

## A SALES TAX FOR OUR SCHOOLS? By Pat Geissman, Medina County Commissioner

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 educators.

Putting the issue of a ½ % sales tax for 30 years on the May ballot for schools was not a unanimous decision by the Board of Commissioners. Why did I vote against this action even though I'm a strong supporter of our schools?

The bottom line for me is that the sales tax that has been placed on the ballot for 30 years belongs to the people for services they need and expect their county government to be able to provide. As a commissioner responsible for the budget and activities of county departments, I cannot see down the road 30 years as to what those needs or emergencies might be. In the last decade this same sales tax has been on the ballot for Medina County Park District Improvements, to fund a Transportation Improvement District (TID), for Conservation Easements (Farmland Preservation) and in 1993 this sales tax was also on the ballot to fund a new jail and justice center.

Even though these last four attempts by the county to use this permanent improvement sales tax have failed, it indicates clearly that needs will surface long before the 30 years is up. It is also important to consider that an ever increasing percentage of our population is baby boomers becoming senior citizens. As income and purchasing power lower, the demand for county services will likely increase. Demands for increased services require additional funding.

Medina County has been fortunate to be one of only three counties still collecting a local sales tax of only ½%. If the county's sales tax is passed for schools, it means there remains only an additional ½% sales tax for county government purposes during the next 30 years. Giving away 1/3 of our sales tax resources could tie the hands of future commissioners in doing their job.

I asked a few school board members to stand in my shoes. When asked if they would give their reserve resources to the county for 30 years, the answer was no - the answer I expected from a responsible board member.

I offered to consider putting the issue on the ballot for 5 years. Then voters would

be able to see if property taxes actually do reduce. I was even willing to discuss a 10 year issue, but my fellow commissioners committed to the school board committee to putting a 30 year tax increase on the ballot. I believe it is a matter of both the schools and county government being accountable to the taxpayer.

Presently only property taxes and income taxes are available to school districts to raise funds locally. One school district, Cloverleaf, has successfully passed an income tax to help fund their operations. Buckeye is following suit and has an income tax issue on the May ballot. Some residents have pointed out the school districts should use their own resources before asking to use the county's for 30 years. Also some voters have suggested that school districts ask the state legislature to add the availability of sales tax to their resources for local operating funds. In that way, if Medina County taxpayers support imposing an additional sales tax for schools, it could be done without risk to county services.

Bottom line for me, this sales tax resource that is presently on the May ballot was given to the county by the state legislature as a means for the county to deliver needed government services; not being able to see the future, I could not vote to give it away for 30 years.

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\*\*\*\*Please visit [www.co.medina.oh.us](http://www.co.medina.oh.us) and review the public hearings of February 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. You will find both positive and negative comments to consider on this issue.

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I have appreciated the input from residents.

Following are comments received from voters via letters, e-mails, and phone calls:

- \* We are strong supporters of education and our local schools, but will not vote for a 30 year tax increase.
- \* This tax is being promoted as those shopping from outside the county will be helping to pay for our schools. Promoters should not forget that 100% of local taxpayers will also pay the additional tax increase.
  - \* Increasing the sales tax will lower the number of out of county sales and as a result hurt local businesses and the county's income.
  - \* Voters won't support any levy which gives the schools, or any entity, a blank check for thirty years without regard to performance. It is not a prudent business decision. There is no guarantee that the next generation of public officials will be

good stewards of our money. One can only wonder when the next sales tax increase will be proposed.

\* This tax is for permanent improvements only. Schools need operating funds. If more infrastructure is built, even more operating funds will be needed.

\* A school sales tax, especially if it can be used for operations, rather than permanent improvements is a good idea. 30 years is not.

\* Let the schools cut some of their administrative costs and operate our schools on lower budgets. We don't need to throw more money at the schools to obtain excellence.

\* There will continue to be property taxes on the ballot and there is great concern by responsible voters that future levy requests will be denied as voters will believe the sales tax, if passed, was the fix for their schools.

\* Taxpayers need to be aware that new property appraisals were done in 2006 that will significantly increase their tax bill in 2008. The majority of property taxes go to schools.

\* Please ask yourself why it is so important for us to tax ourselves for 30 years instead of giving us the opportunity to vote every 5 years for renewals. We must maintain control of our tax structure because we can never be sure of the competency of those who will lead us in the future.

\* Voters in Brunswick supported the last two school levies based on the assurance that taxes would not be increased until 2010.

\* Since we do not have any immediate need for an additional tax levy in Brunswick, I must assume we are being asked to subsidize other districts.

\* I can understand why Brunswick is participating in the discussions of a sales tax, but I can not think of any logical reason why Brunswick voters should support a levy that is not needed now to support our schools, and will only make the passage of our renewals much more difficult.

\* The confusion created by this sales tax levy will make it difficult, if not impossible, to pass the many renewals which lie ahead in Brunswick and the other districts.

- \* It is the job of state legislators to resolve school funding. Voters need to hold their feet to the fire!
- \* The state of Michigan has tried a sales tax for schools, only to go back to property taxes. Sales taxes go up and down depending on the economy. Sales taxes cannot be depended on to pay off long term bonds for buildings.
- \* This is nothing more than a new property tax by a new name.
- \* Residents are concerned that the cities may also be requesting tax increases in the near future and just how much tax burden can they handle.
- \* The rationale that somehow this is not an additional school tax at the expense of property owners is insulting. We will all have less money immediately and it doesn't come with any guarantee about future levies.
- \* Seniors are concerned that with their limited incomes they will have an additional tax each time they eat out, which is one of their little luxuries.
- \* A sales tax increase will be hard on young families who are already paying property taxes and can't afford to pay more taxes on clothing, etc. for their family.
- \* Some residents feel we will never have enough money for schools no matter how many levies are passed and that we don't need another tax of any kind.
- \* Please tell the sales tax promoters to take their campaign to Columbus where it belongs! Commissioners should not be involved in school funding issues!
- \* We can't compete in world manufacturing by constantly increasing taxes. We are seeing businesses going under in Medina County and the largest number of foreclosures on homes were recorded last year.