

A SCHOOL SALES TAX FOR MEDINA COUNTY?

Recently Medina County Commissioners were asked to consider placing a .5% sales tax increase on the May ballot for the benefit of Medina county schools. The Gazette editors encouraged commissioners to “step up to the challenge” by placing the issue on the ballot. I believe there are many questions to be answered before going to taxpayer wallets.

As proposed this 30 year tax increase to fund permanent improvements is estimated to raise \$9.8 million in the first year. The funds would be distributed to each of the seven school districts basically by a per-pupil distribution. Each school would then send some of the funds it receives to the Medina County Career Center and Achievement Center for their use.

I was elected to the job of county commissioner to manage the budget and activities of our county government. I work very hard to understand the needs of Medina County Government and do not consider myself an expert in school funding. That is the job of our very capable and locally responsive school boards and why each district elects Boards of Education.

However, I am very concerned about our schools and the fact that voters generally do not like property tax increases. Cloverleaf, where I live, recently took a new approach and successfully passed an income tax after several attempts

at property tax. Various taxes may have to be considered for future funding of schools.

If I am being asked to expand the responsibilities of Commissioner to school funding, there are many questions to be answered before going to the voters.

It has been proposed that the enactment of a sales tax for our schools would allow for a reduction in property taxes. How much property tax would each district take off and for how long? According to the Board of Elections the ballot expense, since there is no primary scheduled, would cost \$180,000. Which taxpayer pocket will pay that cost? The schools? The county? How would a sales tax affect future property tax levies for schools? Could this tax be affected by the frustrating court battles that continue over school funding?

The Ohio Constitution requires the state to provide for a “thorough and efficient” system of public education. Our new Governor and Legislature made resolution of the school funding dilemma a large part of their election platforms. Could a local sales tax result in Medina County taxpayers being cheated out of the benefit of a resolution at the State level? Should not the new Governor and Legislature have a chance to deliver on those promises before we ask Medina County taxpayers for a 30 year, higher tax commitment?

The law enabling this tax increase requires Commissioners establish a

governing board to oversee the funding and make grants. It is interesting to note that this nine-member board requires three be appointed by the Mayor of Brunswick and six appointed by Commissioners to include a Mayor of another city, a township trustee and a representative of a major business, trade or labor organization but not one representative of any school district. The logical conclusion is this law was probably not meant to raise taxes for schools. But more important, it does not restrict the tax increase to be used for our schools. If approved, we could have a 30 year tax increase with no guarantee it would always go to our schools.

Another concern I have is about the future of Medina County government. If this issue is placed on the ballot for schools, and is approved by the voters, it means that for the next 30 years the future needs of our county government could be shortchanged. Medina county has been fortunate in being able to be one of only four counties still collecting a local sales tax of .5%. If our Board submits the tax increase to the electors for schools, and it passes, it means that there remains only an additional .5% for county government purposes during the next 30 years. While I do not foresee the need for such a county tax increase in the near future; is it prudent to tie the hands of county commissioners elected 30 or more years from now, from doing what is right and needed for Medina County government?

I believe the education of our young people is a key factor in promoting and retaining good paying jobs and maintaining the standard of living in our county.

We can all be proud of the excellent education Medina County students receive from our dedicated superintendents, principals and classroom teachers.

On this issue, we must proceed cautiously and armed with the answers to these and many more questions. Before “stepping up” to a tax increase, let’s make sure we start from a sure footing on solid ground.

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