

Merits of ballot measures 60, 61 and 101 debated

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Debbie Schum, the Western Slope campaign coordinator in favor of Amendments 60 and 61, and Proposition 101, told a crowd of people at the Aspen Business Luncheon on Wednesday that the proposed changes to the state constitution and state law were not “draconian or dramatic.”

“Some of these things take 15 to 20 years to implement,” Schum said. “We’re not just coming in and kicking over the poker table here.”

But Matt Gray disagreed. He’s an attorney at Sherman and Howard in Denver, and an expert in municipal finance who joined Schum at the St. Regis hotel to speak against the measures.

“This dramatically cuts back the public sector in the state of Colorado,” Gray said.

He said the three measures combined would strip \$2 billion out of the state’s general fund and knock out \$1 billion in local property taxes.

“What services do you cut once the \$3 billion is gone?” he asked. “I’ve never heard an answer to that question.”

He also added that Colorado was currently ranked 49th out of 50 states when it comes to the level of state taxes, and 46th when state and local taxation were combined.

“We are a low-tax state,” Gray said.

Schum, who runs a small business and lives in Cedaredge, said she collected signatures to help place the measures on the statewide ballot and she has spoken at length to the individuals who are officially behind the measures.

She also has spoken to Douglas Bruce of Colorado Springs, the author of the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights, or TABOR, which Amendments 60 and 61 would tighten.

And while Schum didn’t directly say that Bruce was involved with the measures, she said, “If you were going to write an amendment to TABOR, would you consult with the man who wrote TABOR? Of course you would.”

Gray responded that it was not so much who actually wrote the ballot language, the important outstanding question was who funded the effort, including paying people to gather enough signatures to put them on the ballot.

“I think people care who spent six figures getting them on the ballot and not reporting that, in clear violation of the law,” Gray said.

Schum said a prime motivation for getting the measures approved was to cut back on government spending and to close loopholes in TABOR.

Schum said the goal of the measures was, in part, to “restore TABOR, repeal illegal tax hikes and try and force the government into becoming accountable for basic services.”

She also said proponents wanted to rescind the recent hike in state vehicle-registration fees and to “stop un-elected boards from taxing us.”

But Gray said that while lower taxes and fees sound good when you initially hear about them, the combined measures were loaded with far-reaching ill effects, including eventually forcing the state to choose between funding schools or prisons.

“I don’t want people voting on government spending in the abstract,” Gray said, adding that instead, voters should know specifically what programs would be cut.

Schum said voters should go to “cotaxreforms.com” for more information. The website of the campaign against the measures is “donthurtcolorado.com.”

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Heather Rousseau/Aspen Daily News

Debbie Schum, left, who is a proponent of Amendments 60, 61 and Proposition 101, and attorney Matthew Gray, who is against the anti-tax measures, present their arguments in front of a nearly sold-out crowd at the Aspen Business Luncheon on Wednesday.

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