

The Debate Over Paying the Bill

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As the old saying goes, everybody wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die. The political equivalent of that saying is that everybody wants good roads, excellent schools and safe communities, but few want to pay more taxes. The struggle over taxes and spending will dominate the 2004 General Assembly session. But before I even go to Richmond, a debate is underway here at home over who should pay for the proposed rail transit system in the Dulles Corridor.

That debate took an unfortunate turn last week with screaming headlines on a full-page local newspaper advertisement asking "Why haven't YOU been told about the largest TAX INCREASE in Fairfax County history?" For residents who have seen their property taxes increase because of the escalating value of their homes, such a question could cause some real concern.

There is no explanation that the proposed Dulles Corridor Transportation Improvement Special Tax District referenced in the ad applies only to commercial land owners—not residential property. While the Special Tax District has nothing to do with residential property taxes or a proposed toll increase, the advertisement lumps all these items together and incorrectly proclaims that "**Reston and Herndon** residents **will pay** a disproportionate share of the toll and tax increase."

In what is an amateurish effort to emulate other anti-tax campaigns, the ad loads on other concerns about "negative traffic impacts" and "no commitment to build rail to Dulles." The ad was "paid for by concerned employers and property owners in the western Dulles Corridor," those who would be taxed in the special tax district.

Another question posed in the ad asked, "why has there been no community discussion about this proposal?" It is unclear what "this proposal" is since the language of the ad blends together without explanation at least three different proposals that are under consideration.

If "this proposal" is the Dulles Corridor Transportation Improvement Special Tax District, the discussion has been among the owners of 51 percent of the assessed commercial land value in the corridor who petitioned the Board of Supervisors to raise taxes on their business properties as a contribution to the rail project and other landowners including the sponsors of the ad who oppose the proposal to tax themselves. Further opportunity to discuss the special tax district is available before the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors on December 8.

If "this proposal" is the environmental impact statement, there have already been more than 800 responses to the original draft, and there are further opportunities to address the supplemental draft at public hearings at 6 p.m. on December 3 at Langston Hughes Middle School and December 11 at Farmwell State Middle School in Ashburn.

The ad is correct in stating that you can call me at 703-758-9733 although I suggest that you use my e-mail address, kenplum@aol.com rather than the address in the ad. But then I hope you will always feel free to call me at any time and particularly when you read advertising that appears misleading. Rail in the Dulles Corridor will bring tremendous benefits to the quality of life of our community. The debate over paying the bill needs to take into account the benefits as well as the costs.