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Special Interests Pour Money into Campaign to Pass $70 Million Tax Increase for Overpriced Rail Corridor

BONITA SPRINGS, FL – A political committee is spending heavily to convince Bonita Springs voters to approve a 30-year property tax increase to fund a $28.6 million purchase of 6.15 miles of railroad corridor that the Lee County Property Appraiser values and taxes at just $378,005.

Campaign finance reports show that Vote4BERT2026 has raised more than $90,000, including $15,000 from a major Jacksonville-based railroad partner (CSX Transportation) and more than $29,000 from the San Francisco-based Trust for Public Land (TPL). TPL also negotiated the "As-Is" purchase agreement with the corridor owner, Seminole Gulf Railway. According to the Lee County Property Appraiser, taxpayers are being asked to pay approximately 93 times the tax-assessed value of the property.

Pattern of Overpayment

This acquisition follows a troubling regional pattern in which TPL has negotiated purchase prices far exceeding tax-assessed values:

Location	Purchase Price	Tax-Assessed Value	Multiple of Assessed Value
Bonita Springs	$28.6 million	$306,239	93 times
Village of Estero	$19.79 million	$330,362	60 times
Collier County	$11.6 million	$104,688	111 times

"This is a textbook example of self-dealing," said Dave Jaye, Chairman of the Lee County Taxpayers Association. "The railroad and affiliated interests stand to receive tens of millions in taxpayer money while keeping future billboard and lease revenue. Meanwhile, Bonita Springs residents would be forced to pay over $70 million in principal and interest, plus potentially more than $100 million in future environmental cleanup and infrastructure costs."

Key Concerns

- **"Pollution Veto" Clause:** The TPL-negotiated "As-Is" contract restricts soil and groundwater testing at high-risk industrial sites, shielding the railroad from an estimated $100 million in environmental liability.
- **Loss of Revenue Streams:** Taxpayers would purchase the land but allow the railroad to retain all ongoing income from billboards, cell tower leases, and utility easements.
- **Hidden Infrastructure Costs**: The bond proposal does not account for rail removal, bridge construction, paving, lighting, and long-term maintenance.
- **Campaign Influence:** Parties with a direct or indirect financial stake in the deal have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to the pro-tax campaign.

The Lee County Taxpayers Association has launched a Tax Impact Calculator so residents and businesses can see exactly how much this 30-year tax increase would cost their household or company. The group is calling for the referendum to be suspended until a fully independent forensic audit examines the purchase agreement, environmental protocols, full project costs, and all campaign contributions tied to the deal. Full documents, campaign finance reports, and the Tax Calculator are available at: usataxfighters.org/issues

About the Lee County Taxpayers Association

The Lee County Taxpayers Association and usataxfighters.org are non-partisan watchdog organizations dedicated to fiscal responsibility, government transparency, and protecting taxpayer interests.

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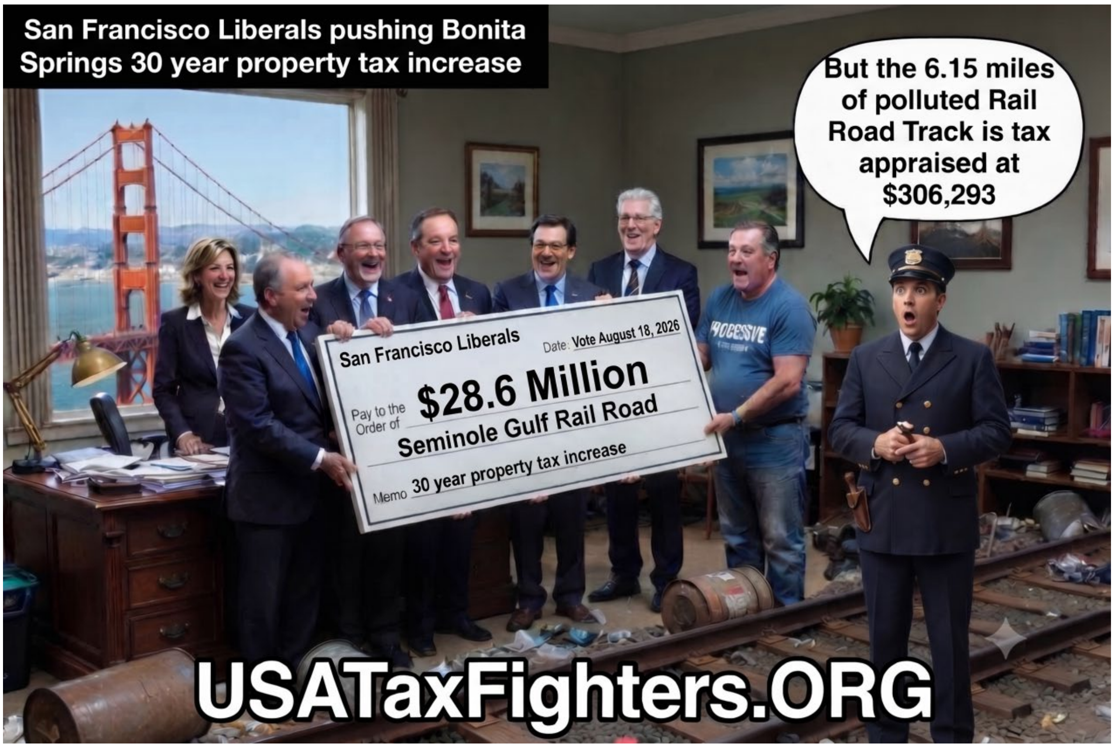

USATaxFighters.org