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Time for Sacramento to Kick Their Habit How Proposition 1A Will Protect Vital Services

By John Russo

Sacramento has an ugly habit.

For over 12 years the state government of California has siphoned off our local tax dollars to get their financial fix. Sacramento's fiscal policies are in dire need of structural reform, but too many at the State Capitol are unwilling to go 'cold turkey'. They refuse to make the hard choices required to balance the state budget. Local police, fire and emergency services are being cut back and our communities are paying the price as the state budget is balanced on the backs of local taxpayers.

Now, this November, voters interested in protecting their community's public services from the State of California's irresponsible addiction to local revenue can do something about it: We can vote for Proposition 1A.

Prop. 1A would severely restrict the State of California's ability to bankrupt local government whenever the State mismanages its own budget. Since 1992, the state Legislature has robbed cities of more than \$40 billion in local taxpayer funds. As a result, cities across the state have had to scale back vital services, including law enforcement, fire protection, paramedic response, road repairs, parks and libraries. Left unchecked, cities will continue to see fewer police officers, longer response time in medical and fire emergencies, and fewer parks and playing fields for kids.

Prop. 1A will specifically prohibit the state from taking city, county and special district's existing share of sales taxes, property taxes, and vehicle license fee revenues. These monies are how cities and counties provide local services. Many cities rightly feel that their coffers are being used as a piggy bank whenever Sacramento's bottom line is in jeopardy. Proposition 1A ends that practice.

The measure also requires the central government to reimburse local governments for the cost of pet projects it forces cities, counties and special districts to provide. If the state can't come up with the dollars, it is required to suspend the mandates it has foisted upon local government. We are no longer required to support Sacramento's unfunded mandates 'habit'. This provision alone should send taxpayers running to the voting booth in support.

Prop. 1A is not entirely unsympathetic to Sacramento's problem. It provides flexibility by allowing the state to borrow local tax revenues in a fiscal emergency declared by the governor and endorsed by two-thirds of the Legislature. Such emergency loans,

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however, would not be allowed to occur more than twice in 10 years, and would have a cap and three-year repayment schedule.

I am proud to have played a part in the negotiations which resulted in this historic compromise measure among the governor, the Legislature, and local government representatives statewide. Prop. 1A represents a practical, bipartisan effort to curb decades of confiscatory practices by the state. We need our representatives in Sacramento—of both parties—to get real about their own budget. Prop. 1A is the equivalent of a Betty Ford Center or twelve-step program for Sacramento's dependency on local dollars. It's time for 'tough love' – vote yes on Prop. 1A.