



### The real issue?

In the April issue of *GOLFDOM* ("What's Behind Nader's Attack on Golf?" p. 53) you printed an editorial concerning my letter to Governor Mandel of Maryland about preferential assessment of country clubs. Your statements indicate a lack of awareness of the real issue involved in that letter and in the report prepared by Michael Kinsley.

The editorial stated that the real question is one of the wisdom of the use of preferential assessment to maintain green spaces. This is clearly not the issue at hand. The real issue raised by the preferential assessment law is who should be paying the \$25 to \$45 per member subsidy of these clubs. Should this cost be borne by the wealthy members or should it be borne by the average middle-income homeowners who could not become members even if they wanted to?

The issue of green spaces raised by your editorial and by Lt. Governor Blair Lee is also a false issue. Clearly, green space legislation is desirable. But the issue here is, given the country club's present location, should membership dues be raised or should the public subsidize the clubs? The answer is obvious. Members of these clubs would in most cases be more than able to pay an additional \$25 to \$45 in membership fees. These clubs would be forced to sell only if their membership were unwilling to pay the increased dues, thus making the operation of the club uneconomical. Almost all of the clubs referred to in the Kinsley report, especially the most prestigious, have waiting lists. Thus, there would be little or no reduction in actual membership if the cost of membership were raised.

The editorial also emphasized the feature of the Maryland preferential law that provides for a rollback in

taxes for up to 10 years. First, the rollback provision is limited to only the 10-year period immediately preceding the date of sale of the land. Thus, if a club had been in existence for 30 years, it would be liable only for the immediate preceding 10 years. Second, there is no provision for interest on the unpaid taxes. Mr. Kinsley pointed out in his report that the real value of the back taxes is reduced by almost 75 per cent because of the failure of the law to require payment of interest. Finally, the rollback provision is grossly inadequate, compared to more modern methods of recapturing back taxes. The most desirable provision, if the law is not to be repealed, would be to have a set percentage of the sales price be paid, in the event the club is sold.

The editorial further stated that the only alternative to the existing use of country club property is high density development. This clearly is not necessarily the case. Most property owned by the clubs is zoned for recreational use. It would require a positive act of the local zoning authority before the permissible land use of this property is altered. Thus, even if a country club were to relocate, the green spaces could remain green.

Finally, the editorial stated that most states were too bankrupt to purchase the country club property outright for park use. Mr. Kinsley pointed out in his report that Montgomery County, Md., can build a substantial golf course that will be *open to the public* with the money the country clubs in that county save in one year. Moreover, the \$600,000-plus that would have been received over the last four years is enough for the county to have built a modest county park.

The emotional and personal commentary in your editorial serves only to cloud the issues involved. A little thought would make evident that the already overburdened homeowner cannot justly be required to subsidize private clubs that he cannot join because of social, ethnic, religious or economic reasons.

**Ralph Nader, Washington, D.C.**  
P.S. How about teeing off with another editorial that avoids earlier misunderstanding and clarifies the real issues? After all, no one is against golf!



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