

Madison County officials applaud Gov. Rauner on veto to stop MESD reconfiguration

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GRANITE CITY — Madison County officials applauded Governor Bruce Rauner on Tuesday for vetoing a bill to stop the reconfiguration of Metro East Sanitary District Board of Commissioners.

Senate Bill 2368 would have removed an appointment to the MESD Board made by the Madison County Board chairman and granted the position automatically to the mayor of Granite City.

Rauner called the measure a state intrusion into local government.

“This is a bad bill,” Rauner said. “We should not have Springfield interfering in local control.”

Madison County Chairman Kurt Prenzler commended Rauner on his action.

Prenzler said years of mismanagement caused financial hardship in the sanitary district, which in turn caused structural/maintenance problems. He said six months after taking office in December 2016, he reappointed new board members when the system failed and homes and businesses flooded.

“I learned key mistakes were made,” he said.

He said the flooding was unnecessary and after he met with board members, they resigned allowing him the opportunity to appoint new ones. Immediately after appointing new board members in May 2017 they began key changes, Prenzler said.

Under current law, there are two members from St. Clair County and three from Madison County. The County Board chairman with the approval of the full board appoints MESD board members.

Stephen Adler, executive director of MESD, said the board has spent quite a bit of time restructuring things to save taxpayers money.

“This (veto) is a big deal to us because we’ve made some great progress,” MESD Commissioner Don Sawicki said.

Sawicki said after he and other board member were appointed it became their mission to get the district’s finances in order since they were “bleeding and crashing.” He said the second thing was to get operations in order.

“There were problems in operations that had not been addressed for years,” he said.

He said the board has addressed both concerns and for the first time in a decade, MESD is in the black.

“It’s outstanding what has been accomplished in a short amount of time,” Rauner said.

He said board members came in and made decisions to cut expenses and eliminate patronage positions.

“The old power base connected to the power base in the legislature said ‘we want to go back to the old ways’,” Rauner said. “They passed a law to return to get it back to that.”

Rauner said the legislature passed the law to return it back to the old way.

“We’ve got to get interference from Springfield out,” he said. “Springfield is constantly putting mandates, restrictions, requirements and manipulations on our local governments and our local taxpayers. Springfield needs to stay out of local government and off the backs of local taxpayers.”

Other officials who attended the veto signing included MESD Commissioner Charlotte Dixon, County Board members Mike Walters, Ray Wesley and Phil Chapman, as well as State Rep. Charlie Meier, Okaville.

Prenzler said the bill called for the mayor of the largest municipality in the county having the greatest equalized assessed value to be a member of the board, which is currently Granite City.

“Granite City is well represented on the board, both Mrs. Dixon and Mr. Sawicki live in the city,” Prenzler said.