service, and redistributing the personnel," Templeton said.

He and Hodgson caution that response times will likely increase beyond its current level of 7 minutes 37 seconds – almost twice the NFPA recommended response time.

"At this point, as fire chief, I cannot advocate for or against the mill levy increase, but it is my duty to report the facts as I understand them," Templeton said.

Ken Buck pledges to continue the war on crime

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Office where he was the chief of the criminal division.

He has also served as an instructor at the University of Denver Law School and the National Institute of Trial Advocacy. He was elected Weld County DA in 2004.

Buck's favorite book is "Under God: George Washington and the Questions of Church and State" by Tara Ross and Joseph Smith, his favorite movie is "Gladiator" and he enjoys Toby Keith's music.

"For the past three years, I have been proud to lead the dedicated men and women at the District Attorney's Office in the pursuit of justice. We have built many bridges, made many friends and earned much respect as we work together to achieve the office's mission: To seek justice, promote public safety and fight for our community. Along with the outstanding law enforcement agencies in Weld, we have made great strides toward these three goals.

"More than a dozen violent predators were sentenced to prison for the remainder of their lives during my first term as DA. This office continually fights for maximum sentences in cases ranging from first-degree murder and domestic violence to vehicular homicide and sexual assault. As a result, hundreds of defendants will spend many years in prison

and off of Weld County's streets.

"Fighting for justice in the courtroom is only one part of the battle against crime. This office, in an ongoing effort to promote public safety, has provided presentations to more than 8,000 people in Weld County. Whether speaking to the community about identity theft or senior fraud, we know that information sharing is a valuable crime-fighting tool that helps maintain a valuable bridge between this office and our community.

"To truly initiate lasting change, however, we must find innovative, collaborative and cost-effective solutions to the problems we face in Weld County including drug use and financial crimes.

"In 2006, this office along with the Weld County Jail, Probation, the State Public Defenders Office, Island Grove Regional Treatment Center and North Range Behavioral Health Center came together to form ICAPP (In-Custody Alternative Placement Program). This program was designed for defendants better served by mental health and/or substance abuse treatment than jail time and aims to reduce recidivism and, in turn, ease jail overcrowding.

"This same group has recently come together again, along with the Weld District Court, to form the Weld County Drug Court. Again, the goal of the program is

to address the underlying issues causing the criminal actions of the defendant.

"Financial crimes are also an area of concern as our county deals with fast-paced growth and an unusually high foreclosure rate. The White Collar Crime Task Force, a collaborative effort between the DA's Office and area banks, has resulted in cumulative sentences of more than 21 years in prison, 94 years of probation and more than \$2 million in restitution to victims. The partnership has proven to be a success for county businesses and has resulted in a safer place for consumers.

"I have also worked closely with our Congressional delegation and county commissioners to raise more than \$1 million in federal, state and foundation grants to sustain programs such as the Juvenile Assessment Center (which has helped more than 1,100 families), the Juvenile Diversion Program (which handles juvenile cases at a fraction of the price of prosecution), the Truancy Diversion Program, the Weld County Gang Task Force and a DUI Prevention Program. Receiving outside funding for these programs means that county dollars can be used to fund other valuable county projects."

Ken Buck can be reached at weldda@co.weld.co.us.

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accelerate the downturn in the economy, and that "their numbers are fraudulent." He said some figures are based on a family of three (the legislature's voter guide states that a three-person household with around \$55,000 in annual income is estimated to pay an additional \$20 in state sales taxes in the first year of the increase and \$40 in subsequent years), but "babies don't pay sales tax."

He also said that the tax is promoted as a penny on \$5, but because cash registers don't recognize percentages of a penny and instead round up to a whole number, it's a penny on \$2.50.

"You can't collect a half a penny at the cash register," Bruce said.

If Amendment 51 were to pass, he said there is no guarantee that the money would go to help people with developmental disabilities because it is an amendment to a statute rather than the state constitution. Once it passed, the legislature could use the money for something else, like "salaries, parks or prisons," Bruce said.

"They can pull the old switcheroo. That's how the system works. It's a sham," he said. "People are trusting the legislature won't steal it, which it will. They have the power to divert the money anywhere they want.

"This is why they tried to push me out of government – because I tell the truth," Bruce said.

For more information, visit www.NoStateTaxHike.com.