

Arizona needs temporary hike in sales taxes

OUR VIEW: McCain, Kyl, Hayworth oppose plan; we await their plan to fix state

Arizona voters will decide on May 18 whether to temporarily increase the sales tax by 1 cent in order to stanch the fiscal bleeding that has ravaged the state.

Two high-profile Arizonans — U.S. Sens. Jon Kyl and John McCain — have come out against the proposed tax, but their response appears rooted in politics.

McCain, in particular, has held to the line that, as a senator, it is not his place to meddle in or comment on state matters. In fact, in the past he has declined to respond to questions about state issues in interviews with the Star's editorial board.

But now that the sales tax has become an issue in McCain's campaign to hold onto his Senate seat — challenger J.D. Hayworth came out against the tax proposal and chided McCain for not having a position on it — he has come out against the tax. He and Kyl issued a joint statement saying that while they usually steer clear of state issues, they are responding to questions about their opinions — and, in their opinion, the tax proposal is bad.

They add, "We recognize the difficult fiscal situation Arizona finds itself in and we appreciate the tireless dedication by our state's elected officials to solve the budget problems."

So now that the candidate and Kyl have inserted themselves in the state's budget problems — namely the roughly \$3 billion hole for the rest of this and the

next fiscal year — we would like to hear how McCain and Kyl propose to keep up public safety and ensure that kids in dangerous homes can be protected, that schools have enough teachers and books, and that our universities are affordable.

We ask for their ideas because without the 1-cent-per-dollar sales-tax increase, Arizona will be in even worse shape than it already is. The sales tax won't fix the budget problem, because it won't generate enough to fill the gap. But it will shrink the hole some, and that is crucial.

Notwithstanding McCain and Kyl's opposition, the sales-tax proposal, known as Proposition 100, has brought together some unusual entities as supporters. Education groups have offered endorsements — as might be expected, as schools stand to lose tremendously if the budget crisis continues — but business groups and private companies have, too.

These supporters live in Arizona, do business in Arizona and see what is happening to our state. They see the closed highway rest stops and state parks, they see the effects of education cuts in their kids' schools, and they're affected by the reduced state spending on services residents usually take for granted, such as social services and public safety.

Organizations including the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, the Southern Arizona Leadership Council, the Arizona Transit Association, the Arizona

Trucking Association, tribal leaders and myriad public-safety and student associations have thrown their support behind Proposition 100. These are groups that no doubt would disagree on many other issues, but they understand why Arizona needs this temporary sales tax — and that the state is out of options.

It is encouraging to see such a cross section of Arizonans join together in support of Proposition 100. Many of the supporters, including Gov. Jan Brewer, are predisposed to argue against tax increases — but they looked at the situation in Arizona, weighed the evidence and came to the conclusion that Arizona needs the tax increase to get through the crisis.

Arizona is at a perilous juncture where we can build for the future or let this budget crisis decimate the state. It's not enough to say "no" to new taxes — we need real options for bringing in revenue, because cutting and cutting won't be enough.

So now that Hayworth, McCain and Kyl are on record opposing the tax increase, we await their suggestions for fixing the problem.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

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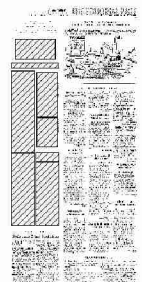
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