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"Measure U is not about not supporting the firefighters, says The Red Brennan Group." Fire Chief Dan Munsey, disagrees and the defeat of Measure U would cost 41.5 million loss of revenue to the SBCFPD.

The Red Brennan Group has ventured to various city council meetings to encourage residents to repeal the FP-5 Special Tax due to the unusual and possibly unconstitutional procedure this tax was introduced to the assessor tax bill. In 2006, the FP-5 tax was voted on by the Helendale community to supplement the cost of fire services in the area. This tax, initially created to service 5.6 square miles around Helendale, now covers an area of just under 20,000 square miles.

The Red Brennan Group is a local, party-agnostic nonprofit with a mission to create “Good Governance” in San Bernardino County.

The **San Bernardino County Fire** Protection District passed a resolution in 2018 approving of this expansion, which the Red Brennan Group argues was unconstitutional. The county board issued an opportunity for residents to protest the expansion; however, it required 25% of property owners who own at least 25% of the impacted land for an election to be initiated.

The protest process consisted of allowing landowners to submit a “no” by protest form or showing up to a public hearing. None of the cities were able to reach the 25% protest, so the tax was then implemented throughout all unincorporated areas of San Bernardino County.

According to Article XIII C of the California State Constitution, “No local government may impose, extend, or increase any special tax unless and until that tax is submitted to the electorate and approved by a two-thirds vote.” While this tax was initially self-imposed by a vote from 1,022 residents in Helendale, it has been expanded to become a \$41.5 million dollar expense from the citizens of all unincorporated areas of San Bernardino County, plus the cities of Yucca Valley and Grand Terrace.

When Helendale passed the tax in 2006, it generated \$117 per parcel with the ability to increase up to 3% each year with inflation. In 2018, San Bernardino County residents paid \$157.28 per parcel. Critics of the tax fear that it will rapidly continue to increase since there’s no maximum parcel amount.

Grand Terrace resident Doctor Tom Rivera spoke on the tax by saying, “Personally, I was not aware of the tax until I started filing my 2019 taxes and noticed the double taxation on my property.” Upon further reading into the state Constitution, Dr. Rivera believes that the residents of Grand Terrace were not provided the opportunity to vote on the tax increase.

San Bernardino County Supervisor Dawn Rowe stated, "I certainly wasn't a fan of the method used to expand the FP-5 zone in 2018, which preceded my time on the Board of Supervisors, but it's important to recognize that FP-5 was originally created through a majority vote of the people in the community of Helendale. The proposed measure to repeal the FP-5 special tax includes Helendale, and I think there's a question about the appropriateness of voters from throughout the county weighing in on the level of fire service in that community. Residents of Helendale voted to pay for better fire service and now a special interest group is trying to take that away. In some ways, you can view that as undemocratic and unconstitutional for voters in Helendale."

The Red Brennan group has already collected more than 34,000 signatures to call for the repeal of the FP-5 Special Tax. The measure to repeal the tax will appear on resident's ballots this November as Measure "U".

Natalie Zuk, the Media and Public Relations Director of the Red Brennan Group, believes that the issue of the tax isn't only about the money, it's a transparency problem with the county and their constituents. "It sets a dangerous precedent if we let San Bernardino County get away with this," Zuk said, "Elected officials aren't representing their voters."

In May, Fire Chief Dan Munsey gave a presentation to the Fire Board detailing that, "If Service Zone FP-5 is repealed, it would result in a \$41.5 million loss of revenue to SBCFPD. The District may be forced to close 15 fire stations, decrease firefighter lifesaving care by over 200; ultimately increasing response times. Secondary impacts would include the elimination and/or reduction of several crucial programs." In the North Desert Service Zone, the division that serves Helendale, fire personnel would nearly be cut in half. Before the FP-5 tax, this region was historically under-resourced and emergency response times in some areas exceeded an hour.

The future of the FP-5 tax and our local fire departments will be decided by registered voters in November. Although proponents support fire protection, this measure is more of a statement of how this tax was forced upon property owners. It will appear on your ballot as Measure "U" to "Repeal the special tax associated with Fire Protection Zone Five" and, this time, it will be up to the citizens of San Bernardino County to decide its fate.

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