



Fundamentally Flawed

TABOR, the so-called Taxpayers Bill of Rights, would amend Minnesota's constitution to place extreme and inflexible limits on government resources. TABOR would threaten the health of democracy in Minnesota by undermining the quality of the public debate, challenging representative democracy, and blurring the lines of accountability.

For more information about TABOR, please visit www.mncn.org/tabor.htm.



The Truth about TABOR: Wrong in Theory

TABOR is a constitutional amendment that would radically shift Minnesota away from our tradition of representative democracy. TABOR would restrict growth in government revenues to a prescribed formula permanently placed in Minnesota's constitution. Any revenue collections that exceed the amount allowed by the formula would be refunded in some fashion. Voter approval would be required to override the formula's limits. Proponents promise that TABOR will empower citizens, increase accountability, stimulate the economy, and encourage government efficiency. In reality, however, TABOR is an extreme and inflexible tool which takes decision-making power out of the hands of the people and their representatives.

Minnesota: A Healthy Democracy

The United States operates as a representative democracy, where citizens elect members from their community to represent them in the governing process. Fundamental to the success of a representative democracy is extensive and informed public debate prior to making decisions on often complicated and interrelated issues. Citizens have the opportunity to participate in this process by selecting their community representatives and then by voicing their opinions in multiple ways throughout the public discussion.

Minnesota enjoys high levels of citizen participation in the political process. In 2004, more than 77% of the eligible population turned out to vote in Minnesota, the highest turnout in the nation. Moreover, Minnesotans have a strong tradition of engaging in other forms of political participation, such as attending public forums or contacting elected officials.

In response to this input, elected representatives must constantly weigh public expectations for things such as a quality educational system, uncongested roads, and safe and healthy communities against concerns about the level of taxation. In reality, there is no magic solution to balancing the competing demands voiced by the public. Instead, as a community we are constantly adjusting the balance as the issues and circumstances facing our state change.

TABOR: Undermines Public Debate

TABOR, however, circumvents this public discussion by claiming there is a magic formula. By placing that solution permanently in the state constitution, TABOR changes the rules of the game to give one side of the debate – the side that believes government should become much smaller – an unfair advantage. Our constitution already requires a balanced budget, so by predetermining the level of revenue, TABOR essentially limits the level of spending. TABOR hands this essential decision to a formula instead of permitting a meaningful public debate to decide the appropriate balance.

TABOR: Undermines Representative Democracy

Proponents of TABOR would be quick to point out that we can override the formula by asking the voters for permission, moving us from representative to direct democracy. The problem is that while voters may be sophisticated, the ballot measure process is simplistic. Ballot questions offer voters "yes" or "no" choices on complex budget issues. Any budget decision necessarily involves trade-offs – increasing spending for a particular item requires that additional revenues be raised or less money be spent on other priorities. But ballot measures circumvent the current process where these trade-offs can be discussed, weighed, and adjusted. TABOR expects voters to make decisions having significant budgetary consequences through a simplistic ballot process that does not take into account how their choice will impact other parts of the budget.

TABOR: Undermines Accountability

A representative system of governing delegates authority to make the tough decisions about government revenues and expenditures to elected officials, so they are clearly accountable for the ultimate budget decisions. Under TABOR, however, the lines of accountability are blurred. TABOR grants authority to determine the size of the budget to a constitutional formula. This leaves our elected officials with significantly less authority, making it difficult to identify who should be held responsible for the ultimate outcomes of the budget decisions.