

Don't let some of the letters of the alphabet confuse you

October 17, 2022



Two years ago, voters passed Measures R and S, the former by a resounding almost two-thirds majority, the latter by a razor thin margin. Both measures increase sales tax revenue by 13.4 percent in the City and County, respectively.

I advocated against both taxes.

It is both misleading and annoying when proponents of retaining both taxes claim erroneously the increase is only a penny. The difference between 7.25 and 8.25 cents is \$2 million more city revenue added to the general fund, a little more than a single Lincoln cent.

Voters in both the city and county will have another bite at the apple to affirm or deny the new tax, in November. Confusingly, the sales tax measures are yes means no and no means yes. A yes vote rescinds the increase. A no vote retains the current higher sales tax rates.

Measure T: The City sales tax. City-registered voters will see BOTH repeal measures , on their city ballots.

The 2.42 square mile Crescent City jurisdiction is the very heart and soul of our community. Enhancing our City is primary.

Measure U: The County sales tax. The needs of our Rhode Island-sized County of Del Norte County are quite different than the city and the various focal points throughout the county serve small pockets of population similarly funded by the state.

Del Norte is a political extension of Sacramento and derives much of its revenue including a 19-cent return on every property tax dollar from Del Norte County paid to the state. One need not be reminded the politics of funding government. The yield from Sacramento is modest at best and never will be satisfactory to the county's needs.

Allow me to be very clear. The intended use of Measures R and S are positive and productive; no one can dispute that. The questions remain are both tax increases justified and affordable, as supporters claim?

I think not.

The city budget encompasses about \$44 million annually, which includes water and sewer services outside of city limits. About \$10.4 million is general fund dollars which has-been bolstered 20 percent via the passage of Measure S.

After observing how the city has allocated the approximate \$2 million in realized revenue, I must candidly admit I may have misjudged city needs not just to survive but actually flourish.

What changed my mind?

During an on-going City Council request by Chief Richard Griffin to equip officers with appropriate and pricey weapons and related tools to be allocated from Measure S funds, a rather ignorant and misinformed public comments speaker challenged the expenditure as wasteful and unnecessary. The comment was offensive and disrespectful to the officers' dangerous work. I was outraged. The next public speaker via ZOOM was me. I articulated my justified and harsh criticism on the non-city resident who irresponsibly spoke before my comment and defended the perilous work our officers do, often thanklessly, every shift.

I'm satisfied funds are not being squandered. Here's how the new taxes are being allocated in the City

Fire Department: \$597,000.

Police services: \$740,000.

Street improvements: \$1.531 Million

Fred Endert Pool: \$1.523 Million.

Closer examination of the funding is convincing. Repealing the increase deteriorates quality of life. Do I concur every allocation is imperative? No!

What I observe is the greater good served by preserving the current city sales tax.

No one likes or welcomes a tax increase, especially in high poverty-affected Crescent City. I'm no different; however, I can appreciate the benefit of retaining the higher sales tax to improve Crescent City. At the risk of sending more shoppers to Brookings, I see more positives than negatives which will improve and make Crescent City a beautiful and special place. Numbers don't misrepresent. Visitors continue to come to Crescent City.

I don't see it the same way for the county.

The just-adopted \$182 million budget includes a \$38.7 million general fund, the largest-ever growth of government in the somewhat flexible GF budget. In no year can I recall has the board ever attempted to trim or reallocate general fund dollars. The budget has and continues to rise like helium. As a result of this spending, do you observe an appreciable improvement in the quality of life in Del Norte County (crickets)?

The mercenary board of supervisors, without benefit of an ad hoc oversight committee, followed the city direction in voting unanimously to place the tax increase on the 2020 ballot and a sliver more of obedient and dutiful voters approved the increase. Much of the newly-derived revenue, about \$1.795 million was larger than projected. About 50 percent of those Measure R funds have been directed to law enforcement, community enforcement (development) and emergency services. Along with the funding includes increased salaried positions. The remaining 50 percent is directed for unannounced infrastructure projects, with the very opaque goal of improving dilapidated and neglected county properties (including the jail and perhaps the dog kennel) and addressing deferred maintenance.

These infrastructure windfalls will continue to balloon annually in perpetuity with no intended target. Assessing new taxes on the public, without identified and specific projects is irresponsible, wasteful and dishonest. Putting folks' money back into their pockets is responsible, trustworthy, honest AND stimulates the local economy. Growing government is a burden and retards prosperity. The resulting growth of government will create more dependency on an already beleaguered taxpayer.

Further, the county also derives SB1 State funding for road improvements. The city has no such funding mechanism for roads repairs.

According to the recently adopted 22-23 Budget, funding animal services has been increased about \$78,000 from the previous fiscal year. These budgeted funds can address the staffing issues at Animal Control, irrespective of whether County Measure U is repealed or not. Wiser folks than I contend it is imprudent to clarify funding for Animal Control until the voters have their say on the county sales tax.

There are those who disdain and mistrust all government, dwelling on its failures to solve long-standing problems. At times, I share my frustration with the ineffectiveness of government but I'm not one of those "dwellers" who choose to "... throw the baby out with the bathwater." The city general sales tax increase is needed and justified: the county sales tax is not.

EYE ON DEL NORTE's position is split.

NO on City Measure T: Status quo. Retains tax.

YES on County Measure U: Rescinds tax to 7.25 percent.

Still confused? I hope not.

Roger Gitlin is a retired Del County Supervisor and resides of Crescent City.