

No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing

Volume II

February 9, 2009

Number 77

“Now is not the time”

- Connie Gaddy opposing massive tax increases

In what will probably prove be the understatement of 2009, School Board incumbent **Connie Gaddy** on 1-8-09 fought off an attempt by **Superintendent Jerry Giger** and pro-administration board members **Keith Strassner, Kelly Long, Molly Malone** and **Jane Haskell**, to add a whopping **60¢ increase to our annual school tax levy PLUS another \$11,000,000 bond issue** for a menu of building expansions and remodeling that are eminently postpone-able at least until long after the recession is over...and it's anyone's guess as to how long that will be.

With typically candid Connie-speak, she elaborated, **“It is appalling to me the amount of money you guys are asking for. Now is not the time to be asking for a tax increase.”** Gaddy and board member **Robyn Sooter** have both been adamantly opposed to the levy increase and the bond issue given the state of the economy and perhaps even if the economy were better. There has been little justification offered for the \$11 million of mostly superfluous building projects which, with a few economies, could be paid for out of cash flow. There was no justification for Giger's proposal for a massive **60¢** hike in our school tax bills. Giger's proposed property tax levy increase would be a .19 increase or nearly a **20%** increase to our current **\$3.0983** school levy which would make our tax rate **\$3.70!** In addition, with the tax for repayment of the \$11 million bond issue Giger also wants, we could be looking at a levy hike *in excess of \$4.00 for every \$100 of assessed valuation!* A tax increase that big is outrageous on its face even without a recession.

You would think that with a 20% tax increase, the windfall to the annual **\$40,000,000** in tax revenues they get every year to educate the same number of students we've had for four decades would come with an ironclad guarantee that they will affect a corresponding 20% increase in our children's test scores - but it never does. Their money issues are always “for the children,” that's the carrot they dangle but all we get is the stick. Tax increases should come with proof that they have *first* diligently cut every dollar of fat from their annual **\$40,000,000** budget - but they never do. This one should come with a financial plan showing us why they need such a huge increase and why they're so freaked out about what will happen to their finances in 2010 - but they don't want to talk about the huge mistake the greedy board and administration made with the 2003 bond issues, they just want us to pay for their ticking time bomb, their financial blunder. Giger's whining that they expect to lose state and federal aid and may have a hard time in the near future is a condition all of us face - but they don't care. These spoiled bureaucrats aren't entitled to a 20% tax increase out of our pockets so they can protect their big salaries and their lavish benefits* such as FREE health insurance. How tragic that they might have to suffer without their customary 3%-5% increases while the taxpayers who pay their pork-like salaries, benefits and perks lose their jobs, their health coverage and their homes. Here's a sample of what our school administrator's make and why they can't “connect” with the real world the rest of us live in.

*Giger's 2007 salary: **\$120,000**,* plus FREE health insurance **\$8,376** and FREE health insurance for his family, plus a 12% retirement match of **\$15,405**, plus Medicare **\$1,740**, plus professional dues **\$868**, and workman's comp **\$668**, plus a **\$50K** life insurance policy, plus virtually unlimited professional travel and expenses and for all that he only works **260** days a year! No wonder he and the other administrators want a 20% increase in *our* taxes to protect *their* fat salaries and benefits. (*a/o 2008 the board increased his salary to **\$127,308** with corresponding increases in benefits)

See Keith falling on Keith's face. Nevertheless, board member **Keith Strassner**,* insensitive as ever to the plight of thousands of Phelps County families and elderly, made the motion to put this appalling amount of new taxes on the April ballot. Much to Keith's surprise he didn't even get a second to his motion...just dead silence from his fellow tax-and-spend board members, **Kelly Long, Molly Malone** and **Jane Haskell**. **Jamie Myers** was dubious about it but **Gaddy** and **Sooter** were adamantly against increasing the property taxes of people who are having a very hard time making ends meet. It was odd that Long, Malone and Haskell abandoned Strassner when the chips were down because last year they had enthusiastically supported the silly and patently phony process of having dotting parents draw up wish lists of renovations and expansions of the buildings without any discussion of how their wish lists will be funded. That's just irresponsible. They were also very enthusiastic about wasting \$11,000 to have a phone survey done to see if the consultants thought they could get both tax-and-spend issues passed during a recession.

Long, Malone, Haskell and Strassner could have given Keith a second on his motion and a majority vote to put both tax issues on the ballot. What shook their nerve? Could it have anything to do with Gaddy's demand for a roll call vote which would have forced each of them to go on record? Partially. Did Keith go too far during the discussion when he called Gaddy a liar to her face? Definitely. To her credit Dana Sooter nailed him good for that. Was it the fact that Gaddy said she would not silently go along with it that unnerved them? My guess is all of the above.

The Tax-and-Spenders, Keith Strassner, Molly Malone, Jane Haskell and Kelly Long (if he's reelected in April) intend to put the same irresponsible spending issues on the ballot in August. The recession will be worse by August.

Pusillanimous Nincompoopery

The RREC was founded due to concern for poor children? Sir Kingsley Amis said, *"If you can't annoy somebody, there is little point in writing."* If true, the RDN article about the interview of **Elizabeth Bax** was a great success. On December 29, '08, Bax fed another green RDN reporter the most ludicrous fiction she's told yet - that the RREC was founded "by people who were concerned about the number of children in the free and reduced lunch programs in Rolla's Schools." Examination of our archive of all RREC's minutes and all RDN stories about the real history of RREC - including one extensive interview with Bill Marshall, RREC's first President and chief organizer - poor children and their lunches were never once mentioned...not once. But Rolla's Artists of Poofery never let facts interfere with any useful tale.

The Bax story contained a string of fragmented claims told "as a matter of factly" to an inexperienced and overworked young RDN reporter whose writing skills appear to have been blunted by too much text messaging. "Make no mistake, we are under siege on that point," burred Bax. What point? What mistake? What siege? The reporter didn't challenge her fractured comments so what is besieging her or us will remain a mystery. Inquiring minds are typically in short supply at the RDN. The article said Bax was in her third year and had just had her contract renewed (and her six-figure salary increased as well no doubt). The RREC guys renewed her contract despite her painful lack of accomplishment and embarrassing lack of skills. Not even her spectacular crash and burn at the county EEZ meeting would dissuade these guys from rehiring Liz. Bax described herself, not very flatteringly, as a "conduit." "I cultivate relationships with outside governments, federal and state and with different private industry," she expounded. The reporter clarified for her, "The cultivation she is referring to is bringing in new businesses to the area, which in return, bring more jobs." Well if she did they would but she hasn't so they couldn't.

Bax was following a long Rolla tradition of plucking any excuse out of thin air to justify the self-serving actions of the select few no matter how big the lie. She was quite comfortable disgorging whatever excuse came to mind because RDN reporters *DO NOT EVER* challenge anything they are told by the people who front for parasitic private non

Kelly Long is up for re-election this year so he needs to be dumped for someone who is not an administrative flunky. In 2011 Malone and Haskell's terms are up and they also need to be replaced. We don't need school board members who are out of touch with the struggle people are having.

April Challengers for School Board: Challenging Gaddy and Long for two year terms are: **Jeannie Cavender**, **Heidi Colench** and **Darlene Ramsey**. **Jamie Myers** is running for a one year term. Do you know how these unknowns will vote on raising your taxes in August if one of them gets on the school board? Can you afford not to know if it means they're going to vote to stick us with taxes during a recession?

profit corporations like the RCDC, the Chamber and RREC no matter how silly their sanctimonious claims may be. One example is the free ride the TIF and Rolla West projects have always enjoyed in the RDN 'news' coverage. The backers can and do make all sorts of exaggerated claims because they are confident that the RDN reporters will never force them to prove their claims or justify their theories, the chief theory being that millions of our dollars sunk into retail will turn Rolla into another Springfield of the Ozark Plateau. They have never investigated and told the public about the new sales taxes the RREC and Woessner are going to cram down shopper's throats to pay for the \$35,000,000 project. Her bosses, the RREC board members, are never interviewed. They hide behind her skirts and let her draw fire with vacuous comments such as "Make no mistake, we are under siege on that point."

Using poor children as a sympathy play is a strategy they hope will keep Rolla taxpayers from remembering that they have already dropped **\$575,000** down the Black Hole for her salary, her FREE medical insurance and her other fringe benefits as well as the \$575,000 in Rolla West studies that will be outdated trash in just another few months. Who knows how much more in additional city money they've blown on their failed RREC Development ideas like TIF I, TIF II, EEZ and Walgreens. Bax is paid to say whatever keeps her bosses happy and that's why no one takes her seriously. The reporter is paid to fill fish wrap with garbled grammar. There's no reward for either of them in telling the truth which is this: ***The retail economy they think will save them is shrinking faster than Bernie Madoff dividends.***

Keith Strassner, tried to prop up her "under siege" story by pointing out that the **General Electric Aviation** project was one example of how RREC could "help" the university efforts. He didn't say she and the RREC *did* help, he said it was an example of how they *could* help. He also contributed this gross exaggeration, that the General Electric Aviation project *could* create "50 to 100 jobs" in the next few years. He didn't say there was a chance in hell that they *would* just that they *could*...if General Electric pigs could fly. GE Aviation has been puffed up by Bax and Strassner as a "new industry" when what they actually are is just a

recruiting office for GE's aero division. Like the Army and Navy, some big industries keep offices on the campuses of engineering schools to recruit engineers when they're new and cheap. They are here to hire baby engineers - not to open a factory.

Wikipedia: [General Electric Aviation](#): "Along with the purchase of Smiths Aerospace, the purchase included opening the first [University Development Center](#) in Houghton, Michigan, in the effort to work with University Students to provide training in engineering

... and more Pusillanimous Nincompoopery

The **Royal Municipal Utilities**, the epitome of intransigent, reactionary mis-management, has not only tied the future of the city to a runaway [MoPEP Machine](#) that is dragging them down with Billions in investments in outdated coal-fired power plant technology and a perpetual, blank check contract which allows their electricity supplier, MJMEUC/MoPEP to pass along to their captive electric customers, but they are now bullying county residents **Bob and Carolyn Weitzsacker** and anyone else in their way to get possession of some land they need for their \$18,000,000 Double Secret Spy Code Ring Project. The report of why the project is being done is so super top secret that even the city council has not seen it and they have no idea why they are approving the biggest debt in Rolla's history.

Mr. and Mrs. Weitzsacker were minding their own business when the four RMU board members and their over-paid administrator decided to kick them out of their home because of the \$18,000,000 Double Secret Spy Code Ring Project. The Weitzsacker's, and over 200 of their fellow county residents who signed a petition against RMU's actions, don't take well to being bullied so they spat back at the RMU board and city council at the December 12, 2008 council meeting and demanded to know in what kangaroo court was the council vote taken to evict them from their home for this \$18,000,000 Double Secret Spy Code Ring Project? Only the city council can condemn property, RMU has to ask the city council to do it for them and they hadn't gotten that vote when they were making the condemnation threats to the Weitzsacker's last April. We wonder why **ex-Circuit Judge John Wiggins**, a RMU board member, didn't know something that simple about a basic state law. The council, clueless as usual, did not know that RMU was threatening to condemn property and assuming that they could get the council to vote to do it for them whenever they snapped their fingers. The RMU board had plenty of justification for assuming all they had to do was snap their fingers and the council would take whatever vote they ordered because that's what RMU has always done. When the RMU board says "Jump!" the council says, "How high?"

It's no surprise that the RMU board and executives are insensitive bullies but we did think that with lawyer and **ex-Circuit Judge John Wiggins** on their board they would start employing more subtle - and maybe even legal - tactics to grab land and walk all over people. Local lawyer **J. Kent**

and software development. The program has performed well and GE Aviation has announced further UDC openings at the University of Kansas.

It's typical Rolla hype of typical Rolla non-news in our non-newspaper. GE Aviation may provide part time employment for some engineering students and computer programmers but this is not going to be new employment for the men and women who were thrown out of work at Briggs. It's very cruel of Bax and Strassner to pretend GE Aviation is anything more than just a recruiting office.

Robinson was hired by RMU and he signed one of the threatening letters last spring, long before the council had approved the revenue bonds for this ill-advised "Hide-It-From-The-Taliban" electrical project. *The problem here is that RMU board member and ex-Circuit Judge John Wiggins works for J. Kent Robinson!* Now, 99% of the people who read that will immediately think, "Ah ha! That's a conflict of interest!" and all 99% would be wrong. Missouri's Conflict of Interest law is written so narrowly that you would have to be the manager of...well, let's say a utility department and employ your wife, brother, son, ex-wife and assorted relatives in order to be in violation of the Conflict of Interest law in this state. This particular odorous arrangement is the more common You-Scratch-My-Back deal between cronies where Wiggins is using his public appointment to toss some business to the firm he works for. You might call it a Smell-the-Ethical-Conflict violation instead of a plain conflict of interest. We're not referring to the ethics of the RMU board of course - it's been years since anyone accused them of having any - but to the ethics of Robinson and his law firm. He's always had a good reputation so was a surprise that he would risk so much for so little. When asked about the conflict, Wiggins' excuse to the council was that it wasn't a violation because he only handles criminal not civil cases for Robinson's firm. The courthouse bailiff could make up a better excuse than that.

Intercounty may have allayed county resident's power concerns but not their political concerns. The couple the RMU board thought they could bully or kick off their land subsequently held a neighborhood meeting with Intercounty General Manager **Dwayne Cartwright** who reassured them that even if the city annexed their property involuntarily they can't be forced to use RMU's exorbitantly priced MoPEP power. The Weitzsacker's and all their neighbors were very relieved that they wouldn't have to be victimized by RMU's power bills but that doesn't change the condemnation/eviction situation.

Within the last three years two different groups of angry county residents have crammed the courthouse meeting room to tell the Phelps County Commissioners they want nothing to do with EEZ or any other schemes of the City of Rolla. Once again the bullying tactics of the RMU board have roused even more county residents to view RMU and the City of Rolla with disgust. If city-county relations continue to

deteriorate the city council has to credit themselves for most of the ill-will from county people but they can thank the small-minded people *THEY* appointed to the RMU board for the rest.

Poor, poor Lonna. Last June this tidbit about Lonna Sowers turned up in [The Turner Report](#) - no, not *that* Turner Report, this one is a newspaper blog by a Joplin journalist and it reported as follows:

[Age discrimination lawsuit filed against GateHouse Media](#)

The former advertising manager of the Rolla Daily News has filed an age discrimination lawsuit against the newspaper and its owner, GateHouse Media. In the lawsuit, filed May 5 in U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, lawyers for **Lonna Sowers** claims she was fired on May 10, 2007, "because of her age."

Ms. Sowers, 62, was replaced by Alissa Martin, who was 33 at the time. Ms. Sowers also claims she had been "treated less favorably than her younger co-worker by defendants."

The company listed the reasons for firing Ms. Sowers in a June 21, 2007, letter sent to Ms. Sowers by a St. Louis law firm, which said, "Ms. Sowers was discharged on May 10, 2004 (sic) after the advertising sales figures were and had been dramatically lower than were acceptable. In addition, in the course of the company's investigation as to the cause of this downturn in advertising business, the company learned that a major part of the problem was significant antipathy toward Ms. Sowers from the advertising public and her co-workers." Ms. Sowers is asking for damages and a jury trial."

Thinking the case might have already been dropped or disposed of, we looked Lonna's case up (**Case No.: 4:08-**

cv-00633-TIA.) in the U.S. District Court's **PACER** online court records system which is where we've always monitored the lawsuits against **ex-Sheriff Blankenship** and his bullies. The trial games won't begin until March 2009 but we don't give Lonna much chance of winning this one. In their response to the plaintiff's filing, the GateHouse Media lawyers pretty much already ripped her complaint to shreds. (If her lawyer couldn't even get the name of the corporation they're suing right it doesn't bode well for her case.) The GateHouse Media attorney responded,

"Further answering, and by way of affirmative defense, hypothetically and alternatively, Plaintiff's claims are barred by the doctrines of waiver, laches, estoppel, and unclean hands."

By Crikey, when you're up against the kind of guys who can sling around words like "laches, estoppel and unclean hands" you're way over your head. We couldn't resist looking up a word like 'laches.' It's an ancient doctrine in law based upon the maxim that, "equity aids the vigilant not those who slumber on their rights." Those who slumber on their rights...that's just damn poetic isn't it?

It has to be humiliating for Lonna when the opposition says they didn't fire you because you were old, they fired you because you were incompetent and no one liked you.

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