The Little Tax that Couldn’t !!! Report and Evaluation by Robert A. Williams

Most all the attention following the 2016 Election was about the Top of the Ballot. Donald Trump came from behind, according to the mistaken and silly polls and the mistaken and stupid media, and won the Presidential race in the Electoral College by a clear and wide margin. We recommended Trump and Trump won Cleveland County by a huge margin.

The bottom of the Cleveland County 2016 Election ballot was regarding raising local sales taxes by 0.25%, allegedly for public safety, law enforcement and fire protection, which failed. We also recommended voting against that tax increase and the tax increase failed by an almost 2-1 margin.

And rightly so for the sales tax increase that was estimated to bring in $1.6 million annually, yet no specific purpose for the tax revenue was ever identified-by anybody. Cleveland County voters passed a $2 Billion statewide Bond issue in March without getting a fair share in return, but shelling out another $1.6 Million on a hope and a promise was just too much.

Even the Cleveland County Commissioners, who thought up this tax sales tax bamboozle in the first place, jumped in with some mumbo-jumbo on the Commissioners website saying the extra sales tax money would go to the volunteer fire departments, Sheriff’s Department, Emergency Medical Services, Municipal Public Safety and the Public Safety Capital Reserve. But not a peep about any specific project or any specific need for any of those ill defined items. Also, not a peep about the property taxes already levied on the citizens of Cleveland County. Fallston already has a 5 cent property tax for the

Fallston Fire Department. Does the Fallston Fire Department actually need any more money for anything? If they do, they, to my knowledge, have not asked the Town of Fallston or anybody else for additional funding. And what about the new million dollar fire station in Waco? Apparently Waco didn't need any extra taxes for that project.

So, Public Safety folks, if you have any urgent and non-urgent needs, the voters have basically told you to go through the proper channels and the proper processes to seek funding. Secret resolutions to raise sales taxes for nothing identified just didn't work and never will.

And, the yard signs that popped up everywhere supporting the sales tax increase for the fire departments only. Who paid for those signs? Political Action Committees that put up signs are required by NC Election Law to register and file paperwork with the Board of Elections. These signs are supposed to identify who paid for the signs, but they did not-in violation of NC Law.

What happened is this. The very first sign I saw supporting the sales tax increase did not state who was paying for those signs. So I called the Board of Elections and found out that nobody had filed a Political Action Committee in support of the sales tax increase. So, I informed the Board of Elections that my call was to be considered a formal complaint. And why not? I am not condoning all the seemingly never ending paperwork every governmental agency requires these days, but every candidate and everybody else is required to file the proper and legally required paperwork. Same with these signs.

The Board of Elections found out that the signs in favor of the sales tax increase were bought by the Cleveland County Firefighters Association and they would soon be in to file the proper paperwork, which they did. The BOE sent me a copy as I had requested.

The paperwork is shown below. Note that the paperwork shows the Cleveland County Firefighters Association paid $4,667.11 for the signs. Also note that the organization is checked as "Other" on the form and the Association address is 117 S. Depot Street in downtown Cherryville-Gaston County. An address search shows that address is a residential condo.

The person filling out the BOE form is a well known advocate for volunteer fire departments in Cleveland County and the sales tax referendum failed, so my research into this issue stops here. However, I would recommend that anyone coming to the commissioners and taxpayers in the future for funds be prepared to describe in detail what is needed, how much it will cost and have significant justification in hand prior to being embarrassed by a resounding defeat at the polls when such information is not provided.

I have one more suggestion along these lines. When such groups as the LeGrand Center, the Earl Scruggs Center, the Shooting Range, etc. come to the commissioners for funds because they claim to be associated with economic development, the commissioners should take those funds out of the economic development tax revenue we already charge on motel bills. And not out of the general fund.

Thank you Cleveland County for turning out to vote in the 2016 Elections. Remember the filing for the 2017 Elections are right around the corner. If we can turn out to vote in 2017 like we did in 2016, we can elect a new crowd who will begin to Make Cleveland County Great Again!!!

[gview file="http://citizensforgoodgovernment.org/online/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Fire-Fighter-Association.pdf"]