



# Taxing matters

**Watching the impeachment trial** these past few weeks made me queasy, knowing the Republicans would undoubtedly acquit him, weakening our constitution and placing my grandchildren's future in peril. Surely our founders never dreamed our elected leaders could be so shallow and care so little about our democracy, instead choosing to twist themselves into preposterous arguments to protect a man they know is immoral and unworthy of the office. It's profoundly disheartening, and I'm afraid our constitution will never be the same after Donald J. Trump.

Back in 1789, our nation's leaders were more hopeful, although they also harbored doubts about their new country weathering inevitable political storms. Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to French scientist Jean-Baptiste LeRoy, telling him "Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

So, let's turn our attention to inevitable taxes, especially those imposed at a state level where presumably we have more of an opportunity for change. While Nevadans enjoy a much lower rate of taxation than most states, we pay for that privilege by continually ranking at or near the bottom in funding for education, human services and infrastructure a citizenry naturally expects and desires. And our taxes are more regressive, since we lack a progressive state income tax (and Washoe County had the highest sales tax rate in the state at 8.265 percent until Clark County surpassed us this year at 8.375 percent), meaning our poorer residents pay a much higher percentage of their income than their wealthier neighbors.

We've heard plenty of excuses for not fixing this economic injustice from Democrats who, once they're in office, become loathe to change the status quo. They tell us a new governor can't fix it during his—we've never had a female governor—first legislative session because of the short time frame between the election

and Nevada's biennial legislature. He can't do it during his second session because of a looming re-election. And then it's just not the right time in the third session and in the fourth, because, well, he doesn't want to jinx the chances of another Democrat's election by passing controversial tax reforms.

The irony of the huge tax hikes led by Republican Governors Kenny Guinn and Brian Sandoval due to recessionary pressures is not lost on me. But neither sufficiently addressed taxation inequities.

Now the Clark County Education Association has announced it will take two new tax plans directly to the taxpayers through initiative petitions, gambling that a strong signature campaign will give them leverage to negotiate a better deal for K-12 education with Governor Steve Sisolak. The union wants to increase Nevada's gambling tax rate in the highest tier from 6.75 percent to 9.75 percent, a move sure to be popular with everyone but the big gamblers.

Their second plan is far more problematic from an equity lens, as they want to

increase the sales tax even more by raising the portion that goes to schools from 2.6 percent to 4.1 percent, a 58 percent increase. This would bring the sales tax in Clark County up to almost 10 percent, one of the highest in the country.

The union estimates the two tax increases will generate about \$1.4 billion every year, with a billion dollars coming from the regressive sales tax.

Meanwhile, many mining companies pay next to nothing—and many, indeed, pay nothing, thanks to overly generous deductions—to Nevada's general fund, and wealthy corporations like the Raiders and Tesla get enormous tax breaks. They all boast about their charitable contributions as if that somehow makes up for the hundreds of millions they don't contribute to the state's coffers.

While death and taxes are indeed inescapable, economic justice demands we ease the burden on the working class. Let's pick on someone else to pay our bills. □

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