



OPINION

An obligation to help

Every day in Teton Valley, people are forced to make personal decisions that affect the fabric of our community. The impact is largely unseen and because of this invisibility, it can be hard to identify the threat.

When a family has to decide to pay rent instead of buying sufficient groceries, our community has hungry children. Hungry children don't progress well in school. They often lack appropriate clothing. They carry the stress of their family's poverty which affects their mental health, social skills and scholastic achievements. Children who are raised in poverty often remain in poverty because their parents are unable to afford or embrace opportunities that become available. That usually leads to another generation born into poverty.

When a man loses his job because his car breaks down and he can't afford repairs, there are community consequences: an employer loses an employee, a family loses income which may lead to loss of their home, a child may drop out of school to help support the family, a medical emergency could occur that can't be paid for, and in varying degrees, we all shoulder the impact.

The federal poverty guidelines state that a family of four with a household income of less than \$24,600 is living in poverty. It's hard to imagine any family size surviving in Teton Valley on less than \$25k. It's hard to imagine having to decide between shelter, food, and clothing. Add



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the additional cost for having your child's cavities filled, needing eyeglasses, needing a doctor, caring for a disabled parent, and all of the other every day challenges that are simply a part of life, and we really should be wondering how our low-income neighbors manage to survive at all.

Instead of judging or making assumptions about why people are in crisis, it's our duty as a humane community to get to know the faces and organizations that make it their mission to help others. Most of these local groups are non-profits that rely on private donations to exist. Private donations make it possible to offer free or subsidized medical care, mental health counseling, shelter, clothing, food, transportation, employment training, education, substance abuse support, and more.

Our little valley has over 40 nonprofits with many of them working to improve the health and human services available for our community. These services aren't hand-outs; they're hands to help people step up and away from crisis. If you review the lists of donor names for these local nonprofits, you'll see many of the same names

over and over again. It's unwise and irresponsible to believe that a handful of individuals can and should continue to pay for services that help everyone. If we ignore this issue, these services will fade away but the need and consequences will multiply.

In a caring community, people build paths to help each other thrive. Teton Valley has a history of coming together to help those in need. We now have a chance to turn history into an enduring legacy. The City of Driggs is asking voters to renew the current 0.5 % local option sales tax. The tax was first approved in 2000 and has been renewed by voters as recently as 2007. Thirteen other communities in Idaho that are similar in size and status as destination resort towns have benefited from this tax, which is paid primarily by tourists. At 0.5%, the sales tax is the lowest rate in Idaho. For our community, some of those funds could be allocated to specific nonprofits to give others a fighting chance at a better life.

Taxpayers are asked to share their input on the request to renew this sales tax through an online survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/DriggsSalesTax>. This is our opportunity to tell city leaders where to direct sales tax support: to the local agencies that help our friends and neighbors lead productive, healthier lives that in turn strengthen our community.