

No telling what voters will do with referendum

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Let's face it: \$52 million is a big chunk of change. This is the amount that members of the DuPage County Board want to cut so they can balance the 2008 budget. This could include 190 employees being laid off and 53 open positions remaining unfilled.

While they approved the budget, County Board members are postponing the cuts until Feb. 5, when voters will be asked to approve a quarter-cent sales tax increase. This would bring in about \$40 million; the other \$12 million would be made up from proposed projects not being done.

DuPage County residents are between a rock and a hard place, as they say. No one wants to see the drastic cuts called for in order to balance the budget, but hiking the sales tax is not a desirable option either.

Most of the layoffs would occur in Sheriff John Zaruba's office with a cut of 109 employees. Other departments overseeing the criminal justice system would experience reductions as well. Public officials have justly decried the approved cuts, warning about the adverse impact they would have.

While a sales tax increase seems like the lesser of two evils, it can have serious ramifications as well. Asking residents to shell out more for locally sold merchandise hits them harder in the pocketbook.

Yes, it's a tax burden shared by people who shop but don't live in DuPage County. But consumers will gravitate to where they can get the best products for the least amount of money.

Delaying the budget cuts until the Feb. 5 referendum was a prudent way of finding out if voters believe the increased sales tax is worth it. Now let's wait and see if the County Board's gamble pays off.