

Letter to the Editor, Property Tax Relief

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I am writing to request that you consider voting “yes” for the Madison County sales tax increase on April 5. I find myself in an interesting position this election! Typically, I am a fiscal conservative especially when it comes to taxes and spending. However, this time I find myself as a co-chairman of the Citizens for Property Tax Relief committee which is a proponent of the penny sales tax increase to facilitate school construction! I never thought I would sit on such a committee! But then, when one looks closely at this issue it would lead to a sales tax increase, but a **property tax reduction**. Our property tax reduction would be **greater** than our loss to the new sales tax; that is a win-win in my opinion.

The sales tax is very limited in its uses. A district can build a new school, improve existing facilities or reduce property taxes. Each school district who favors the sales tax has compiled a list of building work that could be done with this new revenue. This list is not new; in many cases the items are very old, but the district has never been able to find the money to complete the projects. Also, most school district in Madison County has passed a resolution indicating that they would abate at least 51% of the sales tax revenue to their bonded indebtedness. Citizens in the Edwardsville school district have been promised 100% abatement!

Everyone gets upset with their property tax bill, and school officials are not any exception. School officials are always looking for ways to hold the line or cut property taxes for their citizens while trying to maintain quality teachers, programs and good facilities. Come to a Board meeting when next year’s tax levy is on the agenda and just listen to the discussion about the proposed levy; you will be pleased with the responsibility shown by your elected Board of Education. Opponents of school issues refer to Board members and administrators as “they” and refer to their position as if “they” were evil-doers wanting to get as far into your pockets as “they” can to build all of those needless buildings! “They” have names and faces and most of you know them by the same. They work tirelessly to try to protect the taxpayer’s investments while promoting education for the children.

Opponents have two major issues with this tax. First, they don’t believe that now is the right time for this tax. Well, I’ll be honest with you; I don’t think there is a right time for any tax! I hate taxes! Yet, I know that the services we receive from our local taxes are necessary, and all of those services cost money. I have always had more trust and faith in how my local taxes get spent than any others. For many of us we actually know the people who spend our tax dollars at the local level and we do have a voice with them. Hence, we get to vote on this issue on April 5! We didn’t get a vote for the 66% increase in the state income tax, nor will we have any say in how or where it is spent. And when did we get to vote on the new federal health care bill? Local tax dollars are the best tax dollars you will spend!

I have been asked, “If this is such a good idea, why has it failed in most Illinois counties?” I can’t answer that with accuracy because I don’t know the facts in those counties. But, I suspect that it failed because it is a “tax increase” issue at the polls and many of us vote no for that reason alone if we do not fully understand the issue. Local issues, and most often school issues, are the only tax that citizens get a say in. When they finally get to voice their opinion, they vote no

because they are taxed to death. I understand that. I am a sympathizer. Yet, as much as I hate taxes, I have always voted in favor of local issues. I sincerely see this as an investment, not an expenditure.

The second major issue that opponents have voiced is related to trust. There are those who do not trust school administrators and/or Board of Education members to keep their word about the promise to abatement the sales tax. True, it is not law. It is a resolution, and resolutions can be changed. However, that is not the track record of our school's promises to us. When I was employed in Edwardsville CUSD #7, the citizens passed a working cash bond for \$4.5M around 1990. The district promised to use that as an internal bank to save interest money on borrowing from local lending institutions. They promised they would not use that money for any other purpose. Based on the FY2010 audit, Edwardsville has \$5.5M in this fund. Nearly 20 years later, promise kept! They have also built several new buildings with the permission of taxpayers and again promises were kept. Buildings were completed on time and under budget. Shortly before I was employed by Wood River-Hartford #15 they, too, passed a \$1M working cash bond in 1994 with the same promise to their taxpayers that Edwardsville made. Today they have \$1.9M in their working cash fund. Again, promise kept! As you look into schools and their officials you will find that the vast majority are very trustworthy and accountable. I believe that they will again with this issue of promising to abate 51% (or more) of the sales tax money to property tax reduction. If not, you know exactly where to find them!!

The sales tax issue has passed in 9 counties in Illinois. Each school district in all 9 counties told the voters how they would use this new money. All of the districts have kept their promises precisely as stated. That will happen in Madison County, too.

Please vote "yes" on this important issue on April 5. To learn more, please visit our website at www.betterschoolslowertaxes.com.

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