

ASK THE GOVERNOR

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It's time to "Ask the Governor" when Governor Farris Bryant answers questions based on letters and comments from Florida citizens.

QUESTION: Governor, when you recently addressed the State Association of County Commissioners you called for new thinking on the mechanics of local government. What did you have in mind?

GOVERNOR: Well in particular, county government was designed to handle those rural areas outside of municipal government. But the areas outside of municipal government are in most instances no longer rural, yet the government designed to handle them has not changed basically. I would like to see our county officials turn their minds to any of a number of expedients that could be developed for the upgrading of their powers, or the modification of their powers, so as to make them adaptable to the more metropolitan day in which we live. Of course, I also talked to them about utilizing the road funds that they have accredited them on a broader scale than at present. For instance, there is on deposit with the State Treasurer through the Road Department \$23 millions of dollars of unused secondary county funds. Now counties never - these funds belong to a number of counties, maybe as many as thirty -- but they never call on these funds at the same time, so that there is always a backlog of say \$20 million there. I was suggesting to them that they ought to get together and form an investment council among themselves or use some other media so that they could always keep on deposit enough money to meet any demands that they have -- five or ten million dollars -- but utilize the rest of that money to build in the counties that are the most pressed for roads today, the roads that they need with these funds.

QUESTION: Local government, county and municipal, is talking a great deal about the need for finances to operate, not only in roads but other areas, do you think that this is a valid cry for help at this time?

GOVERNOR: Yes, I do. I am always hesitant to approach this problem because it is so easy for local officials to say why doesn't the state give us more money to solve our problems. That way we can spend this money and solve the problems and the state will have to raise it. Well this is a very convenient arrangement and therefore is one to be looked at with considerable skepticism. But it is true that the areas of taxation available to cities are somewhat limited and I have, therefore, suggested that the tax resources of the state might be utilized to assist the local governments in meeting their problems.

QUESTION: Does this then mean that your commitment to look with disfavor on new taxes does not apply to those which would be for local purposes?

GOVERNOR: It does. I have a number of times said that I would consider the utilization of the tax machinery of the state for local purposes. My position has been that we ought to be able to operate the state government within the existing revenue sources - and this we are doing. But I also recognize that school government, and municipal governments, and county governments, that they face ever changing problems and I would not want to close my mind any more than I would want to commit relative to new taxes for local government.

QUESTION: When you say you would not be ready to commit, does that mean that you have not formed an opinion on the call for a cigarette tax increase for local purposes as some local organizations have.....

GOVERNOR: That is correct. I think we have got to evaluate this as we come a little bit closer to the session, as to first of all, their needs; second, the other needs of the state; and third, the other opportunities that we have - that local governments have - for meeting these needs. They have not yet exhausted all the opportunities for deriving from their local powers the funds that they need.

Thank you, sir. If you have a question of general interest that you would like Governor Bryant to answer on this program, jot it down on a post card and send it to "Ask the Governor," the Governor's Office, Tallahassee, or in care of this station, which has made available this time in the public interest. Be with us next week when again we "Ask the Governor."