

Big victory awards refunds for Incline taxpayers

Guest column

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Les Barta

Special to the Bonanza

A few weeks ago we wrote about our big victory on July 20, when the State Board of Equalization unanimously upheld the County Board's earlier decision rolling back the 2006 property taxes of all 9,000 Incline/Crystal Bay residential property owners to the 2002 levels. That was truly the beginning of the end of our long struggle for property tax justice.

Some people have been skeptical, though, about whether we would ever see actual refunds. Well, folks, we are delighted to tell you that the answer is "yes." On October 6, we won another huge victory, this time in district court. Judge Brent Adams ordered Washoe County Treasurer Bill Berrum to pay the refunds as required by the County Board's 2006 decision.

Here is our headline: The Village League and the citizens of the Incline area have won a stunning victory. Our long struggle for justice will soon be over — not just for a few people or a few hundred people, but for all 9,000 residential property owners in Incline Village and Crystal Bay. We will get refunds and interest — not just for 2006, but for all excess taxes paid since then for 2007, 2008 and 2009, and perhaps part of 2010 as well.

This is not just a monetary win for taxpayers. It is a victory for our system of justice and for upholding our constitutional rights — something which regrettably continues to elude some local and state government officials.

The written decision of the State Board's July 20 determination is required by law to be issued within 60 days after the hearing — which would

have been no later than September 20. Yet the Nevada Attorney General's office has been playing games issuing that document, perhaps in the hope of further delaying the inevitable. This unethical tactic was foiled by the recent ruling of Judge Adams.

County officials seem to be still looking for ways to delay payment of the refunds — an unwise strategy which has cost the county dearly in interest, to the tune of 6 percent, or roughly \$1 million dollars per year. Washoe County taxpayers in general should be aware of how their government has mishandled their money, with needless legal expenses and delaying tactics wasted on frivolous and bizarre legal strategies.

These officials have simply failed to grasp the notion that leadership requires constructive policies which promote justice, honor and respect of the authority of law, and minimize the tax burden of citizens. They need to finally realize that the game that they have been playing is over. Justice will be done and the county will have to pay back the illegally collected taxes with interest. Any further delay is futile and inappropriate, and will only increase the inevitable bill. The public interest demands an end to the cost and pain of the ongoing controversy and the ever mounting debt.

To the public officials who persist in aggravating this matter we say: "Prove that you are worthy of the public offices to which you were elected and put an end to this sorry spectacle."

Les Barta is an Incline Village and board member of the Village League to Save Incline Assets.

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