

# Democrats propose voters kill TABOR refunds

BY BARBARA KIRKMEYER

GUEST COMMENTARY

Colorado families are being asked to believe a familiar lie; the only way to fund education is to let politicians take and keep more of your money — forever.

Senate Bill 135 is disingenuous and is not a serious education plan. It is a backdoor attack on TABOR dressed up in the language of helping kids.

Without raising taxes, I have spent six years fighting to increase education funding by more than \$1.3 billion. Governing the right way by setting priorities, making hard choices, and funding schools without breaking faith with taxpayers. ]

Now compare my success with the Democrats plan in SB-135. SB-135 asks voters to get rid of their TABOR refund forever in order to grow state spending by up to \$5 billion annually. While possibly giving a paltry \$200 million a year for 10 years to education.

Over the last ten years, this scheme would have brought in only about \$1.4 billion for education. At the same time, it would have allowed the state to spend roughly \$8.2 billion out of your pocket in TABOR refund dollars without ever asking voters for permission. Democrats' deal on the table: give the government a blank check, wipe out taxpayer refunds, and in return get an amount for education that barely exceeds what we already secured through discipline and priorities. A terrible trade for Colorado families.

And let's be honest about what they are really taking. When refunds required by the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR) hit \$750 and \$800, people felt it. For many households, they got back as much as \$1,600 in the family budget. That is not extra money lying around. That is the grocery bill for the month, new tires, a couple of car payments, back-to-school clothes, help with the property tax bill, or just enough breathing room to catch up when everything keeps getting more expensive.

Note

TABOR exists for a reason. It protects taxpayers from a government that will always find a new excuse to take more. It forces the legislature to live within its means, just like every family in this state has to do. SB-135 blows a hole through that protection. Once the state is allowed to keep and spend the revenue from ~~your~~ TABOR refund, taxpayers do not get that money back. It is gone. And history tells us that when politicians get a new stream of money, they never give it up. The biggest insult is that supporters want to pretend this is "for the kids" when the record says otherwise. If the legislature truly wanted to prioritize schools, it could. The money has been there. The problem is not TABOR. The problem is that too many politicians under the dome would rather fund their pet project first, then run to voters claiming schools are underfunded. They created this problem with their lack of priorities. And now they want taxpayers to bail them out.

Note

And the consequences go far beyond refunds. Once TABOR is gutted, every other promise built on the state budget gets thrown into uncertainty. That includes the homestead exemption. If the state intends to keep funding protections like that, where is the guarantee? Where is the money? Once you open the door to unlimited retention and spending, nothing is truly protected. Everything becomes subject to whatever deal gets cut at the Capitol next year.

Colorado voters should not fall for this bait-and-switch. We can fund education without a tax increase. We have already done it. What SB-135 offers is not reform. It is surrender: surrender of TABOR, surrender of taxpayer refunds, and surrender of any confidence that the state will keep its word when it comes to protections like the homestead exemption.

This is not about the children. It is about control. It is about whether hardworking Coloradans keep more of what they earn, or whether politicians in Denver get a permanent blank check. Colorado has already shown there is a better way. We should reject SB-135 and keep fighting for schools without selling out taxpayers.

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