

I've been Robbed!!! YOU have been robbed too!!!

Without explanation, without reason, without questions and without public notification, the Cleveland County Commissioners (Kevin Gordon, Deb Hardin, Johnny Hutchins, Ronnie Whetstine and Doug Bridges) all voted unanimously to approve a half baked and totally incomplete so-called Guaranteed Maximum Price Contract Amendment that was allegedly dated April 4th, 2024 for a NOT to Exceed price of \$169,174,412.00.

This was apparently on top of the April 2, 2024 Commissioner's Meeting, also with no information made available to the public, when the same fool Commissioners approved a Phase 1 Gross Maximum Price Contract for certain parts of the New Justice Center Project that would NOT Exceed \$74,655,166.00. Allegedly this \$74,655,166.00 would be paid from the \$105,000,000 already given by the State for this project. If so, that State cash is mostly to all already spent and everything else will be on Cleveland County Taxpayers.

However, if that Phase 1 Contract is already mostly spent on the years of grading and digging big holes in the ground out behind the new-old Courthouse and jail and only for the foundation of the New Justice Center, EVERYTHING ELSE, like the \$169,174,412.00 contract that was approved on May 7, 2024 by our great and wonderful, know it all, commissioners (previously identified) is on Cleveland County Taxpayers 100%. But folks, it ain't that easy!!!

First of all, that \$169,174,412.00 contract that the commissioners approved at the May 7, 2024 Commissioner's Meeting, where it says it is a fixed price, not to exceed contract is NOT so fixed price and NOT so "not to exceed." That contract clearly states, right below the \$169,174,412.00

price, "is subject to additions and deductions by Change Orders as provided in the Contract Documents." And if history is our guide, the Commissioners first price estimate for the Justice Center, the price Robert A first discovered hidden in the County Budget years ago was only \$90,000,000.00. Robert A instantly knew when he first saw that \$90,000,000.00 figure that it was low, way low for what was described. And that low-ball cost estimate was made on purpose. And Robert A has said so many times ever since.

This is what bureaucrats always do. Low-ball estimate a project, get the project secretly approved under everybody's radar scope and then escalate the costs all along the way to pay off political favors. Like the big campaign donations to pay for billboards, signs, mailers, etc. The 2024 Primary Elections proved that is right.

But that is not all!! At the May 7, 2024 Commissioners Meeting, County Manager David Cotton stated the \$169,174,412.00 Contract would not come out of county funds on hand, but by the Government Bond method of funding. This caused Robert A to do some digging.

Selling Bonds is just another way of borrowing large sums of MONEY that governments do all the time. Especially National governments and State governments. But also, Counties, Cities and Towns, to some extent. In general terms, this is how government bonds work:

- 1.The government at hand (Cleveland County) wants to borrow \$169,174,412.00. That is called the Principal.
- 2.Cleveland County sells a 30-year Government Bond, so the payments will be as low as possible and so will the interest rate, for \$169,174,412.00.
- 3.Note that for government bonds, the government selling the bond pays interest as set by the US Department of Treasury at 4.375%.
- 4.Note that the government (CC) pays only that 4.375% interest

rate on 100% of the principal (\$169,174,412.00) for 30 years. So, Cleveland County would only pay 4.375% of \$169,174,412.00, which is only \$7,401,380.52 and $\frac{1}{2}$ cent per year for 30 years. Not one penny toward the principal.

5. On the last day of those 30 years, the principal amount is due in full. All \$169,174,412.00. Right back to where Cleveland County started. But minus those total 30 years of interest payments, which totals \$222,041,415.80.

Now folks, let's add up the total cost of this so-called Justice Center Project as known to date.

□ \$105,000,000.00 from the State that will be spent somewhere.

□ \$74,655,166.00 For the Phase 1 foundation work

□ \$169,174,412.00 May 7, 2024 Approved work that will be deferred for the 30 years Bond repayment on the principal

□ \$222,041,415.80 for the 30 years of interest paid on selling the 30-year bond

This totals \$571,471,593.80. Well over half a Billion dollars. But well under what the total cost of this project actually is...

Note that this does NOT cover the following costs that will be incurred to fully fulfill the planned scope of this project.

□ The cost of the Shelby Star building and its demolition costs.

□ The cost the District Attorney's building that was just remodeled. Plus, the demolition costs.

□ The Cost of the Restaurant, 'Taste Tee' I think, and its demolition

□ The cost of all the rentals for fencing and construction equipment already expended.

□ Future landscaping, digging etc. Note the Construction plan for the New Justice Center is to prepare the foundation and construct part of the complex, move the construction area to where the existing buildings are torn down, and then construct

another part of the New Justice Center and move along bit by bit until complete. Which is probably the most expensive construction plan that could ever be devised.

□The final landscaping, road paving and parking lot construction.

□Refinancing the original Bond Principal of \$169,174,412 when that Bond Principal repayment comes due

Folks, Add another \$150,000,000 at least for all of this

Probably, before this is all over and done with, a total of \$1,000,000,000 (A Billion Dollars) could easily have been spent on this project that never included input from the citizens of Cleveland County, a Referendum or anything else that would have been reasonable. In the meantime, there will be little to no money to build new schools or much of anything else. All for an ill-conceived, half-baked and poorly developed justification and foolish execution by a band of five Cleveland County Commissioners who were not qualified for their jobs. Or this job anyway. And, let's not forget the 52,000 Cleveland County Voters who stayed home during the 2024 Commissioners Primary Elections.

Folks As you can see, the numbers don't lie. This new Justice Center project will put Cleveland County Taxpayers, their Children, and their grandchildren in debt for at least 30 years or more over this financial disaster in the making.

Again, Robert A predicts these foolish Commissioners will significantly increase everybody's tax bills in 2025 (and at least into 2055...) Just after the 2024 Commissioner candidates are sworn in for new four-year terms. All this should explain why Robert A will vote as follows for Commissioners in the 2024 General Elections:

□Tony Berry

□Stormy Mongiello

□David Peace

This is the only way to put a stop to the five foolish

Commissioners that have gotten us all into the mess we are in regarding the new Justice Center Project.

Optional Reading

Editor's Note: Folks, maintaining fiscal responsibility in Government is a process that must be continuously followed. The following is an article Robert A published about 10 years ago. It is as true now as it was then. If you have the time and inclination, perhaps you will also consider reading this repeated article. See how history has repeated itself with the present CC Commissioners and their foolish financial decisions!!

I've Been Robbed!!

By Frances

After recently reading information pertaining to our state budget I came to a stunning realization, I'd been robbed! And so have you. How? Our wallets are literally being raided by Governor Mike Easley and by the liberal tax and spend crowd currently in control in Raleigh. North Carolina has the highest individual and corporate tax rates in the southeast. With an individual tax rate of (8.25 percent) and a corporate tax rate of (6.9 percent) we rank among the most highly taxed states in the nation and are currently listed as number nine for our income tax rates and at number twelve for sales tax. We're also taxed on things we don't always think about such as spirituous liquor, telecommunications services, satellite usage, and cigarettes. The cigarette tax alone has increased 600 percent in the last couple of years.

North Carolina is in a tax spending crisis mode with the liberals increasing spending by 21 percent in the last few years. This year with a \$2.4 billion surplus they proposed another nine percent spending increase for next year.

I wanted to know how much of this tax and spending is truly necessary for our state government, schools, and programs to continue and how much is waste? Getting a direct answer from

any government agency can be difficult. But in my search to uncover the truth of the tax and spend frenzy, I ran across some things that absolutely disgusted me.

Pork Barrel Spending:

Pork barrel politics as defined by Wordnet Dictionary – “A derogatory term used to describe government spending that is intended to enrich constituents of a politician in return for their political support in the form of campaign contributions or votes. Typically it involves funding for government projects whose, economic or service benefits are concentrated but whose costs are spread among taxpayers. The way pork barrel spending usually passes is that an individual will add it onto an Appropriations bill at the last minute”.

Pork barrel spending is also generally:

- ☐Not specifically authorized.
- ☐Not competitively awarded.
- ☐Serves only local or special interest.

Just, how much pork was there in the NC budget? A LOT! Guilford County, NC received \$2 million for the effort to build an Atlantic Coast Conference Hall of Champions in Greensboro; The High Point Furniture Market will receive \$1.2 million to help with transportation costs and \$750,000.00 to help with marketing the trade show. The Charlotte Hawkins Brown Museum will get \$1.5 million for renovations and the biggest OINKER of them all was \$400,000.00 for a Teapot Museum in Sparta, NC.

The Teapot Museum has attracted a lot of attention at both a state and national level. The Museum also received a \$500,000.00 grant through the Federal Housing and Urban Development budget. A pork barrel spending watchdog group called “Citizens Against Government Waste” gave the museum special recognition creating the “Tempest In A Teapot” award specifically for this piggish spending.

Locally, Wes Westmoreland the Candidate for North Carolina Senate expressed his disgust over pork barrel spending. In an

effort to enlighten taxpayers about just how their money is being used he has created "The Teapot Express" (a trailer truck) in which to collect teapots to take to the Sparta, Teapot Museum.

Non-Profits/Nonsense

North Carolina also provides state funding for certain non-profit agencies. Some of those do necessary tasks such as Volunteer Fire Departments. In 2003, \$601,654,532.93 dollars went to non-profit organizations. And, of that amount \$53,898,791.23 went to out of state organizations. You read that correctly folks! Your state government is sending huge amounts of your money out of this state. And, all the while needs for highway construction, road repair, schools, etc. for our own citizens are all too often being ignored. Just where did some of that money go? Yale University received \$145,000.00. The Virginia Dept. of Transportation received \$906,000.00 and Banaras Hindu University got \$115,000.00. And, this is only naming a few places where mine and your tax dollars actually ended up. A grand total of 8,514 records for non-profit organizations can be located and viewed at 69. Our state government's taxation and spending practices have long been shrouded in mystery with the average citizen really having no idea as to how their money was actually being used. Considering the fact that some of those in a position of power voted to create another \$1.3 billion dollar deficit this year due to their wasteful and misappropriated spending, it's time for us all to call an end to the foolish use of taxpayer dollars and remove anyone who approves of such practices from office.

Solutions

A Taxpayer's Bill of Rights or TABOR as it is commonly known could have prevented so much wasteful spending. The Americans for Prosperity Foundation has released studies showing that had NC adopted a constitutional amendment implementing TABOR in 1995 we would currently have over \$2 billion dollars in The

Rainy Day Fund and taxpayers would have received over \$1.4 billion dollars in tax rebates. But each time those members of the NC Senate who were concerned enough about the taxing and spending practices proposed a bill to implement A Taxpayer's Bill of Rights for NC, it's been voted down.

This election cycle the Americans for Prosperity Group in North Carolina encouraged

Candidates to demonstrate their support for responsible budgeting, by signing, the 2006 Candidate Taxpayer Pledge. That Pledge reads as follows.

A TAXPAYER'S BILL OF RIGHTS AMENDMENT:
STATE LAWMAKER PLEGE

Whereas, I believe in fiscal discipline and that government should not pose an unnecessary burden on taxpayers;

Whereas, I believe that government should not grow faster than the state;

Whereas, I believe that government should be beholden to the people;

Whereas, I support the following principles:

Annual state, spending growth should be limited to the rate of population growth and inflation.

Excess revenues collected above this limit should be used to create a Budget Stabilization Fund, an Emergency Fund and refunded to the taxpayers through broad-based tax cuts and rebates;

Tax increases should only be enacted by the people's vote or a legislative supermajority.

Therefore, I _ of the _ District of North Carolina pledge to support A Taxpayer's Bill of Rights.

So far 69 signatures have been collected by those Candidates

who are willing to support responsible spending by enacting TABOR. Of those (69) candidates (64) are Republicans and five are Democrats. Local Candidates Tim Moore, Debbie Clary and Wes Westmoreland have both either signed or stated their intent to support such an amendment. It's long past time for the people of our state to know that those in a position to enact such measures are going to do so. A change in mentality and oftentimes a change in leadership are required to move things forward in the right direction.