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TABOR - Warning

We need to understand why Coloradans suspended their Taxpayers' Bill of Rights

By The Capital-Journal editorial board

Comparing one state's tax plan with another's is difficult. It's easy to make too much of an overly simple comparison.

But the fact is that more than half the voters in Colorado voted this week to suspend for five years their Taxpayer' Bill of Rights constitutional amendment, apparently because their roads weren't being adequately maintained, their schools were suffering financially, tuition was rising too high in the state's universities and a number of other frustrations.

Here in Kansas some people are hoping to get a TABOR approved by the Kansas Legislature next year. Their argument is that our law would be different from the one in Colorado and that a TABOR is a good thing.

We have already editorialized that we are skeptical of TABOR. The kinds of restrictions it places on the Legislature's ability to raise taxes when needed takes away some flexibility that allows for quick response to unique opportunities or sudden disasters.

Coloradans have lived under their TABOR for 13 years and slightly more than half said last week they are willing to give up the refunds they were getting from the state if the money will be used for badly needed government services.

Depending on which side you were on, the decision was either a close one with 48 percent of the voters opposing the suspension, or it was a comfortable 4 point spread with 52 percent in favor.

The difference in the actual number of votes was 44,793.

In Colorado, TABOR opponents say the spending restrictions are to blame for the state's budget crunch that caused lawmakers to cut millions of dollars from the state's budget.

TABOR supporters -- get this now -- don't deny there is a budget crunch, but it isn't because of TABOR. It's because of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and a hard drought, they say.

But that's exactly what we're talking about. No one can foresee a terrorist attack or a drought or a number of other bad things that can happen. Neither is it possible to foresee with great accuracy that a major new industry will move into the state if the government services can be provided quickly enough.

True, the TABOR proposed for Kansas would allow exceptional revenue increases if approved by a vote of the people, but most emergencies won't wait for a vote of the people.