

# Letter To The Editor: Prenzler Provides Opinions About "Backdoor Referendums"

by Kurt Prenzler

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*Note: This is a letter to the editor from Madison County Chairman Kurt Prenzler and it includes a submission to Granite City School District 9. He also continues to discuss backdoor referendums later in his letter to the editor.*



## Letter to Granite City School District 9

Dear Superintendent Cann and District 9 board members:

Two months ago, Granite City District 9 passed a “backdoor referendum” to issue \$20 million of “working cash” bonds and on Nov. 22 put a public notice in the Belleville News-Democrat.

This backdoor referendum is a legal loophole to avoid voter approval when issuing bonds that will be repaid with higher property taxes.

A better – and the old-fashioned – way is to put it on the ballot for the people to decide. That’s called a “front door referendum.”

The public notice stated that the only way for taxpayers inside District 9 to vote on this bond issue was for them to collect 2,653 signatures within 30 days from Nov. 22.

That’s a difficult task, especially when the 30-day period – chosen by the district – finds people busy with Thanksgiving and Christmas, it’s dark and cold, and people are reluctant to answer the doorbell.

I didn’t see this public notice – despite the fact that I check Illinois Public Notice weekly – looking for notices just like these. I check for Madison County – not St. Clair County – and the “publication county” for the BND is St. Clair County. That’s why I – and many others – did not see it.

Because part of District 9’s area is in the City of Edwardsville, I believe the backdoor referendum notice should have been in the Edwardsville Intelligencer. Please see 715 ILCS 5/11.

Even if District 9 didn’t overlap into the City of Edwardsville, I believe this notice should have been published in Madison County.

Based on my understanding at this point, I don’t think the notice of the backdoor referendum was proper.

Regardless of the legal issue, I believe the “right thing” for District 9 to do is to put this \$20 million bond issue on the ballot for the people to decide.

**Respectfully,**

**Kurt Prenzler, CPA**

**Madison County Board Chairman**

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### **Backdoor referendums**

Backdoor referendums are unfair, deceptive, tricky - you pick the adjective - and I have collected signatures to defeat some.

In June 2012, the Highland school district passed a \$5 million backdoor referendum to issue \$5 million of working cash bonds. I joined citizens who gathered 1,700 signatures to put it on the November ballot. Our goal was simply to allow the people an opportunity to vote on it. Voters approved the bond issue.

In October of 2013, the Madison County Board passed a backdoor referendum to issue an \$18.8 million bond. We needed to collect 17,600 signatures within a 30 day period to put this on the ballot. 300 to 350 people collected 23,600 signatures (I collected 1,300 - something you don't forget) and we got it on the spring 2014 ballot, where the voters rejected it 2 to 1.

As the result of that effort, the county remains debt free.

Several years later, the Edwardsville District 7 tried a backdoor referendum (\$9 or \$10 million of bonds - I don't recall) and citizens gathered 3,500 signatures. As I recall, District 7 chose to not put the bond issue on the ballot.

In February of 2020, the Collinsville District 10 passed a backdoor referendum to issue \$10 million of working cash bonds. I, and other citizens, began gathering signatures, but had to quit, because of Covid. The district issued the bonds - despite the fact that we had no realistic opportunity to gather signatures.

In the summer of 2021, the Bethalto School District passed a backdoor referendum for \$10+ million working cash bonds. At this time I was not able to collect signatures, and a number of the "Republicans" who opposed PTELL property tax caps live in this district and they did not oppose it. They did nothing.

This past July, the EA-WR District 14 passed a backdoor referendum to issue \$2.4 million of working cash bonds. I joined citizens to gather 1,125 signatures. I collected 300 signatures myself.

My point is that I am not "picking" on the Granite City district, because I have consistently opposed backdoor referendums.

Backdoor referendums are ILLEGAL in Missouri, where the Hancock Amendment requires that all bond issues that will be repaid with higher taxes must be approved by the voters.

The same result is practically achieved in Illinois by PTELL (Property Tax Extension Limitation Law).

Four times (2018, 2020, 2022, 2023) I have asked the county board to put PTELL on the ballot - and four times enough "R's" have joined with "D's" to keep it off.

How can so-called Republicans vote to deny you a vote on PTELL tax caps?

Many people tell me, "Kurt - it's because they are really Democrats!"

I'll let you decide the reason.

In any case, I will continue to fight for your right to vote on higher taxes!

Please attend the Jan. 25 "Winter Fundraiser" at Edison's / The Outlet.

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