

Sparks fly over endorsement letter

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE - A letter sent to the heads of **Madison County** teachers' unions is a subject of intense scrutiny by **Madison County Treasurer Kurt Prenzler**.

Prenzler is running for the position of Madison County Board Chairperson against the current chairperson, **Alan Dunstan**. **Madison County Regional Superintendent Robert Daiber** sent a letter to Madison County teachers' union heads endorsing Dunstan for reelection. That letter was sent to several teachers within a district, who reported it to Prenzler. Prenzler said Daiber's actions were against the **Illinois Educators Code of Ethics**.

The letter from Daiber was addressed to **Illinois Education Association** (IEA) members across the county. It said the following:

"As a former local IEA President, I am writing this letter with great concern about the impact the County Chairman's race could have on the future of our public schools. Chairman Dunstan's opponent, Kurt Prenzler, has openly campaigned and circulated positions to stop school districts from passing working cash bonds. Prenzler and other Tea Party members have spoken outwardly against school boards, calling these financial bonds 'backdoor referendums.' If Prenzler would be elected Chairman, I caution you that he could petition voters to lower their school tax rates by a vote of the electorate, similarly to what is taking place this fall to lower the county rate from .25 cents to .20 cents. It always sounds good to tell voters that you are going to lower their property taxes, however, the negative consequences could mean the layoff of their relatives and a reduction in public safety. Sound budgets need to be in place to settle collective bargaining agreements and pay fair share wages.

"Furthermore, Mr. Prenzler is proud to say that his children were home schooled. Unlike Chairman Dunstan, who attended 12 years of public school in Madison County, Prenzler does not value the outcomes of public education. I have never been more concerned about a local race than I am about this one. I strongly encourage IEA members to support the re-election of Alan Dunstan for County Chairman. Thank you for your consideration."

Daiber said there is no dispute between him and Prenzler regarding the validity of those statements. He said he had no intent of the letter being distributed throughout the schools. He meant them only for the IEA heads across the county.

In a press release issued by Prenzler on Sept. 28, 2016, Prenzler said he was notified by the **Highland School District** Tuesday regarding the letter, which he said "crossed he line." Prenzler also referred to the letter as "campaign literature."

"This is a scare tactic," Prenzler said in the release. "Tell people they will lose their jobs if the other person is elected. What really upsets me is Mr. Daiber involved my children in his political attack."

One of Prenzler's children is home schooled, and another attends parochial school, Prenzler said in the release.

"Regardless of where children go to school, people pay property taxes to the school district and should have a say in how their tax dollars are spent," he said. "He crossed a line by insinuating because my children have been home-schooled and Dunstan went to public school, I don't value public education. His facts are wrong."

Prenzler also disputed Dunstan's assertion he was against school boards.

"I'm not against school boards," Prenzler said in the release. "But I do believe all tax increases should be approved by voters at the ballot box, not just by politicians."

Prenzler said he was against so-called "backdoor referendums," which allow school boards to issue bonds without putting them to a public ballot.

"I oppose them, because I think the public should vote on them," he said. "If the school board or county board wants to issue bonds, they require higher property taxes. Anytime taxes are raised, the voters ought to be able to vote on that."

Prenzler said the State of Missouri requires such bonds to be taken to a public vote before they may be issued.

While Prenzler asserts Daiber violated ethics to send the letter, Daiber said the same is true of Prenzler's letter, which was sent from his Madison County government email address, instead of his campaign email, which Daiber said was a massive breach of political ethics in its own right.

"It sounds like he's upset that he was caught using his office to promote his relative, Dunstan," Prenzler responded in an email to Riverbender.com. "I was at work in my office when I was notified that Highland teachers were receiving his political letter on their school email system. Second, his letter is about property taxes, and he's giving out false information. As county treasurer, I have every right to set the record straight. It's about taxes."