

## **Marin Voice: MUTA is 'paying attention'**

By Basia Crane, Nancy McCarthy, Michael Hartnett, Don Erbel and Dennis Fishwick

ELECTED OFFICIALS at all levels of government continue to propose tax increases as the solution to budget woes. Is the answer to budget problems more taxes or is it better management of tax revenues?

The Marin United Taxpayers Association realizes that taxes are necessary for government to do its job, but all too often, our officials are not spending our money responsibly. Thus, giving them more won't help.

We have witnessed a bloated bureaucracy in Marin that has become increasingly unresponsive to the public. Elected officials' loyalty is to their special interests and campaign contributors, not to the voters.

MUTA is continually active fighting initiatives that are not in the people's best interests. We attend board meetings, write letters and work to educate the public. We often partner with like-minded advocacy groups. Here are some of the issues we are working on.

MUTA is involved in one of the two lawsuits challenging the validity of the 2007 Flood Fee election. Under Proposition 218, a fee must benefit all of those who are assessed a fee. Clearly, not all property owners who are subject to this fee benefit from it. The election should have been conducted as a tax, not a fee, and therefore be subject to Proposition 13 rules.

MUTA has voiced its concerns about the county payroll and pension system. The payroll has grown significantly over the past 25 years, and its retirement system is unsustainable. Because of these growing obligations, essential services are being cut.

The major use of our taxes should be county services, not primarily payroll and pension expense.

MUTA opposes the MMWD's proposed desalination plant. Desalination is far too costly, uses too much energy and poses a threat to the bay's ecology. It is not necessary, as conservation measures outlined by a former MMWD conservation manager will erase any water deficit far cheaper than a desalination plant.

MUTA opposes the continued presence of Sutter Corporation in Marin General Hospital. Over the past 25 years, MGH has been subject to this lease, Sutter has cut staffing and taken hundreds of millions of profits out of the county. A free-standing, locally funded and controlled hospital district is not only viable but would serve Marin residents better than a remotely run, profit-driven corporation.

MUTA supports quality public schools in Marin, but it feels that many parcel taxes going toward schools place an undue burden on working families. Furthermore, many school bond measures have little accountability on how the money is actually spent. Oversight committees appointed to monitor this are toothless, and the public is kept in the dark.

While reducing our dependency on fossil fuels is a worthy goal, MUTA questions the wisdom of contracting with multinational Shell Oil to accomplish this. There are also ways that the county can reduce its carbon footprint without spending millions on another bureaucracy like Marin Energy Authority.

A popular bumper sticker reads, "If you are not outraged, then you are not paying attention." MUTA members come from diverse political backgrounds. The MUTA board members and many members volunteer where they can help the community.

For more information on becoming a member, please visit our Web site at [marintaxpayers.org](http://marintaxpayers.org). Our annual meeting will be at 10 a.m. on Saturday at the Tamalpais Bank in Greenbrae. Please call 456-7910 for details.

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