

Commissioner Questions June 11 2014 (SPLOST, part III)

Q. Why did you receive complaints at the recent bond validation hearing on the county bonding or borrowing money under the SPLOST and utilizing the proceeds to repay the SPLOST debt?

A. That is a good question because we do not know why. Since SPLOST began, SPLOST bonds have always been utilized to finance part of the SPLOST projects and we have "validated them" the same way each time, which is what is required by law. We have been very consistent and very conservative in our repayment plans and that is not going to change.

Q. Were those who were complaining and trying to stop the bond validation process in court some of the same people who always complain?

A. Yes, but I really think (or hope) it was more a case of not understanding than anything. We go through the bond validation process every 5 years and someone always tries to scare the public into thinking we are going to get the county into a debt we can not repay and they are always wrong because that is not going to happen. During the referendum we voted to bond up to a maximum of ten million dollars but we certainly will not bond more money than we can easily repay.

Q. Why do you think some of the same people, year after year, continue to accuse you of financially breaking our county?

A. Unfortunately, it is politics. It is a very, very small group who either has political aspirations or simply wants the attention of pretending to be a government watchdog. Unfortunately, as their thinking continues, they often morph from making up statements or taking others remarks and repeating them without even verifying the information, to actually believing what they are saying. In my opinion, their misrepresentations and often outright lies continue to be justified by them in their own minds. They have an internet forum where they can say whatever they want, and unfortunately, anyone can say anything on the internet, true or false. I can not control what they say nor would I want to. It would be nice if they tried being more truthful and less deceptive, but that is their choice.

Q. So why is this small group concerned that you and the county will get into so much debt that the county taxpayers will be required to pay for it with additional property taxes?

A. It must get back to some of the current political philosophies; that if you continue to say the same old thing over and over, although it is a lie or misrepresentation, people will eventually believe it. However, in this case, they fail to realize that after so many years of crying wolf and the sky not falling, they still think someone is going to take them seriously and the problem is, no one does. Why, after 14 years in office with a solid fiscally conservative record, and the third lowest property tax rate in the State of Georgia, would I all of a sudden start making bad financial decisions? It is not going to happen and they know it. Again, it is simply politics and part of what we have to deal with in county government.

Q. What kind of financial condition is the county currently in?

A. We are in excellent financial condition. We continue to receive an A+ bond rating. We continue to be able to pay our bills without borrowing, and above all, we have one of the lowest property tax rates (currently 3rd lowest) in the entire state of Georgia out of 159 counties. For the third year in a row, we have been able to give our county employees a modest pay increase without furloughs - find another county that has done that. Your property taxes have been decreased for the past four years in a row. We continue to have to watch our expenses very closely and some of the new laws taking effect are having and will continue to have a negative financial impact on the county going forward. But we are very proud of our financial condition, made possible by good solid management and by a very hard working employee and elected official base.

SPLOST part IV continued next week.