

Granite State Fair Tax News

We believe in a New Hampshire tax system that is just and fair.



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Are We There Yet?

The self-perpetuating problems caused by New Hampshire's structural deficit and over-reliance on the property tax for revenue tend to be obscured when the economy is good, for a number of reasons. Property tax increases are not so sharp, and rising incomes can help offset them. Revenues from other sources hold steady or increase. It is easier to ignore struggling families when they remain a minority that tends not to vote. And the nonprofit sector that props up an otherwise untenable status quo is not too strapped to plaster the cracks so people won't fall through.

But in hard times, when all revenues are down and state and local budgets are already cut to the bone, elected officials feel they have no choice but to gouge out the marrow. They pick save-now, pay-later fixes that end up costing far more than they're worth down the road. Indeed, the need for these fixes is a direct result of all the save-now, pay-later fixes from before. Are the problems with New Hampshire's outdated budget system dire enough and plain enough by now that people are actually ready to seek out durable solutions of lasting benefit?

We can do it

The people of New Hampshire are nothing if not resourceful. Together we ought to be able to find a way to modernize our outdated budget system so that it supports all the foundations of our state's success—our roads and bridges, police and fire departments, schools and colleges. Two hundred years ago, our budget system worked pretty well. Because most people made their living where they lived, property was a reliable measure of wealth and income, and the property tax made sense. But not anymore. Now most property is a home, often less a measure of what we own than of what we owe the bank. Yet we still rely on the property tax for 60 percent of our revenues, more than any other state. What our outdated

system means for New Hampshire families is that the only way to pay for the programs we need is to keep raising property taxes. And in our outdated system, a pledge against new taxes is simply a pledge to keep raising property taxes.

Some say, if you can't pay for what you need, then just stop needing it. Others say, if you need it, you'd better find a way to pay for it, because unmet needs have a way of growing far more costly later. For New Hampshire to keep its advantage, we need a balanced approach to tax reform that ensures all our programs are up-to-date and efficient, and that also provides enough revenue to pay for them. The best way to come up with a modern, balanced system that will work for New Hampshire is to evaluate and compare all possible options, and then decide based on uniform standards.

Last year, the Granite State Fair Tax Coalition developed just such a tool for evaluating and comparing options, and one of our jobs

this year is to get people to use it. The Lens lists questions that should be asked about any current or new revenue source to be sure it meets the criteria established by economic experts. Some of these questions are:

- Who pays? Is ability to pay taken into account?
- How much will it raise? Is it enough? Is it predictable and sustainable?
- Does it keep New Hampshire businesses competitive? Do out-of-staters pay their fair share?
- Does it bring home to New Hampshire revenue now going to other states?
- Do federal offsets effectively reduce what individuals and businesses pay in-state?
- Is it easy to understand and administer?
- Can the negative impacts be identified and accounted for?

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Gary Hirshberg, chairman, president, and "CE-Yo" of Stonyfield Farm, addresses GSFTC supporters at our annual meeting. Hirshberg was joined by Stonyfield's environmental policy director, Ken Colburn.

Our Plans Are Ambitious

Together We Can Accomplish Them

Dear Friend of Fair Taxes,

If you attended our annual meeting, you heard one of New Hampshire's most successful businessmen, Gary Hirshberg, president and CEO of Stonyfield Farm, urge us to embrace common-sense, 21st century tax policy that upholds the values we hold dear in New Hampshire. Challenging us to call for tax reform that does more than just raise revenues, he explained that smart tax policy can also help us reach long-term goals, such as encouraging clean energy sources.

At our annual meeting, we also elected our 2010 board. Carol Backus of Manchester represents partner NEA-New Hampshire. Nancy Chaddock of Hill represents the Northern New England District Unitarian-Universalist Association and serves as secretary. Tim Dunn of Keene is a former state representative. Rev. Bill Exner of Goffstown represents the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire. Peg Fargo of Bow represents the League of Women Voters of New Hampshire. Mark Fernald of Sharon represents the United Church of Christ New Hampshire Conference Commission for Witness and Action, and serves as treasurer. John Hattan, a resident of Concord, is the board representative from the State Employees' Association (SEIU Local 1984). Sandy Isaacs of Jaffrey represents the American Friends Service Committee. Bob Jones of Bedford is our vice president and Laurel Redden of Salem is our president.

Over these last few months, and with the help of our outstanding coordinator, Cathy Silber, the planning process for the year was completed and we are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities ahead. Hearing your requests, we're soon rolling out a house party kit our supporters can use to spark a Fair Tax discussion almost anywhere.

We're also working on trainings for grassroots supporters and candidates so they can talk about this issue with confidence. (Remember, we're just starting a conversation on fair taxes, so we have to practice!) And we're especially excited about our plans for a series of larger forums this fall, timed to take advantage of the heightened interest in tax and fiscal policy that occurs when candidates for office start filling the airwaves and knocking on our doors.

In the meantime, we're keeping an eye on legislation moving through the State House to see where we can lend our voice. When talk turns to revenue—or should—we've been there, offering the Lens questions and encouraging lawmakers to make sure they get answers before decisions are made. We were there when the bill to expand gambling was discussed in the Senate and House, and when perilous cuts were being proposed that promised only higher costs down the road.

We're building the organization and actively seeking new organizational partners and individuals to help steer our progress. Please help connect us to groups and people you think could be helpful. Contact Cathy at csilber@nhfairtax.org with suggestions.

We have an ambitious agenda, but we think it's one we can accomplish together. Please read this newsletter for more details on ways to get involved, then let us hear from you!

Your Granite State Fair Tax Coalition Board

Granite State Fair Tax News

The newsletter of the
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Are We There Yet?.....from page 1

We all have a choice to make to keep New Hampshire strong. One option is to pretend our problems are temporary, year after year after year, which will leave our state in such neglect that even when the economy does improve we'll be in no shape to revive. Or we could face facts and develop a modern budget system—in which everyone does their part—that invests what's needed to maintain the foundations of our prosperity for generations to come.

We're ready with big plans

Your board and staff have been hard at work, laying preparations to grasp the opportunities this year presents. Hardship has climbed far enough up the economic ladder to reach a critical mass of voters. And there's no time like an election year in a recession to draw public attention to fiscal policy. Our job isn't just to get more people to agree that maybe it's not so radical after all, this notion of lining up all revenue sources side by side and evaluating their pros and cons with criteria set by experts. Most people already agree! We've just got to do a better job of demonstrating that support. Let's make

this the year we shift things enough that the next legislative session offers a real solution to our state's most intractable problem. Between now and Election Day, we'll be training citizens and candidates alike in how to talk about tax and budget issues. With your help and that of our partnering organizations, we'll be holding house parties. And later this fall, we'll be blitzing the state with public forums. Read on for ways you can take part.

It's time to run

Have you ever thought about running for office? How about taking a stand for sound decision making and a common-sense approach to our state budget? How about calling for tax reform that accounts for both short-term needs and long-term trends, that considers both revenues and expenditures? The Coalition is preparing materials to help candidates talk to voters on these issues. The filing period is June 2-11. Contact us for further information.

Have a party!

Through our partner organizations and members like you, we'll be holding at least 30

house parties or discussion groups around the state, between June and October. All you need is a place for 10-15 people (it doesn't even have to be your house), a list of friends, neighbors and coworkers to invite, and some very simple refreshments. Everything else comes in our new house party kit. It's easy. The kit includes a complete how-to manual, copies of the Lens and brochures, a discussion guide, and materials for action steps (writing a letter to the editor, hosting another house party, helping with a public forum, etc.). Do think about hosting, and call Cathy for more information or to sign up.

The Blitz

Between the primary and the general election, we'll be holding a blitz of at least five public forums, strategically sited around the state, in collaboration with local partners. Each will feature expert panelists, opportunity for audience participation, coordination with grassroots action, and media coverage. Do you have ideas for your area? Can you help with these? Call Cathy today!

Volunteer & Contribute

Count me in!

First name: _____ Last name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

I'd like to

- Have a house party. Help organize a forum.
- Receive a call to talk about other ways I can help.

I'm contributing

\$25 \$35 \$50 \$100 \$500 Other \$_____

I'm enclosing a check.

I would prefer to contribute online.

(Please visit our Web site, www.nhfairtax.org. Find the "donate" button on the home page and follow links to PayPal, where you will also find a credit card donation option.)

Is your money where your mouth is?

Many of us have contributed to candidates of all political parties who take the pledge (to keep raising property taxes) because the alternatives have seemed worse. This year, consider investing that money instead in a way that moves New Hampshire toward real tax reform. Consider contributing that money to Granite State Fair Tax Coalition, and letting the candidates know why. Tell them you'll be happy to help them revoke their pledge to keep raising property taxes. Tell them Granite State Fair Tax Coalition can provide them with effective ways of talking with voters about our state's need for a modern budget system.

Right now, we need to raise \$50,000 to fund our programs, to pay for house parties, forums, and information for citizens and candidates, and we need your help. The Coalition has always depended on your contributions, and now more than ever we're counting on you to contribute whatever you can.



Write a Letter to the Editor!

This is one of the best ways to spread our message and build our movement. Newspapers don't print all the letters they receive, but they usually do try to represent an accurate ratio of the differing views they hear. That means the more GSFTC letters they get, the more will get printed. So get everyone you know to write too—early, often and all the way to Election Day! Here are some tips to get you started.

- **Reference a recent article.** If possible, it is best to include a reference to a recent article that appeared in the newspaper you've selected and then write your letter as a response, building on what was printed or pointing out how your viewpoint isn't included. This greatly increases the likelihood that your letter will be printed.

- **Include your contact information.** Most newspapers will only print a letter to the editor after calling the author to verify his or her identity and address. Newspapers will not give out that information and will usually only print your name and city should your letter be published.
- **Be clear and concise.** Keep your letters brief and to the point. Newspaper editors often edit for length, so try to keep your letter to less than 250 words (or observe the limit of the publication you're writing for). The shorter it is, the more likely it will be printed.
- **State your point early.** Be sure to state your main point in the subject line and in the first sentence of the letter.
- **Keep to one topic.** Keep your letters focused on one subject.

Welcome New Board Members

GFSTC has two new board members.

Tim Dunn is a retired legislator who served three terms in the New Hampshire House where he was vice chair of the Education Committee for two terms. Before that, he taught for 35 years, 33 of them in Keene, teaching English to 10th and 12th graders.

Sandy Isaacs is retired from a career in nonprofit and business administration. He is a member of the American Friends Service Committee Support Committee and cares about economic justice.

Help Us Stay in Touch

Was this newsletter forwarded to a new address? Are you getting our e-mail updates? Please use the form and envelope in this newsletter to send us your new contact information — and feel free to add a sheet with names and addresses of people you know would like to hear from us too.