



# Chairman Criticizes Campaign of 'Distorted Facts' by Jail Rehab Opponents

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Madison County Chairman Alan J. Dunstan criticized Treasurer Kurt Prenzler and other members of the Tea Party for its campaign of “distortion of the facts” regarding the issuing of \$18 million of General Obligation Bonds to finance repairs and necessary modifications to the county jail.

“The citizens have the right under the law to petition to place a referendum on the March (2014) ballot regarding the rehabilitation of the county jail and I support that right. What I do not support, what I find very disturbing, is this is either a clear distortion of facts by Mr. Prenzler and the individuals who are distributing the petitions, or they have a lack of understanding of the issues,” Dunstan said.

“Quite a few county residents informed me they were told their property taxes would increase by \$200 to \$300 dollars, and some were told their taxes would increase by more than four percent,” Dunstan said, adding, “nothing could be further from the truth.”

Dunstan said the impact on a resident’s property taxes for the jail project will be minimal if at all. The 2014 Madison County tax levy will be increased by \$595,000, which will entirely cover all expenses associated with operating the government, including the financing for the jail rehabilitation project,

“When a \$595,000 increase is applied against the more than \$14 billion in property value in Madison County, the impact on an individual homeowner’s property tax bill will approximately \$3 for a \$100,000 home, and quite possibly be less if there is new growth in the county,” continued Dunstan.

“Importantly, that increase covers all operating expenses of government. I informed the County Board from the beginning of this project that the county would reduce other tax

levy funds to help pay for the jail rehabilitation project, and that we would absorb the cost of the project within our normal tax levy increase, and this is exactly what we have done.”

“The rehabilitation of a jail we are required by law to operate and which has critical needs is, I believe, a reasonable, viable expense for taxpayers and Madison County government,” Dunstan stated.

Dunstan also addressed the county’s reserve status by stating the county has in-place a financial policy to maintain a balance in its general fund equivalent to three to six months of operating expenses. The balance is necessary to provide for operating cash for county government, for capital projects and for emergencies.

Madison County will utilize \$6.4 million of its reserves over the next two years for capital projects, including major restoration work at the Courthouse. Dunstan said those projects will reduce the county’s reserves but will still allow the county to maintain a solid financial position within its budget policies.

The chairman and county board have been criticized by Tea Party members for not taking the initiative and putting the issue before voters in the form of a referendum, a point Dunstan says reflects opponents’ lack of understanding.

“The Illinois statute regarding a ballot referendum on an issue such as this is quite clear. The county does not have the authority to put this issue on the ballot,” Dunstan said. “County government has the authority to issue bonds for county jails without referendum. If signatures representing 10 percent of the voters in the last general election are obtained -- in this case almost 18,000 -- it becomes a referendum and is placed on the ballot. It is not a discretionary decision that can be made by the county board.”

“As we approach Veterans Day, it is important to remember the men and women in the Armed Forces who have served and the thousands who have sacrificed their lives so that our citizens can live free and have a vote, a say in the operation of their government,” Dunstan commented. “I respect the rights of the individuals who are circulating the petitions on this issue. But I have no respect for a campaign based on distorted facts and misinformation. If Madison County residents want to sign a petition on this issue after getting true, accurate information I would encourage them to do so. But they need to have the true facts when they make their decision.”

Dunstan encouraged residents interested in obtaining accurate information on the rehabilitation of the county jail and the plans for funding the project to contact his office. “I will be more than happy to talk to any interested county resident on this issue,” Dunstan added.