

## Letters to the editor

**Editor's note:** The author of the following letter to the editor is Thomas Huxley, who is a candidate for Curry County Board of Commissioners.

### Commentary about the recent meeting of the Curry County Commissioners

June 24, 2014 after approving several employee promotions and creating a new position in the Economic Development Department, Curry County commissioners approved an order directing that an election be conducted September 16 related to a three-year Local Option Levy for jail operations.

On June 30 commissioners approved the 2014/2015 Master Payroll including the salaries and classifications of county personnel and collective bargaining agreements.

Let's begin about one hour into the June 24 meeting (county video) when county counsel Herbage began reading the proposed ballot language to the commissioners, county assessor Kolen and county clerk Kolen. "I think that after (the word) option, it would be better if it said "tax" cause that's what it is."

Two minutes later commissioner Smith suggested changing the word "tax" to "levy" and over the next thirty minutes the assessor along with commissioner's

Smith and Itzen removed reference to the word "tax" five times from the ballot language.

Ten minutes after that commissioner Itzen said one of his reasons for favoring a September ballot was the Sheriff's argument against a November ballot. Itzen continued "Ah for one thing he (Sheriff) argued that it's a bad time (November) when you're just receiving your tax statements to be asked to once again kick out more money on anything..."

How considerate of commissioner Itzen. This way if the measure were to pass in September you simply receive the increase in your October property tax statement and pay the first installment November 2014.

Commissioner Brown challenged assessor Kolen on the merits of attempting to pass the jail measure in September stating "It still doesn't help us fund anything else in the county. It doesn't help us fund you (assessor) to collect it for the jail; for us (commissioners) to distribute it over there. It doesn't help the clerk. It doesn't help county counsel. It doesn't help the DA's office if we have all this funding cause they're still unfunded as of January (correction) July 1st of next year. So even if it passes..."

Assessor Kolen could only respond "Yes I understand that's correct also."

About two hours into the

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— Matt Hall, Editor, Curry County Reporter

video prior to voting on the revised language each commissioner provided comments supporting or opposing the Local Option (Tax) Levy.

Commissioner Smith provided these unconvincing arguments supporting the measure. "It's not a fix by any means for our county situation but we're working on other methods to do that, that don't rely on the property owner; don't rely on the homeowner."

Smith went on saying "But this is one piece of the puzzle that could ah keep the core service of the jail functioning within those three years..."

Commissioner Itzen's arguments were no better. He expanded on his long experience in "tax" measures then quickly corrected himself and referred to them as "levy" measures.

Itzen closed with "I submit to you that sixty-eight cents as proposed by the

Sheriff and supported by all three mayors at this point is a level at which our citizens probably would be willing to support. Much less than what we've advanced in the past ah clearly for a project that is ah essential for our, for a civilized county."

Now to the June 30 Master Payroll: In addition to the 2.8 percent cost of living adjustment (COLA), there were two other significant items in the county order (No. 20046) approving the Master Payroll.

Effective July 1st, all county employees including elected officials will now pay the employee portion of the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) contribution which is 6 percent of gross payroll. Of course, all employees including elected officials received a 6.4 percent pay increase in exchange bringing the total pay increase to almost 10 percent. This in turn increases the employer

Social Security (FICA) contribution by nearly 10 percent along with the employer PERS contribution by the same percent.

Additionally, all eligible members of the Teamsters Union will receive a full step pay increase of 5 percent on their hire anniversary date.

An added bonus for elected officials and other employees close to retirement is that the "Final Average Salary" used to calculate PERS retirement benefits is based on the higher of the average of the highest three consecutive years or 1/3 of total salary in the past 36 months.

In closing, the first order of business is NOT more taxes. The 2013/2014 County Master Payroll has approximately 115 employees including those classified as irregular or part time. If you remove the two largest well balanced departments (management to staff

ratio) with 60 employees (Sheriff & Road Dept.) from this total you are left with:

25 - Elected Officials and managers

30 - General staff and irregular employees (varies)

25 - Elected Officials and management overseeing approximately 18 county departments and only 30 general staff and irregular employees. This is an unfathomable low ratio of 1 manager to 1.2 staff.

The 2014/2015 Master Payroll indicates an increase in employees of about 5 percent.

The first order of business is a major departmental consolidation including possibly subcontracting out departments. For example: The County Clerk's office consists of the elected Clerk (\$88,270 wage & benefit cost), an Elections Supervisor (\$80,424), a Public Records Manager (\$62,148) and a Deputy Clerk (\$48,611) for an average cost of about \$70,000 per employee. The Computer Services Dept. consists of the Director of Computer Services (\$101,005) and the Deputy Director (\$78,661) for an average cost of almost \$90,000 per employee. For more on these subjects go to <http://www.currycounty-taxes.com/>

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