

THE DAILY SIFTINGS HERALD

Letters to the Editor

Published: Friday, December 1, 2006 1:07 PM CST

To the Editor:

I hate taxes. But what I hate more than taxes is seeing a community that I love complain about not growing, about not having anything to do here, and refusing to take the steps necessary to change. If people in our community really want to see more shopping, more entertainment, more "things to do" in our community, then we all must pull together and pass the sales tax proposal this February.

There are three separate issues on the ballot. First is a quarter-cent tax for economic development. Second is a half-cent tax for a county jail, construction and operation. Third, is a quarter-cent tax for the cities to be spent only on public safety needs. All three taxes automatically expire after five years. People can vote for all three, or for only one issue-this is not an "all or nothing" proposal.

The first issue is the quarter-cent sales tax for economic development. The proposed tax will raise between \$500,000- \$600,000 each year for economic development. The money will not go directly to any organization.

The Clark County Quorum Court will have the authority through its grant's and aid program to fund ANY organization or project that seeks to promote economic growth ... be it the CCIC, the 2025 Commission, the plans developed by the Clark County Strategic Planning Group, or any other entity. The funds can ONLY be spent for economic development purposes.

Economic development is more than just recruitment of manufacturing industry, unlike editor Dan Marsh suggested in his editorial last Wednesday. Economic development is a process that influences growth and restructuring of an economy to enhance the economic well being of a community through the creation of jobs and improving the quality of life.

Money raised through this tax could be spent to provide incentives for a company who wants to locate a call center in Clark County, or it could be used to build a spec building suitable for a movie theater, or it could be used to help existing industry in

Clark County retool and expand. The options are limitless and not as narrowly defined as Mr. Marsh suggested.

The second issue is the half-cent sales tax for the construction and operation of a new county jail. We are very fortunate to have the best law enforcement people around. They know the people, they know the law, and they keep our community one of the safest places to live not only in Arkansas, but in all of the United States. However, unless we provide them the necessary resources to do their job, we can not expect to have the same standards met in the future.

The current jail is full - it's more than full - it's overcrowded. On a daily basis, deputies have to transport multiple people to various jails all over the state.

Clark County has to pay a fee to the other jails to house our inmates. We also have to bear the cost of transportation and with higher gas prices, it has not been cheap. We need to solve this problem and the sales tax to build a new jail is the answer. We have tried every other solution-using existing funds and raising property taxes-but there just is not enough money to do it.

A half-cent sales tax over a five year period would raise between \$5 to \$6 million. This would allow Clark County to build a new jail facility to house between 100-150 inmates. With the extra space, instead of Clark County paying money to other counties to house our inmates, we could make money from those in need of space. Additionally, in the long run, the cost to Clark County will be greatly reduced by not having to pay other counties for housing our inmates, not having to spend money on transportation, and freeing up deputies time to be in the county instead of driving the interstate back and forth each day.

The third issue is a quarter-cent sales tax for money for the cities to be spent on public safety needs. Like the tax on economic development, it would raise between \$500,000-600,000 each year.

The money could ONLY be spent on public safety concerns, such as police, fire, and ambulance, and could not be used to build more ball fields, or recreation centers. This money is desperately needed by our cities. Recently, Arkadelphia voted to raise their deputy salaries because the rate of pay had fallen so far behind that it was hard to keep good people working their very long. There is more that needs to be done, not just with salaries, but with building new fire stations, providing safety equipment, etc.

Something that's important to keep in mind is just how little all of this will cost each person. Assume that the average family in Clark County spends \$10,000 a year on consumable goods (not including house payment, car payments, etc.). The total cost per family is \$100 per year, or \$8.34 per month. Only \$8.34 - and that's if you

spend \$10,000 a year on consumable goods-which very few people do-to provide opportunities for economic growth, equip our public servants with the resources they need, and provide better public safety by keeping criminals off the streets. And if that is not reason enough, if the citizens of Clark County vote in a sales tax to build the jail, the Quorum Court will be able to reduce property taxes by the 1 mill they were increased last year to fund construction of a jail. That would result in the average home owner saving \$25 -\$50 per year in property taxes.

Dan Marsh in his editorial last Wednesday asked if we all were on the same page. The answer is YES - and we have been for quite some time. In fact, we are one of the few communities where government is acting ahead of time to be prepared-prepared with the resources in place when the strategic plan is complete to move forward and implement it.

I would encourage you to contact me, or any other JP with any questions, concerns, or ideas you have on this or any other issue.

I hate taxes. But what I hate more is people who complain about things not changing in Clark County but aren't willing to make sacrifices to change things. I hope you will vote YES on all three measures in February.

Jonathan Huber

Justice of the Peace, District 1

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