

Matt's Election Letter 2023

Boulder Mayor: **Aaron Brockett** (make him your 2nd choice if someone else is your 1st)

This is the first time our mayor will be selected directly by the voters – unfortunately, I think, since the old council-selection process worked well...but voters love to vote...even if, all too often, they don't really know much about the choices (a much bigger problem with ballot issues).

Luckily, the three main candidates for mayor are all current councilmembers with sufficient experience, and each could be a reasonable choice, although there are important differences here. I'd like them all to remain on the council – an outcome that would have been assured if we hadn't switched away from a council-selected mayor. And due to the strange implementation of our new system, Nicole Speer continues with her current 4-year term on council even if she loses (and can run for mayor next time), while Aaron and Bob Yates are gone if they lose. Even weirder, should Nicole win and thus move up to mayor (with Aaron and Bob gone of course), the 5th place finisher in the council election gets the final, newly vacated seat...even though we're voting for only 4 councilmembers!

Aaron Brockett is the clear choice for me for both substantive and stylistic reasons. His long experience, including five years on the Planning Board, gives him the greatest depth and breadth of understanding of our most important and complex issues, especially in the critical area of land-use and zoning. That's important for a mayor (as I can attest) since the key to keeping the council conversation focused on relevant issues and questions, without wandering off into the weeds too often, is to have a deep understanding of those issues, the broader context, related topics on council's agenda, the priorities of your council colleagues, the typically quite diverse views of the public ... and to be able to make timely suggestions that will help the council make good decisions. Aaron will clearly be the best at this essential mayoral role.

On the issues, while there are some substantive differences among the candidates, they seem to largely be in agreement on key items like creating more housing opportunities, modernizing our inclusionary zoning system, tackling our transportation and mobility problems, and many more. Unfortunately there will likely be too many voters who will choose based on one or two issues that are key to them – notably homelessness and maybe even potholes – this year, even though there will be little, if any, difference in our handling of these issues regardless of who gets elected, and they shouldn't be the basis for selecting a mayor.

On housing, it's important to note that the three main candidates have all supported the development of CU South, higher densities in a number of important projects around town, and have stated their support for finally getting serious about the Planning Reserve and ensuring that it too will have the density, variety of housing, and strong affordability requirements necessary to provide some real housing opportunities. They might differ in some respects – with Bob Yates likely being less in favor of say, rezoning neighborhoods, Nicole Speer most in favor, and Aaron typically taking a thoughtful and somewhat cautious approach while still desiring some changes over time. But note that – contrary to the shrill scare tactics of those opposed to any zoning changes of any sort anywhere – the very modest modifications being proposed here will have tiny impacts that will take decades to play out, which is why proposed changes in areas like the East Boulder industrial zones, the Planning Reserve, and, hopefully, some of our 1970's-style shopping centers are where the action will be, and all three candidates have supported those efforts.

And, although PLAN-Boulder has endorsed Bob Yates, and for the past couple of decades has wanted fealty from its council choices on PLAN's dogmatic opposition to any and all forms of growth and change, I very much doubt that Bob would adopt that approach. Bob did vote against the new occupancy limit of 5 unrelated (from our current 3 or 4), claiming that he wanted to ensure that higher occupancy was accompanied by "affordability" – but since it's almost impossible to see how that could be accomplished, it's hard to know Bob's true motivation.

Homelessness – and the real and perceived dangers from the many encampments and people living in and near our parks and paths – may well be the deciding factor this year in all the council races, unfortunately. I won't even try to summarize the myriad arguments from both/all sides of this issue; the Camera has been full of op-eds. And, of course, there is the "Safe Zones" ballot issue covered below. But it is extremely unlikely that even big changes on the council (or the success of Safe Zones) will have any significant impact, simply because the many interrelated problems here cannot be resolved by the city.

That said, there are some notable differences among the mayoral candidates. Bob, as per his style, seems to claim that he can fix things, even though he of course can't. Yes, he perhaps could – subject to court rulings that will likely tie our hands – push for more and faster cleanups, all of which are temporary. For what it's worth, I generally agree with that approach, even though I know it doesn't really work. But since nothing works, it's still essential that we ensure our parks and paths are safe. And while Bob is opposed to creating camping sites for the homeless (as am I) he otherwise seems to support all of the approaches the city has taken and proposes to take regarding a day shelter and more supportive services.

Aaron, I think, seems to garner significant opposition from those who feel that these issues are the most important ones facing the city right now. As usual, Aaron's position is thoughtful, fully supporting the importance of continuing our on-going removals of encampments and working to keep parks and paths safe – even if Aaron doesn't seem to stress this in his campaign nearly as much as Bob does. Aaron does seem to support the creation of a safe camping site – again, I think that's a bad idea – but one that may be worth trying if the city can figure out how to make it work. Otherwise, I don't see much practical difference – doing things that can actually be implemented by the city – between Aaron and Bob other than campaign noise. Nicole is, however, notably different, as she opposes the clean-ups on the, admittedly reasonable, grounds that they don't work and displaced people just move elsewhere. But it's hard to see how doing nothing is a better solution right now – and while Nicole surely wants to create an alternative approach there just isn't one in the cards anytime soon for a host of reasons that go far beyond the city's ability to resolve.

Style counts too. While voters will choose the mayor, the role of mayor hasn't officially changed in any way. And our City Charter gives the mayor almost no authority, other than to run meetings. Importantly, the mayor does not set the agenda – Boulder has a unique approach via the council agenda committee (CAC), where three councilmembers work with staff to create agendas – and neither the mayor nor any councilmember is allowed to tell staff what to do or how to present information. Yes, too many councilmembers and mayors over the years have skirted that last rule by privately trying (with too much success at times) to direct staff and modify staff recommendations and presentations prior to council meetings – thus preventing the rest of council – and the public – from getting staff's best advice and giving one councilmember more authority than the others. And, indeed, mayors have far more ability to take advantage of this than others on council.

Which is a long explanation of why, again, Aaron is the best choice – because he doesn't play those games, understanding that while the CAC and mayor can indeed help ensure that staff recommendations and presentations are well-structured, cover the material clearly, and consider the wide variety of concerns and preferences of council and the public, neither the CAC nor the mayor should ever try to "fix" the outcome in advance. I'd add that there is one venue where the mayor does have a very important, individual role to play, often out of public view: building strong relationships with colleagues throughout our region, at the statehouse, and in the US congress; Aaron has done an exceptional job in this regard.

And I raise this concern because this is an area where Bob is very likely to have a rather different approach. Although he denies it – and the line between "suggesting" and "directing" can be very hard to discern – Bob's M.O. is too often one that looks and feels an awful lot like directing staff, behind the scenes, in private. Again, some of that is inevitable, some accidental, and yes, it's been done by others over the years. As with anything, it's a matter of degree, intent, and amount. To be sure, voters often like this type of "leadership" that "gets things done" and is "efficient," but you won't like it when you're in disagreement with the outcome, and you – and the council – don't know what happened in secret. Bob's experience in the C-suite likely encourages this behavior – but to be fair, once he's mayor (which seems likely) Bob may feel that he can back off and lead the council – more "efficiently" perhaps, but using his many skills openly and transparently. Or he might just double-down on the inside-baseball tactics. We'll probably soon see...although I'm cautiously optimistic.

A few other concerns about Bob need to be noted, since I do like him in many ways. First, he should get much credit for his informative newsletter – although he's been known to stretch the truth to support his positions. Second, although he was nominally cleared of any misdeeds, he clearly collected email addresses from everyone who wrote to the council, something no one else would think of doing and which is simply unethical. And third, in this election he is ignoring the campaign spending limit (I have no problem with his not collecting city matching funds) and will likely outspend the other candidates quite significantly. Still, he's obviously a strong candidate, has worked very hard on council, and is highly unlikely to be overly influenced by any of the groups supporting him.

So...vote for Aaron Brockett. If your first choice is Nicole Speer, make sure that Aaron is marked as your second choice. We'll be OK the next three years regardless of the outcome.

City Council

Vote for: **Tara Winer, Ryan Schuchard, Waylon Lewis, Taishya Adams**

These four candidates represent a fairly wide range of views, experiences, and styles. While only Tara has notable experience and a good track record, and Ryan has served with distinction on the Transportation Advisory Board (TAB), they are the best choices for those of us who want councilmembers who can tackle our complex issues thoughtfully, while considering the long-term good for the entire community. Some will want to effect change too slowly, some perhaps too quickly, but they would find ways to work together, and with the new mayor and continuing councilmembers. Neither you nor I will always agree with them, but they'll listen to us, not be controlled by any of their endorsing groups, and add a diversity of thought and knowledge to the council.

We seem to have a new normal: lots of open seats (no incumbent running) and lots of candidates with little to no experience or track record. Perhaps that's good in some ways, giving the council more diversity. But it sure makes it harder to choose among them since it's very hard to discern their real priorities and how they might approach the complex issues that will face them – and, I think, they often don't know that either. Given the complexity of these issues – even if some suggest there are easy solutions – it can take years to get up to speed, particularly on land-use questions (unless, of course, you just oppose everything or vote the way your handlers tell you to), so I'd prefer candidates who have done some of that hard work already. But that's just grouchy old me...

That said, we luckily seem to have many good candidates this year who have the potential to be fine councilmembers. As with the mayor, there may – or may not; hard to tell – be few truly significant differences among them on the key issues of housing/growth/land-use, homelessness, transportation, safety, etc. The most likely differences – and most important for me right now – will be found in the housing/land-use arena, and then of course with homelessness, although, again, it's very unlikely that any council can, by itself, resolve the key issues around homelessness to any significant extent.

Tara Winer is the only incumbent running (excluding mayoral candidates). Two years ago it seemed clear she knew very little about city issues, and her PLAN support was troubling. But she deserves great credit – and support this year – for working very hard to learn the issues and, importantly, find her own voice and maintain her independence, particularly on housing and land-use issues. I'll no doubt wish she does more on that front, but I think she'll do more than enough on the issues that really count.

Ryan Schuchard has served on the city's TAB for a few years and so is the only other council candidate with real city experience and a track record, at least in one important area. He has a deeper understanding of the complexities of city issues than almost all of the other candidates, and gets that simplistic solutions won't resolve our long-term problems. He fully grasps the critical relationship between transportation and housing, and the essential environmental benefits from providing more housing opportunities – but like Aaron I think he will approach these controversial issues thoughtfully and carefully.

Waylon Lewis is...well...a bit quirky at times...but in a good way indeed. He's a lifelong Boulderite and has a long history of covering and writing about our city, with an eye towards equity and diversity. He feels he can bridge the often big divide among our famously disagreeing (and too often disagreeable) groups of smart, passionate residents – and he probably has as good a chance to pull that off as anyone. It's unfortunate that he has supported Safe Zones, but he fully understands the much bigger picture of the homelessness issue, and will be another strong but cautious supporter of providing more housing opportunities.

Taishya Adams is likely one of the least well-known of the candidates, with an important track record at the state level but not much that I know of locally. She almost certainly is more aligned with the Boulder Progressives than I am, but that's an important voice to have on the council at this time. She'll certainly support more housing opportunities, but will likely provide different insights into that complex issue – and others – than we typically get from councilmembers.

Of the remaining candidates, Tina Marquis, Jenny Robins, and Terri Brncic seem to have the best shot at getting elected, and I'd be surprised if at least one of them wasn't successful. They all purport to support more housing opportunities, and generally align with what one might call "moderate" policies, if there is such a thing in Boulder. PLAN-Boulder has endorsed all three,

which might appeal to some but is troubling for me – but that may very well be unfair to these candidates, just as it was to Tara Winer last time. But since they have no track record on most city issues it's simply impossible to discern how serious they are about their campaign claims, and at least some reason to be at least a little skeptical. Tina of course deserves much credit for her years on the school board and may well win because of that, but based on admittedly limited contact, she too often seems to again be running for school board, although she is likely the most supportive of housing and I think would make a fine councilmember. The other two are strong supporters of Safe Zones – which doesn't by itself rule them out in my view – and have some good instincts and goals, but have notably less knowledge and experience than I'd like, with Terri being the least supportive of housing.

Ballot Issue 2A: Sales Tax Extension – Vote **NO**

It would be hard to top Mary Young's (former councilmember) superb op-ed in the Camera on this issue, so I will include it here in its entirety. If you're still up for some additional comments I'll add them after her op-ed.

This guest opinion calls attention to a common misperception that may impact your vote in the upcoming election and asks you to vote "no" on Issue 2A.

The City of Boulder ballot Issue 2A asks whether we should extend a 0.15% City sales and use tax that currently goes into the General Fund and generates approximately \$7.5 million per year and if yes, do we want to split this revenue stream in half and dedicate half of it — \$3.75 million — to the arts.

The General Fund pays for entire departmental budgets — including police, fire/rescue, housing and human services, facilities maintenance and municipal court to name just a few.

It pays for programs such as wildfire resilience, behavioral health response, the upcoming day services center, safe and managed parks and public spaces, and provides funding for community programs that help address social inequities such as home repairs at mobile home communities and language access to non-English speakers.

And, yes, provides funds to repair those pesky potholes.

These important services could suffer budget cuts if 2A were passed as it could necessitate cuts in basic community needs, city government responsibilities and affect our city's financial well-being.

The arts and cultural activity in Boulder is crucially important as well. The good news is that we are already showing our love for the arts through a dedicated sales/use tax.

In 2021, we voted on and passed the Community, Culture, Resilience and Safety Tax, dedicating nearly \$20 million to community grants over the 15-year life of the tax. In addition, arts and culture institutions (Studio Arts Boulder, the Dairy, BMOCA, KGNU, Museum of Boulder) have benefited with nearly \$12 million in city capital funding over the last eight years.

Annually, city resources spent on arts, culture and heritage now total about \$4.5 million (Office of Arts and Culture operating budget, public art, community grants and free rent in city buildings).

In contrast, our Municipal Court budget has hovered around \$2.5 million for the last five budget cycles.

Dedicating tax revenue for specific causes or interests has a negative impact on the city's basic services.

The results are similar to the water diversions in the Colorado River Compact: each self-interested party siphons off whatever amount of the resource they can, leaving a nearly dry river for basic public uses, with no flexibility to adjust allocations even under dire circumstances.

Currently, 54% of sales and use tax revenue is already dedicated for specific purposes to Open Space and Mountain Parks; transportation; Community, Culture and Safety; and Parks and Recreation.

Creating yet another dedicated tax runs counter to the City's financial planning which has been on a continuous strategic road to stabilization since the findings and recommendations of two Blue Ribbon Commissions beginning in 2008.

These two ad-hoc committees identified a "structural gap" between revenues and expenditures estimated at \$90 million by 2030, even with the extension of expiring sales and use taxes.

They determined that the Councils' culture of being "everything to everyone" made them prey to reactive policy-making in response to pressure from single interest advocates asking for specific services without consideration of who loses.

Our city council, in wanting to satisfy a single interest, endorsed issue 2A at the expense of more pervasive budgetary considerations.

At a minimum, the Council should have provided voters with two competing ballot questions: one, consistent with the long-term financial stabilization strategy, to renew the General Fund tax in full as it currently exists and a second with the language honoring the citizen petition asking to allocate the full tax to one single interest.

Instead, voters will find only one option that essentially holds ongoing city revenue hostage by requiring half of the tax to be dedicated to a single interest, thereby reducing the City's flexibility in meeting a wide variety of community needs.

Do we really want to pay for more tax revenue diversions through cuts in basic community services, city government responsibilities and risk our city's financial well-being?

Please vote "no" on Issue 2A. We can vote next November to permanently focus the tax on the General Fund and its essential needs before it expires in December 2024.

Mary Dolores Young served on the Boulder City Council from 2013 to 2021 and on the Planning Board from 2009 to 2013. While on Council she also served on the Financial Strategies Committee.

Mary hit pretty much all the highlights of why you should oppose 2A, but here are my additions:

- Most importantly, I want to strongly reiterate the main problem: a dedicated tax for 20 years. While on the council, I fought against adding more dedicated taxes – they're fine for capital projects but awful for operating expenses – and even got some old taxes un-dedicated. If anything, this one is worse than usual since the money, unlike the taxes for Open Space and transportation, doesn't even go to city agencies.
- But it's not just me. Here – excerpted from the Boulder Beat (a great source of news and worth supporting at boulderbeat.news) is what Bob Yates has to say:
He also expresses discomfort with how much of the city's budget is dedicated to specific departments, programs or services, which limits flexibility in times of crisis. "It just locks you in, and then when your values change or when the economy goes to crap ... there's a multi-million-dollar hole in our budget that pays for parks and rec centers, and police and fire, pothole patching," etc. We may need to have "some tough conversations in the next couple of years."
- And then there's the absurd way that we even got to this point. Yes, the arts community had the right to petition a tax onto the ballot – even if we make this vastly too easy to do. But the council's stupid (no other word for it) decision to just put a single "compromise" issue on the ballot giving arts 50% is just...well...stupid. Clearly councilmembers don't really want to spend that much on the arts. How do we know? Well, look at this and next year's budgets; council easily could have increased the arts budget but didn't. Was council afraid that having both the original arts issue (100% to the arts) and a clean city issue (100% to the city, as is now the case) would cause the city issue to fail? Perhaps, but the record is very clear that

arts issues do very poorly in elections, and even if single-issue arts voters did cause the city issue to fail, we could simply try again next year.

- This really would be a huge increase in arts funding. Sure, it's a small percentage of the city budget – but you really need to look at the “discretionary” budget, the fairly small amount left each year after deducting capital expenses, the water utility, dedicated funds to open space and transportation, essential funding for parks/recreation and human services, etc. In that light, and over 20 years, this new – dedicated and unchangeable, no matter the circumstances – money for the arts is quite a substantial hit on the budget, constraining future councils significantly, as city staff was at pains to point out.
- A key argument by the arts proponents is that Boulder spends less on arts than other cities. Well, having studied the concept of comparing city expenditures I can tell you that there is no good way to get accurate comparables – and Mary in her op-ed points that out by adding in items like free rent and the cost of the buildings. But even if Boulder does spend somewhat less, maybe that's because we've chosen to spend vastly more on some other things...like, say, Open Space? Is that so bad? Must we be the biggest spenders on everything?
- Yes, there are struggling artists. You might be aware that there are large numbers of Boulder residents – and even more non-residents who work here – that provide our essential services who are ... struggling just as much or even more. Why, exactly, are those who call themselves artists our priority?
- Yes, certain artistic endeavors likely do provide a return-on-investment (ROI) for the city – although here again the math is exceptionally fuzzy; if you've ever tried to sum the claimed economic impacts from all of the business sectors you'd find that total far exceeds the actual total since each sector – certainly including the arts – is, let's say, very generous with its assumptions. But even if the arts have a great ROI, since when have we made budgetary decisions based on that? In fact, Boulder has been very careful to avoid that trap. Should we now reduce spending for many key amenities (say, recreation centers) that have negative ROIs and increase it for those that bring in the money? And the arts community should be careful that these claims don't result in our funding only those forms of “art” that do seem to have good ROIs but not those that don't, regardless of merit or community desires.
- A scientific city poll taken earlier this year confirmed what we've long known: our residents have very little desire to increase funding for the arts. And when there have been ballot issues – like for a performing arts center – they lose in landslides. I'd suggest that the council over the years has – correctly in my view – provided considerably more support for the arts than our populace would have.
- While nobody likes to talk about it, our arts community has considerable “competition” from the many arts-related activities at CU, and, of course, from what has become world-class options in Denver. That doesn't mean we shouldn't support local arts, but it gives our residents many more options.

At minimum, the council should have given voters a choice, with a clean 100% to-the-city tax as an option. Since they didn't, the current issue needs to be defeated so we can get a clean tax issue on the ballot next year. Luckily we can do that with no loss to city revenues since the existing tax doesn't expire until the end of 2024. Given the large campaign budget of the proponents, and the fact that the council stupidly (have I mentioned how stupid this is?) put this on the ballot without another choice, it will be very hard to defeat – but your **NO** vote will help.

Ballot Issue 2B: Elections Administrative Charter Cleanup: Vote **YES**

Sure – this really is just an elections administrative cleanup.

Ballot Issue 302: Safe Zones 4 Kids: Vote **NO**

I won't try to compete with the endless, and often repetitive, set of op-eds in the Camera on this issue. As I've noted, I'm also rather tired of the encampments, trash, needles, and very real safety issues in our public parks and paths. And while, indeed, forcing people to move doesn't solve the bigger problem, it does, at least a little, help with the perceived and all-too-real safety concerns, and perhaps, just a little, helps convince some people that staying in Boulder, or coming to Boulder, might not be such a good idea. And fairly or not, we simply have to keep noting that, according to all the data, at least 2/3 and more like ¾ of the city's homeless population comes to Boulder from outside the city ... a very real fact that makes any sort of resolution even more impossible. So, yes, I guess I'm not a "true progressive" on this issue.

Still, this ballot issue is a very bad idea for so many reasons, even if we acknowledge and understand the frustration of its supporters.

First, it isn't about safe zones or kids, at least not the way it's written. By including not just school zones, not just our main multi-use paths, but anyplace within 50 feet of a sidewalk ... that is essentially the entire city. It's hard to prioritize everything, so this is just meaningless, as its creators well know. Sure, one could say this is just a way of sending a message to the council, but this is real language that will be added to the city code. While it can't, and won't, really impose constraints on the city's already aggressive enforcement policies, it will remain in the code forever, certainly causing confusion and much wasted time on debate and accusations of failing to ...what ... triple our police force so that every homeless person everywhere in the city is immediately and repeatedly rousted?

And here's a letter to the Camera from someone who seems familiar, and who states some of these problems better than I have:

When considering whether to vote for the Safe Zones measure, we need to use generational thinking. This proposal takes a single focus approach to a multi-faceted problem and would lock that approach in for years to come, because ordinances passed by a citizen vote can't be changed by future City Councils. So passing this measure means the city is locked into an enforcement-first approach for years (or generations) to come. Circumstances change, communities change, and we learn new and better ways to address wicked problems like this — but future City Councils would not be able to pivot to adapt to changing circumstances or adopt new solutions because this ordinance would tie their hands. It's never good policy to take single-focus solutions and lock them in for the future.

The issue here is how to address homeless people living on the streets. This ordinance would lock the Council into an "enforcement first" approach even when other, better options are available. I'll be voting "no" on 302.

— *Joni Teter, Boulder*

Second, our real efforts should be focused on the federal government, state legislature, and Boulder County. They are the governmental entities responsible for health and human services, not cities. The city of Boulder can do very little to deal with the key problems here of drug addiction and mental health that almost certainly are the main drivers of safety-related issues. Nor can the city effectively deal with the influx of homeless people from outside Boulder who, understandably, come here because we provide far more services than most places. If only the people supporting this ballot issue would use their considerable energy to vociferously lobby

Boulder County and our legislators we'd perhaps have a better chance of finding some real solutions.

Finally, if you're worried that voting no will somehow send a message that we shouldn't continue to remove encampments (well, at least until a court foolishly tells us otherwise), I really don't think that's an issue at all. Even councilmembers who are more "progressive" than I am on this issue have repeatedly supported that approach and will surely continue to do so, since public safety and the ability of all of us to access and use our public spaces is a critical role for the city. A **NO** vote will, however, let the next council continue to work on this complex issue in a more comprehensive and thoughtful manner.

County Ballot Issue 1A: Open Space Sales Tax Extension: Vote **MAYBE**

Of course this will win in a landslide, as it probably should. I'm just being grouchy here, as usual. The county needs to spend considerably more money on human services, as noted above – that's its role in government. If that means spending a bit less on other stuff, even things we like, so be it. At minimum, the county should stop spending any of its general (non-dedicated) funds on its open space program, and turn its attention – and money – to more pressing needs.

County Ballot Issue 1B: Affordable and Attainable [Housing] Sales Tax Extension: Vote **YES**

While I am always extremely nervous about giving the county more money – even for such essential needs as affordable housing – the need is so great that, sure, let's see how they spend it. Why the skepticism? It's not that the county actually wastes the money – although their spending gets nowhere near the scrutiny that the city's does – but that almost without exception the city of Boulder gets little in return, especially given that our city provides fully half of the county's general tax revenues. No doubt this will continue, but, still, the need is great. Kudos to Matt Benjamin on the city council for getting our council to send the county a letter noting that council support was contingent on the county using a significant portion of this sales tax revenue for critical support of city needs relating to homelessness and affordable housing; I wouldn't hold my breath waiting for that to happen, but at least the city has finally, if weakly, spoken up.

State Proposition HH: property tax relief and TABOR refund modification: Vote probably **YES**

I think the legislature goofed by tying some limited property tax relief with reducing TABOR refunds, and not only will HH probably lose, but we already have a much larger and quite troubling ballot issue on property tax that will be on the 2024 ballot via petition.

Property taxes are a strange beast, our only real attempt to tax "wealth," which is a good concept but with a rather poor implementation. Colorado's property taxes are very, very low compared to most of the US, even if in Boulder they seem high due to our crazy-high property values (they would be 2 to 3 times higher in most parts of the country, especially ones where you might actually want to live).

But people – especially the landed-gentry who vote – understandably hate property taxes. Look at progressive California with its infamous Prop 13, which is an astonishingly awful and inequitable approach. And I have little doubt that next year, unless the state legislature takes

additional action, that a ballot issue significantly reducing property taxes, no matter how bad and inequitable it is, will pass.

Most opposition to HH comes from its apparent large reduction in future TABOR refunds, which will allow the state to backfill the property tax losses of special districts (like library and fire districts). Well, I don't think we should be getting any TABOR refunds, so that's not my problem. Tying allowable tax revenues to population growth and general inflation has never made any sense; governmental expenditures are just not related in any real way to general inflation or even growth. Still, attaching this TABOR "fix" to a property tax issue was a mistake.

The property tax relief from this issue will be rather modest, certainly compared to the huge jump in property values, so don't expect a big impact on your bill should this pass. While I do lean towards supporting it, one reason for opposition would be, I think, to force the legislature to take another, more comprehensive look at property taxes, detach them from TABOR issues, finally try to fix school funding, and deal with all sorts of other admittedly difficult revenue issues in their 2024 session.

State Proposition II: retention of taxes on nicotine products: Vote **YES**

Sure, absolutely no reason not to retain the taxes already collected and continue to collect them in full for sales of nicotine products.