

WASHOE ADVISORY BALLOT QUESTION NO. 1

WC-1

This question is advisory only: Do you support the continuation of an existing property tax in Washoe County for use by the Washoe County District Health Department's Vector Borne Diseases Program in case of an emergency in the amount of \$0.005 per \$100 assessed valuation?

Yes /___/
No /___/

Explanation: A "yes" vote would advise Washoe County that voters wish to continue an existing \$0.005 property tax rate for use by Washoe County District Health Department's Vector-Borne Diseases Program in case of an emergency.

This tax provides a fund for use by the Washoe County District Health Department's Vector Borne Diseases Program in case of an emergency outbreak such as West Nile virus or event such as the "anthrax" incident that happened at the Microsoft Company in 2001. With the public health threat to Washoe County from the spreading nationwide

West Nile virus epidemic, it was important to act before the legislative \$3.64 tax rate cap was reached. The Board of County Commissioners imposed the \$0.005 tax rate beginning in July 1, 2003 and created an account that accumulates about \$500,000 per year, the money in this account can only be used for an emergency and upon County Commission approval only for the Vector-Borne Diseases Program.

The West Nile virus can infect humans, birds, mosquitoes, horses and some other mammals. The virus may cause West Nile fever--a mild disease in people, characterized by flu like symptoms. West Nile fever typically lasts only a few days and does not appear to cause any long-term health effects. More severe disease due to a person being infected with this virus can be West Nile encephalitis, West Nile meningitis, or West Nile meningoencephalitis. Encephalitis refers to an inflammation of the brain, meningitis is an inflammation of the membrane around the brain and the spinal cord, and meningoencephalitis refers to inflammation of the brain and the membrane surrounding it.

The Centers for Disease Control to date for 2003 has identified 9,858 cases of the human illness compared to 4,156 cases in 2002. About 30% of these cases suffered severe symptoms including encephalitis and meningitis and may experience permanent neurological disability. The Centers for Disease Control calls this outbreak the largest West Nile virus epidemic ever recorded. However, the human fatalities from West Nile virus decreased somewhat with 264 deaths in 2003 compared to 284 in 2002. This decline may result from increased public awareness about the need to seek supportive medical treatment sooner after becoming ill.

A "no" vote would advise Washoe County that voters do not support continuing an existing \$0.005 property tax for the purpose of an emergency fund to be use by the Washoe County District Health Department's Vector Borne Diseases Program.

Argument in Favor of WC-1:

In the administration of public health, it was the intent of the State legislature that “causes of disease, epidemics, sources of mortality, and all other matters related to the health and life of the people shall be investigated. Such measures shall be taken as necessary to prevent the spread of sickness and disease”. It is the mission of the Vector-Borne Diseases Program to protect the public’s health and well being through the prevention of human disease, discomfort, annoyance, and economic loss caused by vector species and vector-borne disease agents. Examples of diseases that may be addressed by the program include:

Mosquitoes: Encephalitis, West Nile Fever

Ticks: Lyme Disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, Relapsing Fever, Tularemia

Rodents / Bats: Plague, Rabies, Hantavirus

Livestock: Anthrax, Brucellosis

There are currently no treatments other than supportive care for encephalitis, hantavirus, or rabies.

With population increases, widespread air travel, visitors from other countries and location of housing in previously unpopulated areas, risk for spread of these diseases to humans increases. Rates of these diseases emerging and rising in many areas due to complacency, lack of financial and political support.

Surveillance and primary prevention activities carried out by vector-borne disease professionals are the major means to interrupt transmission and control these diseases.

Unfortunately, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “*vector-borne infectious diseases are rising or re-emerging in many areas due to a number of factors. These include a shift in public health policies and lack of financial support, resistance to insecticides and antibiotic treatment, lowered interest in surveillance systems and genetic changes in the disease organisms themselves. Effective prevention strategies can help reverse this trend*”.

We are urging you to vote yes on WC-1 to ensure funding to fight vector-borne diseases. Your yes vote helps to protect the public’s health and sustain a high quality of life for each and every one of our citizens. Every citizen deserves the right to live, work, and recreate, without suffering from vector-borne diseases that threaten health and well being. A yes vote will ensure that funds will be available for immediate use by the Washoe County District Health Department in order to respond to emerging threats or outbreaks of diseases such as West Nile Virus.

Argument in Opposition to WC-1:

The administration of public health programs is becoming more cumbersome and abundant each year. Supporting the “Continuation of Tax to Support Vector-Borne Disease Emergency Control” would continue to increase the tax burden on Washoe County Residents. Supporting this Ballot Question sends many messages to the County Commission as well as to the State Legislature. Some of which are:

- Continued Taxation is Approved by Washoe County Residents

- Washoe County Residents approve taking the tax burden of public health programs that could be supported state funding, not County residents

And

- Private citizens do not need to concern themselves with protecting themselves from vector-borne diseases.

These are messages we do not wish to send to our County Commissioners and State Legislators.

This ballot question not only continues to keep an unnecessary tax on Washoe County residents, but also gives the citizens a false sense of security. This false sense of security may prompt citizens to not take the proper safety precautions related to vector-borne disease because they assume the county has already done so.

These diseases have been introduced and studied, we as citizens now have a better idea of how to safeguard ourselves against them. Therefore, we need not contribute more of our valuable tax dollars to protect ourselves against diseases we are already aware of. Thus we already know what precautions to take to safeguard ourselves against these diseases.

In regards to public health threats and emergencies such as the Microsoft Anthrax scare, programs have been created at a national level (such as the Patriot Act and its associated programs) to respond to issues such as this. The Washoe County citizens should not have to pay for responding to emergencies such as this because of the National Security programs already implemented post 9/11.

If this program continues to grow within the county's Health and Human Services Department, Washoe County Citizens may be faced with deciding to increase taxes to pay for more programs and personnel in future elections.

Rebuttal to Argument in Favor of WC-1

Washoe County residents may not feel comfortable having additional tax dollars go into more government programming. Also, there are no guarantees in place suggesting that the level of services delivered from this \$.005 tax is useful and/or accurate. There continue to be cases of Vector-Borne Diseases in the state as well as a few in Washoe County, therefore, the money all ready in the program may not have been useful. A "No" vote on the Continuation of Tax to Support Vector-Borne Emergency Control will reduce our tax burden. Specifically, a "No" vote will continue to support the fact that Washoe County Residents are not willing to continue to support taxes for services that do not equally affect all residents and for services that are not equally distributed to all residents.

Rebuttal to Argument in Opposition to WC-1

The arguments committee has received the arguments against the rebuttal. The committee has decided not to prepare rebuttal.

Fiscal Note: The current property tax levy of \$0.005 per \$100 assessed valuation would continue the property taxes that the owner of a new \$100,000 home will pay of \$17.50 per year.

If the tax continues to be levied, Washoe County may sell bonds payable from the tax that are backed by the full faith and credit of the assessed value of the County. Following the levy of the tax, additional expenses are expected to be incurred to pay for the operation and maintenance of the facilities acquired, which will be paid from the tax or from existing County resources.

