



Voters will be asked to repeal 1/8 cent tax

By Andrew Oxford

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Taos County officials are hoping voters will swap one tax for another.

The Taos County Board of Commissioners approved a ballot question Tuesday (Sept. 2) that would allow voters to repeal a 1/8 cent gross receipts tax in the general election Nov. 4.

The 1/8 cent gross receipts tax has been designated for health care since it was passed by voters in 1988 and at one time it paid the county's contribution to a state program for funding rural hospitals such as Holy Cross Hospital.

But revenue from the 1/8 cent gross receipts tax has been piling up since the Human Services Department changed its formula for financing that program, known as the Safety Net Care Pool Fund, requiring the county to only contribute revenue from a separate 1/12 cent tax that already exists.

Since revenue from the tax can only be used for health care, however, it cannot be applied to other county expenses.

The law regarding that tax has been rewritten since 1988, allowing commissioners to impose such a tax without voter approval. To do so, however, voters must repeal the current 1/8 gross receipts tax. If the tax is repealed, county officials could replace it with an 1/8 gross receipts tax that would not have such restrictions and could be used for general expenses.

"This is a way we can free up an additional \$800,000 for things like roads without raising taxes," District 4 Commissioner Tom Blankenhorn told *The Taos News*, noting the revenue a 1/8 cent gross receipts tax would generate.

Revenue from the existing tax has accumulated into an approximately \$1.5 million surplus earmarked for health care, he said. The board of commissioners has yet to solicit proposals for using the funds but Blankenhorn has suggested he would like it to be applied to mental health services.

A new tax could be forced onto the ballot as well if county voters petition the move, Taos County Attorney Bob Malone told commissioners Tuesday.

The question is the only way Taos County voters will find on the Nov. 4 general election ballot.

— *Andrew Oxford*