

**Editorial**  
**'Near-sighted' legislation**

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Some Florida legislators have supported a tax-cap proposal that would be so devastating to local governments, it's hard to believe that it was even conceived.

The proposed legislation, called a taxpayers' bill of rights, would cap annual tax and fee growth and also restricts local governments ability to impose any new taxes or fees.

Though the bill died in committee last year and has been assailed by state Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink as "near-sighted," local governments should be vigilant in opposing any similar legislation proposed in this session.

Local governments have been hit hard by revenue shortfalls stemming from Amendment 1 and the economic downturn. Budget forecasts remain bleak since property values continued to fall this year.

Consequently, governments have faced layoffs, wage freezes, a reduction in services, increases in fees to make ends meet.

Most disconcerting about the legislation, which was designed to be a proposed constitutional amendment placed on the ballot in November 2010, is that it circumvents local governments' home-rule powers.

Requiring local governments to have referendums to exceed tax caps is unwieldy, at best, and too restrictive. Why elect officials to oversee budgets if they are not allowed to raise taxes or fees to ensure that they have enough revenues to operate their governments? Referendums are costly and could disrupt the budget process greatly if they are held every time local governments attempt to generate more



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revenue.

Constitutional amendments should not be proposed on a whim; they are supposed to pertain to the framework of state government – not mired in policies or motivated by politics.

Governments may need additional revenue to make major utility or other improvements comply with state regulations. If voters' reject attempts to raise revenue in referendums, what recourse do the governments have other than to continually borrow money to comply with the regulations?

Many state mandates have been imposed on local governments over the years. These require local governments to add personnel, necessitating increases in taxes.

Whether the tax-cap is revived in legislative session remains to be seen, but anything remotely resembling the measure that fell in committee this year spells trouble for Florida.

Referendums aren't needed to control government spending. If residents feel their elected officials are acting irresponsibly in raising fees and taxes, they can speak out at meetings or contact their officials.

They also can remove them from office through elections. Same goes for legislators, too.

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