

County Republicans must not hide budget from the voters



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Thirty years ago, county Republicans fooled the voters of Monroe County with a post-election-day tax increase of outrageous proportions. In 1976, two days after the general election, the Republican county manager at the time, Lucian Morin, submitted a budget to the legislature that proposed a 47 percent property tax increase. Voters were shocked and appalled. The following year, the county charter was amended to require the budget be submitted no later than the second Tuesday in October, well before Election Day. This amendment was put in place to hold elected officials accountable to the voters. It was the right thing to do then and continues to be the right thing to do.

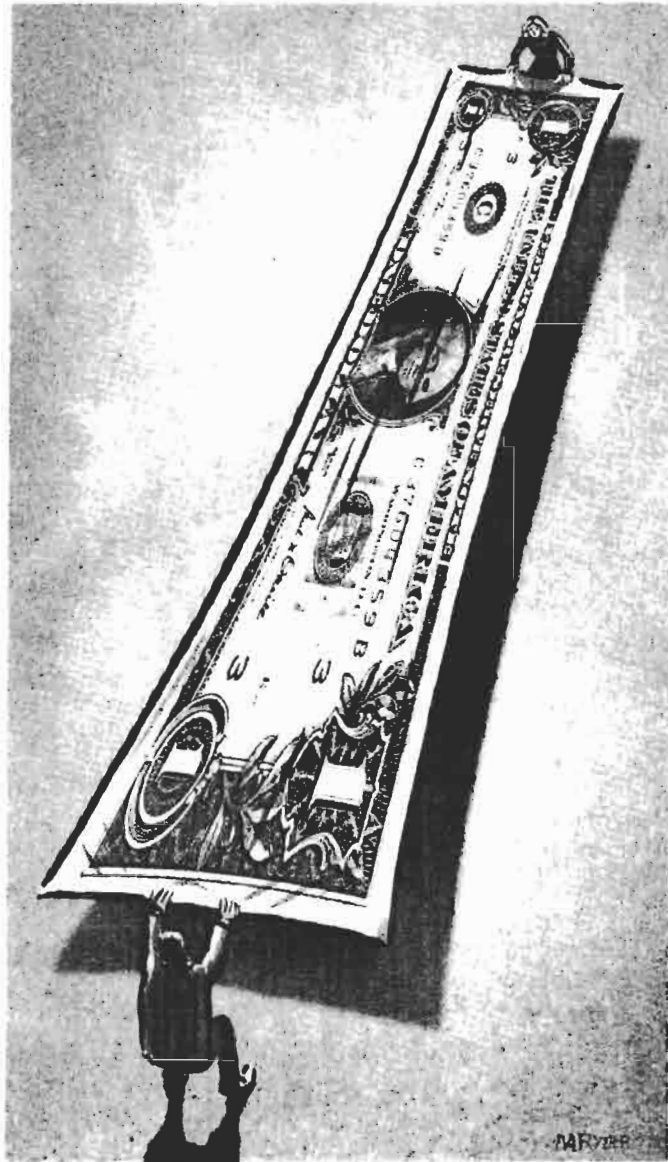
Nevertheless, the Republican majority has submitted a proposal bent on turning the calendar back 30 years by stripping away the accountability that protects voters from being blindsided by massive tax increases. This Tuesday, the County Legislature meets to vote on a proposal to push the budget submission deadline back after Election Day to Nov. 15. If the Republicans have their way, voters from this year forward will be forced to vote for their legislative and executive representatives without knowing if their tax money has been mishandled. Once again, county residents could be subjected to surprise tax increases and cuts in services without recourse.

In a community stunned by the kind of back-room deals that

permitted incredible salary and benefit increases for former members of the Republican-controlled water authority, this pushback proposal is unconscionable. We should be seeking more government transparency and accountability, not return-

ing to the dark days of surprise tax increases and unaccountable officials. As a community, we must demand nothing less than the ability to analyze our fiscal situation before the day of accountability: Election Day.

In addition to restricting ac-



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countability, this proposal shortens the time available to review the budget from a little more than two months to just 3 days. The legislature's approval of the county executive's budget is fundamental to our system of checks and balances, yet the county Republicans seek to limit this debate. Their proposed 30 day review period is simply not enough time to responsibly evaluate a billion-dollar budget. Not only does this shortened timeframe impact legislative review but it virtually eliminates public scrutiny.

Frankly, I am amazed to see this blatantly political piece of legislation has been re-introduced. County Republicans proposed this irresponsible change to the county charter in 2004 but public outrage forced them to withdraw their proposal. Voters made it clear two years ago that they strongly oppose this measure, which would hinder their ability to hold elected officials responsible for their actions. Nothing has changed!

I urge the citizens of Monroe County to once again speak out against this proposal by calling the legislative majority office at (585) 753-1922 and letting them know that you are still opposed to moving the budget deadline. As the recent water authority scandal has shown, county residents cannot afford to be unaware of what their public officials are doing. You can also make your feelings known by logging onto www.citizensforopengovernment.org or by participating in the public forum prior to the legislature meeting on Sept. 12. Call (585) 753-1950 to sign up to speak. □

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