

TABOR is terrorizing Colorado's townspeople

BY SEAN CAMACHO

GUEST COMMENTARY

TABOR is a great example of a Frankenstein's monster. At first, the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights looked like a wondrous achievement, a genuine throttle on public spending complete with direct voter control and, even better, annual taxpayer rebates. What was not to like?

But, as the tale goes, the monster has grown beyond its intended purpose, beyond the ability of its creators to contain it. And now we have this fiscal beast freely roaming the countryside and terrorizing townspeople. Just ask the residents of Lakewood.

The taxpaying residents of Lakewood are the latest large-scale victims of TABOR, although they are certainly not the first. And unless we make big changes, they won't be the last.

If you haven't caught the news, Lakewood was just hit with an unexpected \$42 million bill to refund taxpayer dollars to massive cellphone companies — leaving them in a budget hole that will mean cuts to important city services such as roads, public safety and transportation.

Because cellular companies barely existed when TABOR passed, they were not taxed under existing laws, and without voter approval of a new tax will get sweeping tax breaks that other companies and everyday Coloradans don't.

It's time for Colorado to repeal TABOR. Not amend it, not retool it, not further twist it and contort it, but repeal it.

TABOR is bad policy, and it's costing taxpayers dearly. Not only that, but the taxpayer windfalls it promised have fallen short. Instead, it's costing taxpayers more, and we're seeing that play out in the heart of one of our own communities.

TABOR has become a corporate tax loophole factory for technologies the writers of the law never saw coming. Instead of benefiting individual Coloradans and their families, TABOR is benefiting big business, such as telecom, AI and other tech companies.

And it's working overtime. In the case of Lakewood, the application of an already-in-place tax to new technologies in the same space has led to the fiscal disaster we're seeing now. Because of TABOR.

In just this latest example, the people of Lakewood are stuck having to come up with a huge sum of cash that will leave services crippled, rainy-day funds depleted, and an immediate future of uncertainty and apprehension, to pay off these billion-dollar corporations.

To call this a TABOR backfire would be an understatement for the ages.

The problem is that TABOR is dangerously outdated, and there are industries that benefit from being in Colorado but don't have to carry their fair share of the tax burden. As a result, hard-working Coloradans pick up the tab.

The pace at which the world is moving is faster than we ever could have imagined, and we need to replace TABOR with a law that can keep up.

Note

And we're going to have to keep up. The Trump administration has made clear that over the next three years, more and more of what used to be paid for by the federal government is going to be shifted to the states. We're going to have to make up for shortfalls we cannot even predict. Medicaid, food subsidies and public education have been cut. The infrastructure we rely on to attract new business and good-paying jobs is crumbling, and TABOR's corporate tax loopholes keep us from fixing it. The results will be catastrophic.

The time has come to recognize the monster we've created is no longer one we control. The likely empty mailbox this year where your TABOR refund used to land should be evidence enough that the law no longer works. TABOR's hounding the residents of Lakewood, and it's coming for Colorado's future.

Anyone who's seen the Universal Pictures classic knows what we have to do: The townspeople gather, light torches, storm the castle, and put the beast to rest.

It's time to put an end to TABOR.

Rep. Sean Camacho, a Democrat representing District 6, has been a vocal opponent of TABOR and sponsored legislation to challenge its constitutionality during the 2025 legislative session.