

The SPLOST Vote

'The truest form of transparency' and a good deal for taxpayers

On Tuesday, Cobb County voters have the opportunity to renew the existing SPLOST and keep Cobb County the envy of metro Atlanta.

The SPLOST has built Cobb County one penny at a time — from roads, bridges, parks, libraries and fire stations to providing vital resources for emergency services and police. The SPLOST has allowed us to do these things without incurring debt on the backs of taxpayers and without spending millions in interest on debt. Thanks to the SPLOST, Cobb has enjoyed the lowest property tax rate and the lowest sales tax rates in the Atlanta region for more than a decade. And we are only one of a handful of counties that maintain an "AAA" credit rating — higher than that of the federal government.

The SPLOST is a funding mechanism that just makes good business sense.

It fairly spreads the burden to fund vital projects for infrastructure and capital projects across the county. All individuals and businesses that utilize our roads, parks and service systems pay as they make purchases. In fact, a significant percentage of revenues collected from the SPLOST are paid by people who do not live in Cobb. As tourism grows in our County, this percentage will only rise.

Those opposed to the SPLOST have little to say that actually addresses the merits of the issue. They offer no solutions, just anger and deception that will only hold Cobb back. Efforts have been made to fool voters into the SPLOST vote being a "new" tax or a "tax increase." The reality is that Cobb's current and low sales tax rate of 6 percent will not change.

Some have tried to turn the SPLOST into an attack on the board of commissioners. The reality is that the SPLOST represents the truest form of transparency and local control. It allows the citizens of Cobb to decide how they want dollars for transportation, public safety and parks to be spent and lists

the costs of the projects.

The commissioners are bound to follow the project list in spending SPLOST dollars. If the projects returned to the general fund, the commissioners would have complete control over how to raise the revenue and how to spend the money.

By voting yes to renew the 2016 SPLOST, we will be voting yes for projects that will have a positive impact on the lives of every Cobb citizen while keeping taxes low.

A "No" vote causes a property tax increase for projects, debt and interest on debt. This creates a burden on small businesses, property owners and families by increasing their tax bills, increasing their rent and increasing their mortgages. Homes in our county would become less affordable and less attractive due to higher property tax debt.

To reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility, the SPLOST contains more than \$287 million for transportation improvements across the county.

To keep Cobb as a great place for residents of all ages, the SPLOST contains millions of dollars for improvements to existing parks, libraries and senior services as well as the construction of new parks, libraries and sidewalks.

To keep Cobb a safe community, nearly \$88 million will be devoted to police, fire and emergency services. The SPLOST will mean new fire stations, better police training and improved emergency services. While every family in Cobb prays they will never need police, fire or emergency services, the SPLOST will secure a new county radio system to ensure that police, fire or emergency services can get to you and your family faster if an emergency arises.

When the true and accurate information is considered, the SPLOST is a good business decision, a good deal for taxpayers and a wise investment to keep taxes low and to secure Cobb's future for years to come.

Join with us in securing a bright future for Cobb by voting "Yes" on Tuesday to continue the SPLOST.

Georgia native Dale Hughes has worked as a business consultant for 30 years and currently consults with community-oriented businesses such as Atlanta-based Gay Construction and Kennesaw-based GTP Associates with his wife, Cindy.

Justin O'Dell is an attorney in Marietta with the firm of O'Dell & O'Neal. He is a member of the Marietta Kiwanis Club and has served on numerous non-profit boards. He and his wife, Jenni, live in West Cobb with their two children.

Darhyl Watkins has been a Cobb resident for more than 27 years and lives in the Smyrna/Vinings area. He is a member of the South Cobb Redevelopment Authority and serves on the Cobb Board of Elections in addition to his position as a global client advisor for the Oracle Corporation.

Ask yourselves these questions before casting ballot, then vote 'No'

Before you go to vote Tuesday on the six year, close to \$1 billion SPLOST on the ballot, ask yourself four simple questions:

- ◆ How much will the SPLOST cost taxpayers?
- ◆ What are the benefits to taxpayers if the SPLOST is defeated?
- ◆ What are the needs vs. wants in the project list?

◆ And how can we go about meeting our needs without it?

On the first question, on average, it will cost the average Cobb household \$3,080. You must decide if that is worth the price.

Second, having that money in your pocket will result in significant economic benefits for our local economy. Let us not forget that the fountainhead of wealth creation is the free market, not government, because government does not make

money. It consumes it.

Moreover, in a down economy, with high unemployment rates right here in Cobb, maintaining this tax increase is the wrong prescription for Cobb County. Therefore, there is no better time than now to cut taxes to jump start our local economy. And doing so would give us an amazing competitive advantage over neighboring counties, where our sales tax would go down to 5 percent versus 7 or 8 percent elsewhere.

Third, this SPLOST is full of reckless, wasteful wants that lack accountability or specificity. For example, ask yourself:

◆ Is \$89.5 million to turn C.H. James Parkway and Roswell Road into six lanes from four when traffic volume does not justify such an expansion a want or a need?

◆ Is \$2 million for a new equestrian center when there are already many private facilities in Cobb which serve the horse riding public a want or a need? And why are we using public dollars to compete against private enterprise?

◆ Is \$1.7 million in Kennesaw for a new recreation center, splash pad and dog run upgrades a want or a need?

◆ Is \$400,000 for a railroad quiet zone at a crossing to be determined a want or a need?

◆ Is \$23.4 million for technology "which allows government to focus more attention on aspects of customer service that are more challenging" (page 38 of the SPLOST list) a want or a need?

◆ And finally, is spending tens of millions to build infrastructure to support a new Braves stadium a want or a need? With the Braves owners already into us for \$397 million to build their new stadium, I say that if they need it that badly, they should pay for it themselves.

On the other hand, ask yourself if paying your mortgage or rent, putting gas in your car or putting food on the table is a want or a need? Without this SPLOST we will be better able to meet those real, legitimate needs.

And fourth, how can we meet the needs of the county without a SPLOST? With revenues increasing into the general fund due to a recovering economy, that should be enough to meet our legitimate needs, if spent wisely.

Before we impose yet another SPLOST we need to ask ourselves: Are our county commissioners doing everything in their power to reduce costs so that we can free up resources to pay for legitimate needs without a SPLOST, or could it be we have a spending problem rather than a revenue problem here in Cobb?

Unfortunately, this special purpose tax has morphed into a general purpose tax, where proponents want to use it in ways that go way beyond its original intent, even going so far as using it to paint the interior walls of government buildings.

I hope you will agree, by the time you go to vote, that this SPLOST is a bad deal for taxpayers and that you will vote no.

Lance Lamberton is the Chairman of the Cobb Taxpayers Association.



DALE HUGHES



JUSTIN O'DELL



DARHYL WATKINS



LANCE LAMBERTON



ELLIOTT

SECOND 7B OPINION

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2014 ♦ MDJ

COLUMNIST | JUDY ELLIOTT

Looking for greatness and weird surprises in politics

Chuck Todd, the new moderator of "Meet the Press," sighed on his network's news show. Yes, he took a bus tour through the South, interviewing voters in diners, on the street, getting a handle on the midterm elections.

But did he have new-found wisdom on the latest polls, on who would control the Senate? "What I can tell you," he assured the news anchor, "is some weird things are going to happen in this election!"

Makes you feel proud, doesn't it? Millions of dollars spent, red meat political ads dominating the TV screen, e-mails begging for money, and it all comes down to who votes and who doesn't!

The loaded question to a few candidates: "For whom did you vote for president?" has been unanswered more than the truth was told.

One Kentuckian interviewed was filled with gratitude for the Affordable Care Act, giving her child insurance coverage in spite of a pre-existing condition. Another small business owner in the state complained his employees' health insurance coverage was eating up his profits.

One more time, all politics is both local and personal! We may not be as polarized as Congress, but we have our issues and we're voting with solutions in mind.

The president's name is not on the ballot, but it keeps coming up as candidates distance themselves from his policies. He's too liberal or not liberal enough. Aaron David Miller, in his new book, "The End of Greatness," posits the theory America can't have another great president and shouldn't want one!

Say what? Aren't we daily wishing for a president who will schmooze with Congress, give up the big programs and balance the budget, cut back on entitlement spending, but allow the military their just due, protect the environment yet keep gas prices low, root out terrorists and give us world peace?

Maybe not, but it sure sounds like us! Miller is a realist. He pegs us as idealists, believing leaders, elected, those promising "high principles, lofty visions and big agendas can impose them through the power of persuasion and a winning personality."

When our expectations are not met, Miller writes, we criticize the ability of leaders to communicate, to "articulate their narratives so powerfully, followers will rally to the cause and doubters will comply or melt away."

"Men make their own history," Miller writes, "but they do not make it as they please. Like it or not, we are muddling along in what he calls "the post-heroic leadership era," a time familiar to a frustrated electorate.

For the five "so-called great powers — the United States, Britain, France, China, and Russia," time and circumstance have diluted the charisma of transformative leaders," Miller believes, offering up the name of one whose "humility, commonness and anti-greatness" has, ironically, made him a man of the people, one who could change a world view: Pope Francis I, making his mark.

As we ponder the "sorry state of our dysfunctional politics," (Congress ranks with root canals in the public's view of positive experiences), Miller writes of our "presidency-dependence, even addiction which cannot be satisfied."

In the one national office we all vote to fill, eventually, a president will disappoint, author Miller believes. He quotes the unflappable Harry Truman, who described his job as being "a glorified public relations man who spends his time flattering, kissing and kicking people to get them to do what they are supposed to do anyway."

Even the erudite Thomas Jefferson believed: "No man will ever bring out of the presidency the reputation which carries him into it."

Miller puts before us the names of three "great" American presidents who "overcame a nation-wrenching crisis and, in doing so, changed the nation forever." Jot down your choices. We'll compare notes with author Miller in the first column after the election.

In the meantime, please leave your fingerprints on a ballot, dear voter. Be a part of Chuck Todd's "weird," (that's "weird" meaning unexpected), surprises coming from the South on Election Day.

Judy Elliott is a longtime resident of Marietta.

LETTERS POLICY

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