

The Taxpayers' Association of Indian River County February, 2015 Presidents Message

The Taxpayers' Association of Indian River County wholeheartedly agrees that it is vitally important that local government do all that they reasonably can to return the Indian River Lagoon to a healthy condition. The health of the Lagoon is of utmost importance not only to our County, but all of the residents up and down our beautiful Treasure Coast. Most people list the Lagoon's health as one of their top priorities when it comes to maintaining the wonderful quality of life we all enjoy here and The Taxpayers' Association shares that viewpoint.

Recently this desire to improve our Lagoon's health has led some to actively seek a governmental fix to the problem. While clearly the Lagoon is an area where we feel local government can and should be directly involved in taking a leadership position, we also want our elected officials to move forward in the most effective ways possible, especially when it comes to forming new entities to deal with this issue. Before entering into any long term agreement we feel it wise to fully explore all options. The newly proposed Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program inter-local agreement and the City of Vero Beach's proposed Storm water Utility Tax are two such programs where we feel some rethinking is warranted before moving forward with these plans.

Limited Government and the Administrative State

The newly proposed IRL-NEP and Storm water Utility will both create additional layers of government that will be primarily run by unelected bureaucrats. These bureaucratic agencies are exceedingly difficult to sunset, leading to an inevitable permanent involvement and are now more and more frequently removing our elected officials from the decision making process. This also leaves the taxpayers - the ones whose money is being used to fund these projects - little recourse when it comes to trying to thwart the growth of these agencies. Here at the Taxpayers' Association we feel the continued growth of the administrative state has become one of the biggest threats to the people's representative democracy and therefore due caution must always be exercised before doing anything that might further strengthen its grip on our way of governing.

We also feel the proposed storm water tax based on square feet is regressive and would hurt our community's poorest citizens. If Vero's elected officials deem storm water improvements necessary, a tax structure already exists to raise revenue in the form of ad valorem taxes. Funding the expense through property taxes would increase transparency and encourage elected officials to engage the public. This transparency is extremely important at a time when the public's trust of our government is at an all-time low. We have always felt good representative governance was one of the foundations that our great country was built on and anything that widens the gap between the voter and their elected representative further weakens that foundation.

It is our fervent hope that the proposed storm water expenditures solve the runoff issue, improving our Lagoon's health, and that future incremental ad valorem taxation could be eliminated through the annual budget process. However, with the creation of a storm water bureaucracy, such annual adjustments to spending decisions would be more difficult. It is our

experience that governmental fees/taxes raised by programs such as these are much more likely to creep up silently in the future as opposed to decreasing. The same holds true for the budgetary and operational procedures of the IRL-NEP. These basic starting points have not been given to our elected officials in any detailed fashion, yet they are being asked to endorse the establishment of this new agency. What is now being proposed as a small cost for our County to pay could wind up being something much bigger or of a different structure in the future, as fiscal conservatives we must always keep a keen eye on limiting any possibility of the public's money being spent unwisely and rushing into agencies like these without putting forth a solid blueprint that must be followed is not prudent governance in our opinion.

Again, the Lagoon's health must be improved, on that we can all agree. How we get there as a community is something we at The Taxpayers' Association will continue to try to ensure is done in a way that best benefits all our taxpaying citizens. Only then can we rest assured that both our quality of life and our future fiscal viability has been maintained for future generations.

John Kistler, President, Taxpayers' Association of Indian River County