

Mike Sittig: Property tax "time out" would hinder local self-government

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Republican gubernatorial candidate Bill McCollum said that if elected, he will seek to impose a two-year freeze on property taxes for local governments across Florida. He said Floridians need a "time out."

A "time out" so that state government can once again meddle in local affairs instead of tending to pressing statewide issues?

Those of us who believe that people in local communities are smart enough to govern themselves have had enough of big brother mandates and restrictions, whether from the state government, the federal bureaucracy, or some multinational corporation. To frame this proposal as a "time out" is especially insensitive at a time when Florida's coastal communities are fighting around the clock to protect their hometowns from the oil disaster.

McCollum's proposal elevates politics above leadership. Where does he think Florida's coastal cities and counties are getting the financial resources to deal with this crisis? It certainly hasn't come from BP. Rather than waiting at the mercy of BP or federal and state government as the oil advanced toward their shores, leaders in Florida's coastal cities and counties have pulled together, seized the initiative and are putting everything they have into protecting our coast. When cash on hand has failed they have turned to their reserves.

Elected city and county leaders are working with public employees around the clock alongside business owners, neighbors and volunteers. They do this even though they were told that BP might not reimburse their efforts. They were warned their actions might violate some rule worked out between big government and big business.

But while the state and federal government appointed task forces and held conference calls these local leaders got together with their citizens and took matters into their own hands. They declared their willingness to go to jail if it would protect their beaches, their homes and their livelihoods. It has been a remarkable demonstration of exactly why local self-government is the keystone of American Democracy and why Florida's local governments, those "closest to the people," are so important.

With a \$6 billion state deficit, a broken property insurance market and a catastrophic oil spill that threatens the very identity of coastal communities, our candidates for statewide office ought to be focusing on these pressing matters rather than meddling in local affairs.

The BP oil spill is challenging in so many ways, with numerous short and long term repercussions for our citizens and the communities that we live in. But know that the Florida League of Cities is dedicated to preserving Floridians' right to govern



themselves and pursue their own destinies, free from needless interference by state or federal governments or multinational corporations.

As such, we hope McCollum will reconsider his big government, interfering, “father-knows-best” proposal and let local communities continue to exercise their constitutional right to govern themselves.

Mike Sittig is executive director of the Florida League of Cities.

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