

Washoe equalization chairman steps down

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Steven Sparks, Washoe County Board of Equalization chairman, resigned from the board Friday morning after District Attorney Richard Gammick said his office would no longer represent the board.

Gammick said Sparks refused to listen to his deputy attorney's advice in handling the dispute about Incline Village property values.

His voice cracking with emotion, Sparks, the chairman for the last three years, resigned just before the board took up 900 appeals filed by Incline property owners. Hearings on the appeals will continue Tuesday.

John Bartlett, a Carson City lawyer who had represented the two county tax boards for 10 years, was contracted by Gammick to take over as a special deputy.

"When people start ignoring our advice, there's a conflict," Gammick said. "There's no reason for us to be there. We are not going down that road."

Sparks said he resigned to avoid adding any more burden on the board.

Les Barta, one of the leaders in the Incline Village appeals, said the action is one more attempt by the county to suppress the tax rebellion under way for the last five years.

In late December, the Nevada Supreme Court ruled in favor of the taxpayers and the decision could possibly cost the county tens of millions of dollars in lost property tax dollars from Incline property owners.

The court said the county used unapproved methods for valuing Lake Tahoe shoreline property and tear downs, and out-of-date sales data.

"You can smell what's going on," Barta said. "They have been manipulating this process from day one. They don't want to let go of the money."

Gammick said he made the decision after the board on Monday agreed to consider whether to roll back tax values to 2002/03 levels for the upcoming 2007-08 fiscal year for all 9,000 Incline property owners in the wake of the Supreme Court decision. The board is to decide Feb. 28 whether to conduct those hearings.

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