

What you should know about **SOS/TABOR: CI-97**

Rep. Scott Mendenhall, Sen. Joe Balyeat, and other Montana legislators are working to put a constitutional initiative on the Montana ballot. They call it “Stop OverSpending” (SOS) – CI-97.

The initiative is modeled after Colorado’s so-called “Taxpayer Bill of Rights” (TABOR). It would impose a rigid formula in Montana’s constitution to limit state government spending.

National effort. Montana is one of several states targeted for passage of SOS/TABOR initiatives by out-of-state groups such as the Illinois-based “Americans for Limited Government.” This is a well-coordinated national effort.

TABOR has been a failure. Colorado is the only state with a TABOR; voters enacted it in 1992. TABOR has devastated economic growth, education, health care, and roads in Colorado. That’s why Coloradans voted to roll TABOR back in Nov. 2005. The state’s business leaders and Republican governor led the charge for a five-year TABOR time-out.

This serves as a warning to Montana. The only state that has had to live under TABOR just voted to suspend it. Why would we want to repeat Colorado’s mistake?

Under Colorado’s TABOR:

- Roads and streets deteriorated to the point where 39% of the state’s transportation infrastructure was in poor condition.
- Colorado went from the middle of the pack to the bottom of the barrel in funding for schools, higher education, child immunizations, health insurance for poor children, etc.
- Colorado had the 4th slowest job growth of its 8 Rocky Mountain neighbors.

SOS doesn’t fix anything. Supporters claim Montana’s SOS/CI-97 fixes the worst problems with Colorado’s TABOR. But the TABOR **formula** is the main cause of Colorado’s problems. The formula limits state spending to inflation + population growth. (Just ask Coloradans how well it works.) The same formula is in Montana’s SOS proposal.

We already have a balanced budget requirement. Montana’s constitution already requires that state spending must not exceed revenues. As Montana’s Lt. Governor John Bohlinger said, SOS would replace that one-sentence requirement in our constitution with three pages of complex language that only a lawyer with a math degree could understand.

We should ask ourselves:

- Do we want to hamstring health care services, especially for seniors?
- Do we want fire trucks and ambulances to take longer to respond to emergencies?
- Are we ready for our kids to face larger class sizes and less attention from teachers?
- Are we willing to risk driving on bad roads and bridges?
- Is it a good idea to endanger Montana’s economy?
- Do we want higher property taxes? (TABOR/SOS shifts the burden of funding public services from state to local governments.)

TABOR was too extreme for Colorado.

SOS is too extreme for Montana. Don’t Sink Our State!

