

# NSN EXPRESS

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A No Standing News Special Edition / Fast reading for busy people

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## Leftover Turkeys

**A Thanksgiving Story.** Once upon a time there was a Positive Taxpayer who was al-w-w-w-y-s positive about everything, even raising property taxes because it was “for the kiddies.” He believed everything he was told or read from his friends on the “Raise Your Taxes” committee about how very few hamburgers the new taxes would be. Then one day in November, Mr. Positive Taxpayer got his tax bill and was shocked to find it was huge! Much bigger than his tax levy friends had told him it would be. He rushed to the tax collector, yelling about his huge tax bill. The tax collector explained that the new tax was levied not only on his real estate, but also on his personal property - something his friends on the “Raise Your Taxes” committee hadn’t mentioned to him. The reason his personal property tax bill was s-o-o-o-o big was because he also owned a \$200,000 boat! The moral to the story is: Trusting turkeys that don’t ask enough questions get a well-deserved plucking.

**The Biggest Leftover Turkey Is... The Rolla School Board!** The news of Superintendent Ewing’s sudden resignation overshadowed a very important story about the school board’s 7:00 a.m. meeting on Tuesday, December 4. The story started the weekend of October 26<sup>th</sup>. Every year our school board goes to a taxpayer-paid MSBA convention at Lake of the Ozarks where they are expensively wined and dined at a private dinner by St. Louis bond salesman Larry J. Hart. Last week, barely one month after the gala evening, their host Larry J. Hart came to the school board “workshop” to pick up a little business from his dinner guests who just “happened” to be in the mood to refinance the district’s bond issues. Larry J. handed out a thick stack of incomprehensible calculations on refinancing bonds to a board that gets a headache if they spend more than five minutes a year on their \$32,000,000 budget. Having already basted and stuffed these turkeys at his private all-you-can-drink-and-eat party in October, Hart would have walked out last Thursday with their lucrative

contract, but board member Frank Blum actually wanted time to read the material before he voted. Bass and Wilkerson were absent and had not seen the information at all. A quickie 7 a.m. meeting was planned to take the vote and there was little doubt as to what the vote would be because board President Stratman signed the paperwork on the spot.

By Tuesday morning at 7:00 a.m. someone must have finally asked why they were just handing business over to Hart without bids. That morning, Superintendent Westbrook admitted he had been on the phone with the lawyers until 10 p.m. the night before. Their conclusion was that state law RSMo 360.106, Sec. 11, says that the financial consulting and the underwriting work on a bond sale or bond refinancing can ONLY be done by competitive bids. These little details can be annoying, can’t they? Frankly, we can’t understand how these two Superintendents (who together draw down almost \$200,000) only check at the last minute to see if something as important as refinancing the district debt has to be bid or not. We also can’t understand why we have a board that lets itself be led around by the nose and never checks to see if the staff is doing its homework. If they don’t care about doing the “legal thing,” they should at least care when their own employees leave them hanging out there looking stupid. In his resignation, Ewing whines that he can’t get along with a board that is “interfering with day-to-day operations” and has left the “realm of visionary planning.” What bunk! Is it micromanaging to ask if what they are being pushed to do is legal or not? Did they think these secret “gratuities” and Hart’s quid pro quo barely 30 days later would never be discovered or connected? Or are they really incapable of seeing that taking expensive favors from salesmen makes them look like people who don’t know where to draw the ethical line? The moral of this story is: It’s easy to cook a whole group of

turkeys if you give them free drinks and stuff them with steak and lobster first.

**Klitzing is ready for the oven.** The council proceeded with the ordinance to give poor Rec Center Manager Klitzing and the Rec Center Advisory Board the dubious power to set fees on the recreation center. Does Klitzing realize his wily employers have deliberately put his head on the chopping block? It was a dirty trick on the new guy and they should be ashamed of themselves. The fees are going to be a very unpopular issue and the council doesn't want to get bloodied with it. Klitzing and the RC Advisory Board are going to be their crash-test dummies to road test the public's tolerance for price levels. When people start complaining that they can't afford to use the facility they are paying taxes to build, the council will point to poor wet-behind-the-ears Klitzing and the RC Advisory Board and say: "They're the dudes that did it. They set those awful fees." If the fees had been set by ordinance, however, Klitzing could toss that hot potato back into the council's lap.

**Disposing of the leftovers.** We were wondering what progress Butz is making on the WaCo landfill purchase and why the Mayor is still having closed meetings about something we all know about when this letter arrived from a reader:

"I am always amazed (and I'm not sure why anymore) by our city's (in)efficiency. Several months ago the city increased their trash disposal fee. Actually, they nearly doubled it and it was already approximately double what a for-profit sanitation company would charge. Anyway, at the time they increased our disposal fee they encouraged us to reduce our disposal cost by recycling things that we would normally throw away. We took them up and started recycling office paper. We found that we were having approximately a standard rollout cart full of paper every month. At the end of last month the city informed us that it was no longer cost efficient for them to recycle items from businesses. I'm confused - why is it cost efficient to drive a truck and trailer on a route and pick up and sort items at every house, but inefficient to pick up a pre-sorted cart?

Why could the businesses not be on a route for recycled items? (We had to call when our rollout was full.) All businesses are required to have trash disposal. Everyone in the city limits is required to use the city sanitation services for trash disposal. Where do the profits from sanitation go? Or are there no profits shown on the balance sheet and expenses from other areas of city operation hidden into it? I wonder if this is somehow a way to conceal what the money is being spent on? All just interesting information that is useful for nothing I suppose."

On the contrary, it fits like a glove. The city needs big volume trash numbers to justify jumping into the \$35 million WaCo landfill debt. Cutting off household recycling would raise a storm of protest from "green" residents and wouldn't work, but discouraging large volume recycling by businesses will quietly pump up the trash volume numbers needed to justify the WaCo project. Why? Read on.

**Chucky's Ba-a-a-a-ck!** The council had another closed session at their November 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. This one was to discuss the WaCo Landfill deal, which, like the evil Chucky, is back again. The other, smarter buyers who thankfully preempted our regional "consortium" of cities, backed out when they got a good look at the deal, the site and the sellers. Not having as much sense, John Butz, Richard Cavender and Randy Verkamp still can't wait to get their hands on that \$35 million debt again. However, while they were out of the running this summer, the EPA got involved and they don't think too highly of the plan to build a leaky landfill on top of an old barite strip mine next to a stream that eventually empties into the Meramec River. The EPA is also a little sensitive about people putting landfills in areas where low-income people live. Rural low-income people can't afford to fight a landfill in their neighborhood as, for instance, the rich Ladue people could if this were in their backyards. But if the EPA doesn't squelch the deal, Butz, Verkamp and Cavender may not be too late to invest in this potential Superfund site w-a-a-ay over by St. Louis. The Post Dispatch has been covering this but not the local "news" paper.

**The Bass/Wiggins Jihad.** In a series of e-mails on October 30th, council members Charlotte Wiggins, Lou Magdits and Harry Kiefer discussed the Channel 16 fiasco. Magdits thought the council should force the station to have an “advisory board” to give them some “general guidance and oversight,” although he admitted that the advice wouldn’t be binding (then what’s the point in having it?). Kiefer, who at first was gung-ho to crack down on Channel 16, changed his mind and didn’t agree that the city should do anything. His e-mail showed he at least had a better grasp of the issues and he commented: *“I’m not sure we have the right (or obligation) to oversee business practices.”* He also said he feels *“there is still a ‘get RVP’ in all this,”* and he added, *“No matter how much we proclaim that this agreement has nothing to do with April and the Committee - it was just an accident of timing- I doubt if anyone believes that.”* His clincher was that the city *“certainly cannot allow another group to start up with less restrictions or control than we imposed on Ch. 16.”* Harry’s on the right track on this one. For instance if Channel 16 was bought out by ...oh, let’s say a physician’s wife and a former reporter. Would the council impose the same demands on them?

Wiggins is adamant about *“controlling”* the programming and content of the cable TV station for *“the good of the people,”* and in her e-mail arguments complained that Ch. 16 wasn’t providing free services such as chamber luncheons (now there’s a yawner) and she goes on about the council’s obligation to oversee the *“integrity and professionalism with whom we do business.”* (Oh Pleeze! The very idea of the same council that went along with helping the mayor and his partner pocket a profit off the sale of Buehler Park, trying to grab the moral high ground here is farcical.) She pointed out that the *“citizens who filed the original complaints (‘the citizens’ are she and Annie Bass) deliberately kept the complaints separate from any deliberations your committee made, (but they sent Keith Strassner in to watch their toast for them) and still retain the option of filing suit if they really were pursuing retribution.”* (Yeah, right.) The Bass/Wiggins appreciation of the First Amendment would put the Taliban to shame.

Wiggins, who has only lukewarm support on this issue, didn’t know when to quit. After getting support

only from Brown and Barklage, she made a motion *“that the City accept Requests for Proposals based on criteria for establishing a public access channel for Rolla.”* The motion died in a loud silence for lack of a second. Let’s see if Bass can finish their attack on Channel 16 from the school board side.

**Better Daycare than Daybreak.** John Butz would like to drop the messy issue of the excessive fees for the day care ladies who take care of children so their parents can work and earn money and pay city taxes. Wiggins didn’t want to let them off the hook and said the purpose of making them comply with a zoning process was because neighbors should have a forum in which to object to having day care in their neighborhood. You know, all that excessive traffic when six parents drop off and pick up their tiny tots five days a week.

If toddlers are a big neighborhood nuisance, what about the neighborhoods that have Daybreak Houses with up to a dozen juvenile court charges coming and going day and night? Now there’s a lucrative source of city license fees. You wouldn’t believe what the state pays per head per day to the guy who has those contracts! They could use a lot of zoning controls and the neighbors would love to have a forum in which to object to having his Daybreak care in their neighborhoods - so would the cops. The council should drop their harassment of the toddler care providers and look at the really big neighborhood problems. The city can’t keep them out of neighborhoods, but they sure can make it unprofitable for the contractor to let them run loose.

**The Hitch at Hy-Point.** MRPC’s Director, Richard Cavender has a problem. The site the RCDC is “giving” him, which he will use as part of the matching funds for the day-care grant, is a curiously sunken patch of land. No one at the last council meeting would admit to knowing exactly what it was when Cavender wanted them to fill it in for him at a cost of \$10 to \$20,000, but we think someone had better do some samples and soil tests to find out what’s in the soil or under it. Somewhere in the history of that patched together industrial park that the city taxpayers “donated” to RCDC was something about an old lagoon. The whole area is, after all, an industrial park, not pristine untouched prairie. Who knows what has been dumped in this odd “lagoon”

site. It would be beyond crass for the city council to pour money into a day care project where innocent children will be playing in contaminated dirt. In fact, if Cavender and his quasi-governmental agency are going to make money off providing day care to kiddies, why doesn't he pay to have the samples done and/or the lagoon filled in? Why should city government help him out while hammering his private day care competition?

**Are toll roads next?** The dispute still flares up now and then between the council and the RMU board over who owns the water/sewer lines out to the main buried somewhere under the public streets. But so far there is no resolution. Jim Stoffer, RMU board president, was at the second meeting in November trying to be convincing in arguing that the homeowners are responsible for maintaining and repairing the line all the way out to the city's main waterline. Robert Sooter, watching the council meeting from the comfort of his Lazyboy, was so incensed that he jumped into his car and rushed in to

refute Stoffer's claim while he was still making excuses. (Isn't it great living in a small town? You couldn't do that in St. Louis.) Sooter pointed out that if what Stoffer claims is true, it means that the homeowner could dig up the city street any time he wanted to.

If you take Sooter's logic a little further, it also means the city would have to give every homeowner in Rolla an easement to tear up city streets whenever they wanted to check for a leak. Bet no homeowner has one of those easements. Even better, if every property owner has control over the street "his" lines are under, couldn't he put up a tollgate and make cars pay to recoup the cost of repairing "his" water and sewer lines? Sooner or later RMU is going to lose this one. Even Barklage questioned RMU's feeble claim that 1/3 of the cities they checked made the homeowner pay for the whole thing. Barklage pointed out that meant 2/3 of them didn't. Barklage occasionally gets in a good shot.

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