

Rock Island County Board Report *District 22*

An update from Drue Mielke, your county board member.

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Updated information at www.DrueMielke.com**

Referenda for your consideration on the March ballot

There are two sales tax propositions on the March 18th ballot. The current sales tax rate for businesses located in Rock Island County unincorporated areas and Coal Valley is 6.25%. Businesses within Moline and Rock Island city limits have a sales tax rate of 7.25 and 9% on prepared food (restaurants) and liquor sales.

If voters approve both proposals below, sales taxes will rise in Moline and Rock Island to 8.75% on most purchases and to 10.25% on prepared food (restaurants) and liquor. Across the board, sales tax will rise 1.25% on sales in Rock Island County.

Shall a retailers' occupation tax and a service occupation tax (commonly referred to as a "sales tax") be imposed in The County of Rock Island, Illinois, at a rate of 1% to be used exclusively for school facility purposes?

This 1% school sales tax was not proposed by the Rock Island County Board. It was placed on the ballot by school districts in Rock Island County.

"To pay for public safety purposes such as disaster readiness, animal control, and sheriff's patrol; shall Rock Island County be authorized to impose an increase on its share of local sales tax by 0.25%? (This means that a consumer would pay an additional \$0.25 in sales tax for every \$100 of tangible personal property bought at retail.)"

The Rock Island County Board placed the 0.25% (¼ cent) proposed sales tax on the ballot. I voted against its placement on the ballot because I do not believe there will be an increase in funds towards public safety. Rather, there will be a decrease in the obligation from the county's general funds. In other words, there will not be an increase in the public safety budgets.

Arguably, the county's general fund is at its worst condition and could use revenue. I just cannot sign onto a situation, where in essence a budget is not changing and monies are not going to its stated purpose- public safety. We need to provide honest answers. We need to build trust that our stated objectives are fulfilling the intended goals.

RICo struggles with budget and Hope Creek Care Center- opens \$7 million line of credit

Rock Island County is in a budget crunch due to property tax revenue changes, increased TIFs (tax increment financing) districts and less funding from the State of Illinois.

The budget committee expresses its sincere appreciation to AFSCME Local 2025A who agreed to defer a general wage increase of 2% which was under their contract.

Because revenue is brought in quarterly with property tax receipts, a tight budget has necessitated the county board voting to approve the opening of a \$5 million line of credit the general fund at 1.45% with Blackhawk Bank and Trust.

In addition, due to a \$1.6 Million loss last year, a \$2 Million line of credit has been established for Hope Creek Care Center, our Rock Island County owned and operated nursing home in East Moline.

General Fund Estimates:
Projected Revenues \$26,203,886
Projected Expenses: \$26,188,870
Estimated Balance: \$15,016

I proposed an Advisory Referendum asking residents "**Shall Rock Island County continue to maintain and operate Hope Creek Nursing Home**". This advisory question had no dollar figure placed on it and was to give people a voice in continue Hope Creek, but was tabled indefinitely.

A referendum **to increase the tax levy on property taxes for Hope Creek** is expected to be voted to be placed on the November 2014 ballot to support Hope Creek Care Center, the county nursing home, which has outstanding debts of about \$18.5 million.

Residents have asked me to support a placement of this tax levy referendum **which I will do to give voice to the people in this important decision.**

*Working for you and
listening to you...*



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More options needed for RICO courthouse

The county board in December voted to delay placement of a referendum to address the courthouse. The referendum just proposed is similar to the referendum that I voted for to be placed on the ballot in April 2013. One difference is that this went from a \$118 Million cap for a public building commission to \$72 Million. You spoke and that 2013 courthouse referendum failed.

My voting "no" to placing a \$72 million courthouse referendum on March 2014 ballot was a vote for more options.

Ten months of research by the Visions for the Future ad hoc committee produced a \$72 million recommendation for a referendum which is too costly. The recommendation said to build a new courthouse, fix the county office building, and leave the courthouse a vacant building. The space needs study data produced by the Vision committee has value, but the proposed referendum that came after is not the right answer.

We need to focus on the issue at hand- inadequate courtroom facilities. Now is not the time to roll the county office building into the equation and should not be part of the courthouse solution.

Some county board members stated they voted "no" for fear that it would decrease the chances for the planned Hope Creek tax levy increase to pass in November. But one does not have to look further for a reason to turning down the courthouse referendum other than it is not the right answer.

A better answer is needed that residents will want rather than a referendum that mirrors the failed referendum from last April and hoping that the voters will change their minds in one year's time. I believe that we owe it to the voters to put a referendum together that is likely to be acceptable to the voting public.

As your county board member, I have a fiduciary duty to look out for the best interests of the county and the residents of District 21. Asking the judges to sue the county, as other county board members have done after the referendum was voted down, is not that answer. As county board members, we ask the judges to continue their patience as we look at more options. The current situation didn't just happen overnight. It is the result of years of neglect and inaction on the part of past county boards, before our tenure.

I am committed to addressing the threat of a lawsuit and are working towards a solution that will address our county's courthouse obligation during one of our county's bleakest financial periods.

County Board downsizing update and efficiency

A recent article in the Dispatch and Rock Island Argus on Sunday, February 23, "Board payroll costs RICO \$435K" showed the amount of money that goes towards the Rock Island County Board.

The article brought two issues to the forefront.

● Reducing the Size of the County Board

In November 2012 when I was elected, 72% voted in an advisory referendum to reduce the number of county board members from 25 to 15.

I have fought to defend the people's will in downsizing the board. I did not blindly accept opinions that deserve readdressing. The issue now rests with the Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office because I spoke up and pushed for review and an updated opinion.

● Hiring a County Administrator

Prior to being elected as your county board representative in 2012, the possibility of having a county administrator was an issue.

I wrote then, "I am currently a Trustee with the Village of Coal Valley so I am very familiar with the advantages of having an administrator. One advantage to the county would be to have a trained professional whose job would be to direct and supervise the day-to-day operations of all county departments and agencies and then report and answer to the elected officials and carry out the county board's directives. Another advantage is that it would help assure that politics or favoritism do not enter into the county's daily operation and would create continuity."

Where are our successes?

We have a undetermined courthouse facility issue, deficit spending budget with \$5 million borrowing, Whistleblower lawsuits, and \$2 million borrowing for continued operations of our nursing home.

Is it time we look at the benefits of a county administrator?

I believe as county board members that we have a duty to investigate this option. Many counties in Illinois have a county administrator, including our neighboring Henry County. I am currently investigating this issue to improve the operation of our county.

Next Election

Tuesday, March 18, 2014

GENERAL PRIMARY