

Necessary follow-up to sales tax hike

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The most predictable outcome in the Tuesday primary in DuPage County was the loud no from voters on the question of whether they wanted an increase in the county sales tax.

After all, who wants a tax increase? And especially one that was strongly opposed by the very county government officials responsible for having put the sales tax hike proposal on the ballot in the first place.

Make no mistake. These officials didn't do a "never mind" to the tax hike because of a sudden unearthing of pity in their souls for the beleaguered taxpayer. They are still going to get their sales tax money -- just from a different source. DuPage is one of the collar counties that is set to get a sales tax increase courtesy of the state mass transit bailout.

You can't vote against this one.

But we hope a county government that will be flush with money from a permanent tax increase doesn't proceed to find ways to spend every dollar to be taken from us at the cash registers for years to come. There are always many eager hands ready to snatch up more of our hard-earned dollars.

Yes, the county needs new sales tax revenue to bolster a financially strapped public safety system that is doing a good job of arresting and prosecuting the worst among us. And county government is generally well run. In the past, the county board has also showed sympathy for the tax burden in cutting property taxes.

At the same time, there are things the county clearly doesn't need. It doesn't need to be paying its board members \$48,620, a salary that will increase to \$53,645 by 2010. At least it doesn't need to be paying bonuses of up to \$3,000 on top of those salaries. It doesn't need to be paying its board chairman \$110,150 now and \$121,540 by 2010.

It's not just us saying this. Just about every candidate for county board that ran in the Republican primary on Tuesday agreed that it's only right to make sacrifices in board compensation given cuts in pay and benefits in the private sector. Now it's time to make them.

We also heard good ideas from candidates for county board and how to run government more efficiently, and to fund more aspects of government with alternative revenue sources.

We especially like DuPage County Board member James Healy's idea of examining ways to reduce the size of the county board. Delivery of county services would not suffer if the county board had fewer members, and there would be cumulative savings in salaries.

Proposals to look at increasing fees charged for certain county services should also be pursued. We wonder, too, how much progress has been made in getting deadbeat defendants in court cases to pay fines and fees owed the county. That debt was close to \$20 million in the middle of 2006.

DuPage County government got a sales tax increase that it needed. Now it needs to do right by taxpayers in using those tax dollars efficiently.