

Voters may be asked to weigh in on Nevada education spending

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A Nevada labor union leader said his organization is “looking seriously” at launching a ballot initiative to put a tax hike to increase funding for education to the voters at the 2012 general election.

“We are looking seriously at this process because the legislative process is an impossible one,” Danny Thompson, executive secretary-treasurer of the Nevada State AFL-CIO, said this week. “With the two-thirds requirement in the constitution, what in effect that does – it has the minority control the majority wishes. You cannot solve the problem at the Legislature alone without some help from the people.”

Nevada has a two-thirds vote requirement in the Legislature to raise taxes or fees.

Thompson said Nevada needs more tax revenue to properly fund education, which in turn would help in the diversification of the state economy and lead to the creation of jobs.

A survey of Nevada voters by the Retail Association of Nevada showed 57 percent would prefer to raise taxes rather than see further cuts in spending to education and health care. Sixty-four percent also said higher taxes would lead to job losses, however.

Other polls conducted in Nevada over the years have often shown voter support for specific types of tax increases, such as those imposed on gaming or on alcohol and cigarettes. Voters have typically not favored increases in the sales tax

or property tax.

Asked to comment on a potential tax ballot initiative, Nevada state Sen. Michael Roberson, R-Las Vegas, said the issue properly belongs in the Legislature.

"I don't think there are very many people in the state that believe that tax policy should be through ballot initiative," he said. "We can talk about it now, we should be talking about it now, between now and next February (2013). But it is the job of the Legislature to make those decisions."

The Nevada Legislature will convene again in 2013.

Ballot measures are not always well thought out and often cause more problems than they solve, Roberson said.

"We all want to have more revenue and more funding for education," he said. "Education and job creation are the two biggest issues facing the state. This state is certainly at a crossroads. We have got to reform education but we all know we need to fund education better."

Roberson said he and his Senate Republican colleagues would be happy to sit down with Thompson, as well as with legislative Democrats, to discuss and work toward an acceptable solution regarding tax policy and tax reform.

"People are fed up," Thompson said. "We have the lowest spending on education in the nation and we have the highest unemployment with no solution to these problems in sight, and we have a total dependency on a single industry for paying our bills."