

County takes a shot at 10-cent-a-bullet tax: Stroger wins shouting match, OK to transfer \$13 mil. from forests

Chicago Sun-Times, February 8, 2007, by Steve Patterson

What could be the nation's first tax on bullets is being floated as a way to help balance Cook County's budget.

Commissioner Roberto Maldonado wants to slap a 10-cent-a-bullet tax on those buying ammunition in the county. It's one of dozens of plans offered to close the county's \$500 million budget deficit.

The plan comes as the County Board raids the Forest Preserve District for \$13 million, demands millions more from state government and considers slapping fees on SUVs, towed cars and other items. It's all being discussed to try to lessen the impact of thousands of job cuts, as proposed by Board President Todd Stroger.

Stroger said he'll listen to any ideas to increase fees but wouldn't change his commitment to a no-tax pledge.

QUIGLEY BLASTS STROGER

As the county nears a Feb. 28 budget deadline, tension is building, and Stroger launched into his first public shouting match Wednesday, accusing Commissioner Mike Quigley, an ally, of scheming to "stab me in the back."

Quigley blasted Stroger for encouraging the \$3 billion county government to raid the \$167 million forest preserves budget to close his gap. Both governments are controlled by County Board members.

But Stroger said it's simply a payback on \$13 million in help the county government gave the struggling forest preserves five years ago. There was huge debate about whether that was a gift or a loan, but most of the board sided with Stroger and approved the transfer.

'LATERAL TAX HIKE'

"The bank managers became the bank robbers today," said Benjamin Cox of Friends of the Forest Preserves.

Quigley told Stroger "from here we part," as he was peeved over a property tax increase the board approved for the forest preserves just

months ago, coupled with learning Wednesday the district has a \$66 million surplus. Forest preserves officials gave \$13 million of the surplus funds back to the county board, and said the district wouldn't miss it.

Quigley said transferring those funds is "a lateral tax hike" and Stroger loses "all credibility" for future tax increases. Stroger fired back that Quigley will "stand with me one day and talk about me the next." Although Stroger won that battle, more are sure to come as the county struggles to balance its budget.

Maldonado said an ammo tax "is as close as possible to a sin tax" and could bring in more than \$250,000 a year.

A National Rifle Association official urged the County Board to look elsewhere for funds.

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FOR MORE ON THE WEB

Log on to www.suntimes.com to hear audio of the heated exchange between Cook County Board President Todd Stroger and county Commissioner Mike Quigley.

THE BULLET POINTS:

A look at how much of an effect a fee on bullets would have - from small fries to big shots:

\$.10

Deputy Barney Fife, if he bought his own police-issued bullet and was able to join the Cook County Sheriff's Department.

\$50

Terry "Tank" Johnson, if the Bears defensive tackle made the trip across the county line for the 500 rounds of ammunition allegedly found in his Lake County home.

\$530,368

If every person in Cook County, 5,303,683 according to 2005 U.S.

Census estimates, were to do his or her part and buy one bullet.

\$600,000,000

From the U.S. military, if Cook County could get its 10-cent fee for the average 1.5 billion rounds of small arms ammunition used each year of the nearly four years of the Iraq war.