

Letter To The Editor: Backdoor Referendum Rears Its Head, County Board Rejects PTELL Property Tax Caps

by Kurt Prenzler
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Letter To The Editor:

What timing!



On July 12, the East Alton / Wood River High School District No. 14 published a legal notice of a \$2.4 million backdoor referendum – the tricky legal loophole in Illinois law that allows taxing districts to raise property taxes without voter approval.

On July 13, the Madison County Board rejected my request to put PTELL property tax caps (Property Tax Extension Limitation Law) on the ballot, for voters to decide.

If PTELL property tax caps were adopted by the voters of the county, the backdoor referendum would be a thing of the past.

Four times (2018, 2020, 2022, 2023) I have asked the Madison County Board to put PTELL property tax caps on the ballot, and although some members voted to put it on the ballot, every time a majority of the board said no.

A backdoor referendum is a sly way to increase property taxes – here \$2.4 million – without voter approval. In this case, the district plans to issue \$2.4 million of working cash bonds, with the money going into the district's checking account, with no restrictions on how the money is spent.

The only way voters can vote on this is for 10 percent of the registered voters (in this case 832) in the district to sign petitions – within 30 days after July 12. If the citizens manage to gather the petitions, then the bond issue will be on the March 19, 2024 ballot – for the voters to decide.

This “quarterback sneak” is illegal in Missouri where the Hancock Amendment requires that if a district wants to issue bonds that will be repaid with higher taxes, it must be approved by the voters.

Ironically, on July 13 public school superintendents showed up at the county board meeting to speak against PTELL property tax caps. If they knew what the EA / WR district had just done, they didn't bother to mention it.

Last night I went door to door, getting 30 signatures on the petitions required to put the \$2.4 million tax increase on the ballot.

Not one person knew about what their school district had done. And 9 out of 10 people signed the petition, wanting to learn more and to vote on it.

Isn't that the American way?

The un-American way is “the ends justify the means” – which is what the backdoor referendum is.

If anyone has any questions about this, they should feel to contact me: 618-514-2599 personal cell/text.

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Madison County Chairman

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