

## Opinion: Proposition 1D will rob children's needs

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For pity and terror, the tragic, prolonged spectacle of California's elected leaders driving our once-vibrant economy into near bankruptcy is hard to top. And yet, they topped it. Rather than face the problem like grown-ups, and raise honest-to-god revenues, they have gone on a scavenger hunt for dollars that can be diverted into the gaping maw of the general fund. It's like a parent who can't make a mortgage payment deciding, rather than get a job, to raid the kids' piggy bank.

Proposition 1D, one of the budget measures on the May 19 ballot, asks us to approve the unconscionable grab of the tobacco tax funds that have been meeting the needs of children from birth to age 5. Californians voted for this program in 1998, passing Proposition 10, the measure that established FIRST 5 and its county-based approach.

FIRST 5 has been one of our progressive state's most progressive programs, providing communities with innovative services that are giving at-risk kids a fighting chance at a healthy, productive life. FIRST 5 is the largest, most stable funding source of health coverage for kids up to age 6 in our state, with more than \$48 million spent last year just on children's health insurance through local Healthy Kids programs. Santa Clara County, which created Healthy Kids, has been able to cover about 10,000 kids every year, and FIRST 5 is funding all the ones ages newborn to 5.

It could be argued that some of these funds will be used by the state to help kids in our county. But that is a far cry from the local control of funds and programs that FIRST 5 has permitted.

The amount of funding provided to each FIRST 5 County Commission is based on the area's birthrate. FIRST 5 Santa Clara County has created and supported early education, school readiness, developmental screenings, early interventions, oral health care, nutrition and anti-obesity efforts for our kids — based on what our community needs and how our community can best implement the services.

What sense does it make to lose 11 years of careful work, for the paltry \$268 million a year that the state will take from the FIRST 5 programs? That isn't even a decent drop in the bucket of California's \$42 billion deficit. It is too great a sacrifice, for so small a contribution to solving the state's fiscal problems.

It's just wrong to break the piggy-bank if you can't pay the mortgage.

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