

## Sheriff's Car Taxes

Last March, County Supervisors passed two of County Sheriff Ed Bonner's three proposed taxes on cars and trucks registered in Placer County. The League of Placer County Tax Payers were concerned that discussions between the Supervisors and Sheriff's Department may have resulted in violations of State laws, including the Brown Act. The League, under the Public Information Act, requested a record of all documents, notes, and meetings among the parties prior to the enactment of the two vehicle taxes.

The League has received copies of a number of the requested items, not the original records, and we are reviewing them. A troubling issue has emerged in that several pages of the Sheriff's submitted calendar notes have blocked-out sections. These pages list times, places and dates of meetings that took place between the Sheriff and one or more Supervisors and staff, but parts of those same pages are blocked out. Other meetings and events at those times are not shown. No enclosure from the Sheriff's office was included to explain the missing information. The League has requested an explanation from the Sheriff's office.

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## Why Can't A Politician Think Like A Taxpayer?

At some point in almost every conversation with many elected officials, the official will make the following statement or one like it, "You know, I am a taxpayer too." In the broadest sense the statement is true. Politicians do pay many of the same taxes that oppress taxpayers. Not on their perks, of course, but on the other sources of income, spending and property ownership.

Paying taxes may make a politician a taxpayer, but not necessarily a taxpayer. A taxpayer believes public money that is derived from taxes should be dedicated entirely, or primarily, to provide essential services at the lowest feasible cost; a politician believes that spending money to satisfy the whims of isolated constituent groups is justified, particularly if the groups are vociferous, are generous with campaign contributions, or consist of one-issue-voters. A taxpayer believes that new programs and projects should be funded by reallocations within the existing budget; a politician believes that every new program or project, even expanded ones, requires new taxes, increased taxes or new bonds. A taxpayer believes that public employees are employees; a politician believes that public employees are mentors.

Examples from Placer County would fill this issue of *Tax Talk*. Here are a few that come to mind.

Members of the Placer County Board of Supervisors have a structured mechanism to distribute taxpayer money for nonessential services. The Board has authorized each Supervisor \$20,000 every year for "revenue sharing," a euphemism for allocating taxpayer money for whatever special events or causes that strike any Supervisor's fancy at any particular meeting. Albeit many of the recipients are worthy, but none are essential and few, if any, are proper County expenditures. Particularly odious is the thinking that is expressed by a Supervisor saying, "I gave \$1,000 of my money to Y" or the representative of a worthy cause saying, "Supervisor X gave us \$1,000 of his money." Other Placer County governments distribute taxpayer money in a less structured way. For example, the City of Auburn includes \$143,350 for support of community projects without itemizing the improper city expenditures; this is about 60% of the projected deficit.

Few Placer County property tax bills do not include money for special funds, bond

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## Health Care Stabs Business

One of the great issues the State Legislature is grappling with is health care and, particularly, affordable health care for the approximately 6.5 million Californians who do not have health insurance. Some don't want it or don't want to pay for it, and some cannot afford current health care costs.

How this plays out in the State budget debate is that health insurance for the uninsured would cost about \$2 billion a year, and while there is a rainy day surplus from last year's budget that Democrats are willing to spend, Republicans balk at eliminating that cushion for emergencies.

Assembly Leader Fabian Nunez (D) has proposed AB8, a bill that would tax businesses 7.5% of their payroll to fund the health insurance "needs." Businesses may avoid the tax by funding health insurance for their employees that meets the State requirements. Either way, employers would be funding the health care costs and thus

remove it from State budget requirements.

However, AB8 could be quite a disaster for small businesses that are unable to afford or purchase reasonable health insurance for their employees. AB8 is a "play or pay" issue for business and there are no exceptions for business hardship in the bill.

At a Senate Health Committee hearing on July 11, held open for voting, not enough members attended to pass the issue. The Committee membership has a Democratic majority. AB8 will now go to the Senate floor for passage where Democrats also have a large majority.

By taking health care out of budget negotiations the Democrats will push to fund additional programs for drug addiction and families that offer foster care for children, plus cost-of-living increases in grants to the aged, blind and disabled.

Telephone or write your State Senator (see page 4) and tell them to oppose AB8.

— Wally Reemelin

## Ant Swarms Yield Problem Solving Clues

Individual ants lack brain power, but as a group, they can accomplish complex tasks. Now, scientists are trying to adapt that process, known as swarm intelligence, to make complicated problems easier for human organizations.

Animals tackle problems by unconsciously exchanging cues with other animals. If, for example, an animal stops running, a nearby animal will do the same. That mechanism allows ants to forage for food and bees to select a perfect-size hive. "Ants aren't smart. Ant colonies are," says Deborah Gordon, a biologist at Stanford University.

The military has used swarm theory to survey dangerous areas. In one experiment, 66 robots were sent to locate six

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## REFORM Campaign Finance Reform

The sword aimed at the heart of freedom of political speech, the McCain-Feingold Law of 2002, was severely dented by the recent Supreme Court decision that the *Federal Election Commission cannot prevent citizens groups from running broadcast ads discussing pending legislative issues close to an election*. This breath of fresh air prunes back a vicious arm of McCain-Feingold, one of the most onerous and stupid laws to come down the legislative pipe in recent years. The main result of McCain-Feingold was to greatly limit individual political speech and spawned a host of 527 advocacy committees with unlimited spending ability, causing the greatest increase in political campaign spending in history.

Other campaign finance reform laws have also trampled on freedom of speech, but failed, like McCain-Feingold, to actually reform anything, but did limit freedom of expression.

One hundred years ago the first federal campaign finance law, the Tillman Act, named for its sponsor, South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman, banned corporate contributions to federal campaigns. "Pitchfork Ben" Tillman advocated lynching black voters and was instrumental in establishing Jim Crow policies in the southern states. His law neatly fit with his segregationist agenda, as corporate money primarily backed antisegregationist Republican politicians.

Modern era campaign finance reform shows an equally partisan slant. In 1970, Democrats were fearful that support for big government was waning because of Republican congressional gains and the election of Richard Nixon to the Presidency. To stem this tide, the Democrats passed the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) in 1971 and amended it 3 years later. This protected Democrat sources of support as labor unions were exempt from the law which stringently limited political contributions and any expenditures that might "influence" an election. It also mandated disclosure of political contributions as small as \$10, established a system for tax-financed presidential races and set up a new bureaucracy, the Federal

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