

# 'Greedyest generation' seeks tax freeze

BY J. RONALD CAREY

Last year the voters of Texas approved a constitutional amendment that allows freezing property taxes for the disabled and people over age 65.

Sounds good, doesn't it? Who could be against helping the helpless and the elderly?



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It was clever, perhaps even devious, to include the two groups together.

In terms of need, the two groups could not be more divergent. The disabled deserve the assistance; we elderly do not.

First, let's look at the argument presented by a few seniors and columnists and compare their allegations with the truth.

■ Seniors on Social Security are on a fixed income.

No one on Social Security is on a fixed income. Every year, Social Security payments have increased. The truth is that seniors are on a guaranteed increasing income.

■ Seniors have higher medical expenses.

There is a federal program called Medicare that applies to seniors. There is also a new drug benefit through Medicare. The truth is that seniors have guaranteed medical insurance.

■ "An untold number (of seniors) are losing their homes because of rising taxes" (Ken Rodriguez's column "Property

tax freeze for seniors gains support, momentum," Nov. 7).

The reason the number is untold is that the evidence is anecdotal only.

Do seniors have any tax breaks now? Yes.

■ People over 65 have a school tax homestead exemption that is 67 percent higher than that of younger Texans.

■ Homesteaders over 65 have their school property taxes frozen; taxes of younger Texans rise yearly.

But apparently these benefits aren't enough. We seniors want even more.

Now, compare the financial condition of the elderly vs. the young.

■ The elderly have lower housing costs. Seniors are more likely to own their houses outright.

■ The elderly have lower living costs. Few seniors have children in their households.

■ Four years ago the United States had a budget surplus. This year there is a record deficit. The elderly are spending wildly; the young will have to pay the bill.

■ Because the elderly pressure Congress to not reduce Social Security payments or benefits, there is a looming deficit that will affect only the young.

■ At age 65 seniors are guaranteed medical insurance even if they have a pre-existing condition. The cost next year of Medicare will be less than \$80 a month. That is a bargain

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compared to the hundreds of dollars a month most younger people pay — that is, if they are even able to get insurance.

How precarious is Medicare's future? "If you don't want to see your children and grandchildren crushed by massive tax increases when the baby boomers retire, you had better transform Medicare." Words of a screaming liberal? Hardly. The quote is from Newt Gingrich.

And how serious is the debt we are leaving the young? Peter Peterson, who was commerce secretary in the Nixon administration, gives advice to the "rising generation" in his new book, "Running on Empty." He cites the danger of lowering taxes without reducing spending. His conclusion is that current leaders are selling out future leaders.

The U.S. government debt is \$53 trillion, including obligations such as Medicare and Social Security. In terms we all can understand, that is \$473,000 per household.

Interest alone adds \$1 trillion a year. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan recently said, "As a nation, we may have already made promises to coming generations of retirees that we will be unable to fulfill."

There are several full-time workers in San Antonio paid \$18,600 or less. That is below the Census Bureau's poverty level for a family of four. On the other hand, many people starting Social Security this year will be paid more than

\$20,000 a year. And most of them will have additional income sources.

All this makes it clear. We elderly want services to continue, but we don't want to pay our proportional share. We have time on our hands so we can pass petitions, appear at public meetings and walk door-to-door. Younger citizens are too busy working full time, eking out a living, to mount an equivalent campaign.

The people of Windcrest voted against the tax freeze. The mayor of Windcrest was quoted as saying that several elderly people told him that they wanted to "pay their fair share." How refreshing.

Now compare our generation with our predecessors. What can be said about our parents? They believed in pay-as-you-go. They paid their debts fully and on time. They would never have tried to saddle their children with an unfair obligation.

And if this tax freeze for the elderly is passed, then what will be said about us? We believe in having the young pay-as-we-went. We want the young to pay our debts. We want to transfer our obligation to the young.

Our parents are known as the greatest generation. If the tax freeze is approved, we elderly will also be branded. We will come to be known as the greedyest generation.

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