



Guest commentary

Issue 1B: It's not your penny to give

By Brian T. Schwartz

Would you call the police on someone who didn't donate to a charity that you consider to be a "worthy cause"? If not, then you should oppose County Issue 1B in this November's election, which would extend the so-called "Worthy Cause" sales tax. This tax is immoral — regardless of how worthy the causes are. It is compulsory charity, or charity at gunpoint. It is intolerant to people's values and unfair to charities that must earn our donations. It undermines both the responsibility of donors and the accountability of nonprofits that receive forced donations.

The compulsory charity tax represents the tyranny of the majority. Recipients of the tax revenues are politically-favored charitable organizations in Boulder County. Generous Boulder County residents can and do donate to these organizations. But in 2000, 50.5 percent of the voters supported the measure, which makes it a crime for Boulder County consumers *not* to donate to these charities. You can end up in behind bars.

This is an offensive display of arrogance and intolerance. In 2000, almost 67,000 voters voted for the tax. Apparently it's not enough for these supporters to donate to charities they deem "worthy." They asked government to impose their values on everyone else, as if they are anointed to declare what the real "worthy causes" are. But there's no compassion in spending other people's money by force.

Compulsory charity is unfair to nonprofits who do not receive government subsidies. Every dollar you're taxed to fund politically-favored charities is a dollar you could have given to a charity that actually earned your donation. We appropriately disapprove when

government legislates to give certain businesses advantage over competitors. We should also object to politically-favored government-subsidized charities.

Compulsory charity undermines your responsibility to promote your chosen values. Say you care about whether people receive adequate health care, housing, or education. The last thing you want is for government to address the issue. Government is unaccountable to you as a donor; it gets your tax dollars even if you think it's squandering your tax dollars. This lack of accountability gives government-funded charities little incentive to be efficient or effective. By empowering government, you disempower yourself.

Compare this to donating to a charity yourself. You're the customer. Charities know that to keep your donations coming, they must demonstrate that they are a worthy cause. You can read the organization's literature and Web site, talk to their employees, or read performance evaluations by Charity Navigator and GuideStar.org.

GuideStar envisions "an increasingly efficient nonprofit marketplace where donors seek out and compare charities, monitor their performances, and give with greater confidence; nonprofit organizations pursue more effective operating practices, embrace greater accountability, and enjoy lower fundraising costs; and society benefits from a more efficient, generous and well-targeted allocation of resources to the nonprofit sector."

Supporters of the "Worthy Cause" tax claim that without it, worthy causes would not have sufficient funds. But the alternative to the compulsory charity tax is not "doing nothing." The alternative is to take

responsibility for supporting your values by donating money yourself and persuading others to donate.

Remember the 67,000 voters who originally supported the tax? If they thought these causes are so important, they should put their money where their vote is. This year's Boulder County budget includes \$3.5 million in the "Worthy Cause Fund." Instead of voting to force their neighbors to donate to charity, a \$50 tax-deductible donation would provide this revenue.

Another common argument in support of compulsory charity is that "we all benefit from it." But do we? The poor also pay the sales tax, but could benefit more by using their hard-earned money to provide for their families. That \$3.5 million can create other values, either through other charities or businesses that create jobs.

In any case, just because you benefit from something does not mean you must pay for it. We benefit if others have food, shelter, clothing, and good hygiene, but this doesn't mean government should force us to buy food, shelter, clothing, and soap for others.

Some claim that these are necessities of life are "rights." They are not. Rights are freedoms of action, not entitlements to what others produce.

The "Worthy Cause" tax empowers authorities to decide for others what causes are more "worthy" than others. This is an elitist and intolerant, and has no place in a civil society. Ballot Issue 1B isn't about "a penny for a worthy cause," it's about compulsory charity. If you want to donate your own penny, that's great. But your neighbors' pennies are not yours to give.

Brian T. Schwartz is an optical engineer in Boulder and blogs at PatientPowerNow.org.

Don't endanger act

Struggling species still need protection

This editorial appeared in Newsday:

On its way out the door, the Bush administration is trying to endanger the Endangered Species Act, legislation that has the support of more than 80 percent of Americans. This is a parting gift to the administration's friends in the timber and other extraction industries. It has to be stopped.

The law has worked, reviving species that were in danger. Take the bald eagle: In 1963, before the act, there were about 400 nesting pairs left. Now there are nearly 10,000. Still, industry officials argue that complying with the act costs them money. And they have a friend in the Oval Office who'd like to help them out.

Now, federal agencies — before they act themselves or approve industry initiatives that may affect endangered species — must consult with biologists at the Fish and Wildlife Service or the National Marine Fisheries

Service. Under the proposed new Department of the Interior rule, the agencies wouldn't have to consult but could decide on their own.

Allowing agencies to police themselves, especially if they lack relevant scientific expertise, is just another form of Bush's fox-guarding-the-chicken-coop environmental policy. In recent days the department has extended the comment period on the proposed rule by 30 days. But even after an extra month it will still be a bad idea. It's not likely to survive a lawsuit. So why do it?

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FREE HEALTHY BONES LECTURE

Relieving shoulder pain

TREATMENT INNOVATIONS FOR ACTIVE ADULTS

Thursday, Oct. 2

Do you suffer from nagging shoulder pain? You're not alone. The shoulder is one of the most overused and often-injured joints, especially among active adults. In fact, an estimated 20 percent of Americans will have a shoulder problem at some point in their lives. Luckily, there are new minimally invasive surgical treatments that can help relieve the pain.

Come hear an orthopedic surgeon with specialized training in sports medicine discuss the latest innovations for treating shoulder pain sufferers under the age of 60, including the newest options for rotator cuff disease, labral injury and shoulder instability.

SPEAKER: Khemarin Seng, MD,
of Mapleton Hill Orthopaedics

TIME: 7 to 8 p.m.

WHERE: A Spice of Life Event Center,
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