

THE COLORADO SPRINGS GAZETTE

OTHER VOICES

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According to Paul Prentice (*Other Voices*, Saturday, October 8), resetting baseline spending limits through Referendum C is bad because it defeats TABOR goals. But adjusting the baseline *supports* the goals of Coloradans who value education, transportation and other public services. If you want better roads, having an extra tax refund from the TABOR defined “surplus” (on top of the usual refunds for over-withholding of taxes) is not going to help you get those roads. We have to work collectively -- much as the smallest-government-possible folks hate that word -- to build and maintain roads. Similarly, if you are a typical college student, your refund from the TABOR-defined surplus will be way below the average refund amounts you are hearing about from the pro or con side. The amount of your refund is tied by law to your income in the prior year. People who have the lowest incomes will get the least back

A student at any public college would be much better off getting help from the rest of us to keep tuition down and then paying through taxes -- after graduating and getting a good job -- to help future students. And if you value moving Colorado *up* from the bottom of the list in childhood immunizations and *down* from the top of the list for incidence of whooping cough, refunds from the TABOR “surplus” are a pretty inefficient way to go. Sending those dollars directly to the state and county health departments is easier and more cost effective than figuring out how and where to donate part of your refund --and hoping enough other farsighted folks help donate to these programs.

Is changing the TABOR limit to allow these expenditures a tax increase? Those who say yes must think that our current President Bush is responsible for a big tax increase on wealthy Americans. Under his cuts in tax rates, some have done so well that they pay more dollars in taxes now than a few years ago. And if you were out of work part of last year and made less, you paid less income tax. Was that a tax cut for you? Don't think so. If you are back on the job this year, you'll pay more tax than last year -- but maybe about the same as before you lost your job. Have you experienced a tax increase? Once again, the answer is no.

Referendum C allows new revenues from an economic recovery to backfill cuts of the past few years. Some talk about government needing to “tighten its belt” when times are bad. We've been there, done that. State funding per student in higher ed has been cut by over 1/3. We have completely eliminated state funds for immunization, juvenile diversion, and many other small programs whose benefits spilled over to all of us. It's

been proven: more college educated people create a stronger economy. It's been proven: immunizing children saves future health care costs. It's been proven: juvenile diversion programs decrease future crime and save money on courts, prisons, insurance claims, etc.

If we don't make the adjustments to TABOR spending limits which Gov. Owens is publicly supporting as necessary -- both for Colorado and for preserving the key elements of TABOR -- let's think about what will happen. The Colorado economy may be booming while existing TABOR spending limits force us to *act* as if we are in a recession. We'll be belt-tightening while the economy is flush, *not* because times are bad. If Referendum C and D fail to pass, it won't be long before we hear the following. A growing chorus of Colorado citizens will bemoan how stupid it is for government to be refunding more money than ever while it fails to repair roads and schools, etc. etc. These will be people who never truly understood the issue because they bought into the confusion the anti-Referendum C and D campaigns are sowing.

The Colorado business community is solidly behind C and D and willing to give up their share of potential TABOR surplus refunds. They understand that business will prosper more with a strong Colorado economy. How about the rest of us? Do we value good roads, educational opportunity and proven prevention in health care and juvenile crime? Do we understand the role that these play in maintaining a strong economy and society? Or will we fall prey to what George Will recently called an "ideological fetish" for doctrinal purity about anything surrounding TABOR?

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