

Who cares? It's just tax money

By Larry Blote and Steven Blote

The Blotes are Rapid City businessmen. Larry is a former common council member. Steven is his son.

An old rancher once told me, "I think them government boys want to be cattle men, but they don't know nothing 'bout cattle." His point was that when government tries to do what professionals do, its results are usually a bust. The extension of the half-cent sales tax will raise millions. This money should be thought of as tuition, so we can all learn what happens when government competes with business.

The main argument supporting Project 2012 (I call it "Project Tax and Spend," or "Ed's Great Adventure") is the success of the civic center. Now, who can argue with that? Let me just stip this in — 75 percent of the half-cent sales taxes dedicated to the civic center still supports it. In other words the civic center is still a tax burden. I really do like the civic center, but it is not a justification for what is next.

VOTE NO!

Let's look at some of the projects. An aqua park, now this is my idea of spending tax money. First let's list some of the costs. Projected to cost \$1 million, they should be able to bring it in at \$3 million. Remember the new \$600,000 softball complex. They got that done for a mere \$2 million.

Now the benefits: It would be a barrel o' fun for the kiddies; it would provide city jobs for those not in year-round school. It would help alleviate the overcrowding problem at the privately-owned water slide park, (you who drive by there know what I mean). And if we actually have a warm summer, operating revenue may make a dent in actual costs.

Indoor recreation center: This is a popular project; the city wants one; the Reporter is dedicated to building one, the YMCA already is one. If everything goes well we eventually will have three rec centers. These of course will be a place for our city's youth. Benefits will be cuts in teen-age drinking, pregnancy, delinquency, and it should also help to improve grades. Considering the power of these centers we should petition to rename them "parents."

I really like the idea of a museum, especially a "world-class" type museum. I can't say it will make money, but I just like a good museum. Also, I like job development. I support tax breaks to lure new business to town (as long as the council sees them as fit for our great city; gaming establishments or anyone they can turn their nose down on, need not apply). South Dakota is ranked very high on the business-friendly scale, we should do well. If bringing business in is our goal, I see no better way than supplying an educated work force. The time might be right to add a large university, call it University of West Dakota. It would be world-class and could incorporate some of the things already mentioned. This is only a trial balloon, so talk amongst yourselves.

Is there anything more noble than recycling? The city wants to be a player in waste management. But wait, we already have a company in town called Waste Management. Their business is recycling. And they are so big they are listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Now I like a challenge, but competing with these folks would bring new meaning to the word redundant.

Please understand, I am not a naysayer for its own sake. Government should aid business by providing a stable environment, not compete with it. Governments do not spend your money like you would spend it. Fact is, this vote will cost you \$10,000. Of course, they could have held it concurrent with another vote, but it's just tax money so who cares?

Remember, few if any of these projects will be self-supporting. The cost of these projects and the expense in operating them will require tax revenue forever. Just like the Energizer bunny, it just keeps going and going and going ...

A better tomorrow for Rapid City

By Jim Shaw

Shaw, of KOTA Radio & TV, is chairman of Citizens for Vision 2012.

Rapid City has a unique opportunity to say "yes" for civic progress by voting FOR the half-cent sales tax continuation on Nov. 9.

Twenty years ago, Rapid City voted for the civic center. Since then we've seen a tremendous expansion of activities and economic growth in our community because we have this fine facility.

Now, we can say yes to continued economic prosperity by voting for continuation of the half-cent sales tax. Remember, about 50 percent of this tax is paid for by people living outside Rapid City, and the tax is not on food or medicine.

The mayor and city council have shown great faith and trust in the citizens of our fine community because they have put the decision in our hands. The sales tax continuation could have been voted for at a city council meeting. Instead, they have opened up the process by holding numerous meetings over the past two years. Over 2,000 people attended and offered their ideas for Rapid City's future.

VOTE YES!

The citizens selected these projects: recycling, Canyon Lake restoration, visitor information center, Spirit of the Black Hills Museum, job development, and recreational facility enhancements.

- Recycling will bring Rapid City into compliance with federal and state mandates and protect the environment for ourselves and future generations.

- Job development: The Rapid Fund will develop new job opportunities for the people of Rapid City. It will assist Rapid City in its economic development efforts by aiding local expanding companies to create primary jobs and to attract new companies that will create additional jobs and opportunity for our citizens.

- Canyon Lake restoration will improve water qualities and expand recreational facilities.

- A state-of-the-art visitor information center will promote Rapid City and the entire Black Hills as a destination point of travel by making visitors aware of the diversity of experiences available in our area.

- The Spirit of the Black Hills Museum will display the collections of the Museum of Geology, State Archeological Research Center, Sioux Indian Museum and Minnifusa Pioneer Museum. The economic impact on Rapid City's economy is conservatively estimated at about \$12 million in increased retail sales annually and will generate more than \$300,000 annual sales tax revenue for the city.

- A variety of recreational opportunities will be provided to maintain Rapid City as a vital community while continuing the quality of life we all enjoy.

How should you vote on Tuesday? Here are answers to some of the questions people have asked about the half-cent tax.

Are we giving the council a "blank check"? No. Citizens will always have control over future spending because the city council must hold public hearings to determine projects and funding. We can stop the tax anytime with a simple majority vote by the city council.

Why isn't there a "sunset" on the tax or how can it be removed? There is. It can be removed by a majority vote of the city council at any time. It is subject to the repayment of bond obligations that cannot exceed seven years.

Is this a "black hole" type of on-going tax? No, the dollars from this tax can only be used to build a particular project. State law says that sales tax monies cannot be used for operation and maintenance. Each of these projects has a variety of sources of income to cover their on-going costs, like user fees, admissions, rentals and private donations.

Why isn't the tax going for a third high school? A third high school wasn't one of the highest priority projects in the Vision 2012 meetings. More importantly, the citizens have said they want to vote directly on the issue of a third high school. Please remember too, that the school district takes in an area that is much larger than just Rapid City, and all citizens in the district should have a chance to vote on school funding.

Is this a "back door" attempt to build the aqua park? No, the aqua park is not one of the six identified projects.

On Tuesday, we have the chance to vote FOR Rapid City's future for a better quality of life. For a few cents a day, we can ensure a better tomorrow for all the citizens in our city.

Ask yourself, is Rapid City better off if this tax is continued? The answer is yes. It makes sense and it's the right thing to do.

Please vote FOR continuing our half-cent sales tax.