

Kurt Prenzler and Chris Slusser Debate for Madison County Chairman Seat

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
March 7 2024 10:51 AM



EDWARDSVILLE - During a debate hosted by the League of Women Voters and the Edwardsville chapter of the NAACP, incumbent Kurt Prenzler and challenger Chris Slusser outlined their policy ideas as both compete for the Madison County Chairman seat.

On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, candidates gathered at the Wildey Theater in Edwardsville for a Voter Service Event that aimed to inform voters about the candidates ahead of the Madison County primary election on March 19. Both candidates began by introducing themselves and outlining some of their major policies, and then they answered five questions posed by audience members.

What are the primary duties of the County Board Chairman? Who is responsible for personnel recommendations? What would you like to accomplish?

Prenzler began by explaining that one of the main duties of the Chairman is to appoint directors, but he lost this power in 2022.

“In that primary, June 28, 2022, I supported County Board members who promised to put property tax caps on the ballot, and some Republican incumbents lost and they were quite angry, so they took some of my powers away,” Prenzler said. “But one of the things that I think is in the Chairman's job is to be a leader in a number of different areas.”

He pointed out that he promised to make Madison County a no-kill county and they have adopted out 8,000 pets since he took office in 2016. He also appointed commissioners to the Metro East Sanitary District and “turned that very important organization around.” Prenzler noted that his second term took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and he led the County through this.

Slusser agreed that the Chairman previously made a lot of the personnel recommendations “prior to the Board stripping Mr. Prenzler of his powers.” He said that many of those powers could be restored.

“The only powers that the Chairman is actually granted constitutionally by the State Constitution is that the Chairman presides over meetings and makes recommendations to boards and commissions,” Slusser said. “Everything else that the Chairman had prior was through ordinances by the County Board, and as I always say, the County Board can giveth and the County Board can taketh away.”

Prenzler used his rebuttal time to talk about PTELL. He said the tax levy is increasing around the county and PTELL would limit this increase to the lesser of the CPI or 5%.

“We badly need that because everyone knows that property taxes are just too high in the county, and the County Board has been unwilling to put that on the ballot the four times I’ve asked them to do it,” Prenzler added.

Slusser responded and said “it’s highly misleading” to refer to PTELL as property tax caps. He said PTELL might also “encourage some bad behavior from some of the taxing districts” because they could max out the tax rates in the time between PTELL being passed and before it went into effect, which could lead to a 15–18% increase in real estate tax.

“I support a more comprehensive, real, meaningful reform,” Slusser said.

What changes would you make to County Board procedures to increase transparency and accountability?

Slusser said that community members can access audio recordings of the County Board meetings, but he wants to make video recordings available, too. Prenzler said the County Board should put PTELL on the ballot so community members can vote on it.

Prenzler also said he wants to see multiple bids before purchases are made by the County. He noted that Slusser “finally” provided information about losses on the investment reports after being asked for this information last year.

Slusser responded that he had “inherited” Penzler’s accounting manager and they had reported the reports the same way that the office did under Prenzler, until it was brought to Slusser’s attention that they were supposed to show the unrealized gains or losses.

“We have never lost a single penny on any investment that I’ve ever purchased,” he added.

Prenzler responded that Slusser currently has losses in Alibaba, an e-commerce company, which is “underperforming.”

“The Treasurer has invested \$815,000 in Alibaba and five corporate bonds,” he said. “The last time I looked they were underwater about \$60,000.”

Explain PTELL. Should Madison County approve this?

Prenzler explained that PTELL limits the increase of the tax levy. He encouraged attendees to focus on the levy and he called PTELL “a very rational and common sense limit on the amount by which a taxing district can increase taxes.”

“What does PTELL do? It limits the increase to the lesser of the inflation rate measured by CPI, or 5%,” he explained. “In the last two years, the federal government has told us that the inflation rate is 6, 6.5%. So that would be a limited increase of 5%. And I want to say that it does not put fire districts out of business. It doesn’t put schools out of business.”

Slusser said PTELL was passed 30 years ago in Illinois and the state still has the second highest property taxes in the U.S. He explained that taxing districts are “creative” and will levy to the maximum every year.

“There will be a guaranteed increase every single year under PTELL,” he added. “You’re waiting eight to nine years for that to level off. You’re never going to see relief, you

just have maybe smaller increases. So I think the real reform is the Indiana Model. The only way to meaningfully reduce property taxes is to change the way we fund schools in the state.”

What types of economic development do you envision for Madison County?

Slusser pointed out that he lives in Wood River, where the downtown has been revitalized in recent years. He said he has helped connect developers to Granite City, which could lead to 600 manufacturing jobs. He also said that St. Louis has had a “crime spree” for years and he wants to incentivize developers to come from St. Louis to Madison County.

Prenzler said that people should think about what can be controlled in Madison County and noted that “we can try to control our taxes.” He said he has fought against a 1% sales tax for years. He also said that taxes need to be at rates where businesses and families can afford to live in Madison County.

Do you think affordable housing is a legitimate issue for Madison County? If yes, how would you achieve this?

Prenzler said that he believes affordable housing is a concern. He noted that one community in Madison County needs to improve wastewater treatment.

“Particularly with the high-interest rates these days, I think that mortgage rates have really gone up and so I think affordable housing is something that we always need to be looking at and making sure that we don’t have building codes that are too restrictive,” he added. “Affordable housing is a major, major thing that we all need to be working on, the county and also other municipalities.”

Slusser noted that it is cheaper to own a home in some communities than others. He agreed with Prenzler that some code ordinances are “very restrictive” and have “gotten a little carried away.”

“I think a lot of it is developers have to have incentives and builders have to have incentives to come and want to do that,” he said. “It has to make sense for them, because if a builder is not going to make money on a project, they’re not going to be willing to come forward and do the project.”

Election Day is March 19, 2024. For more information about the Madison County candidates, check out [this article](#) on [RiverBender.com](#).