

60, 61 and 101 discussed at public meeting

Written by Chris Lee

Community members and leaders of local entities gathered at Phillips County Event Center to listen to a non-partisan presentation on Amendments 60, 61 and Proposition 101 Monday, Oct. 11. Rocky Mountain Farmers Union (RMFU) created the presentation using information from both proponents and opponents of the ballot initiatives.

Roy Pfaltzgraff, president of Phillips and Sedgwick County Farmers Union led the group through each ballot issue. "We just want to get the information out there because there are a lot of questions," he noted.

Pfaltzgraff said the initiatives each run to a full paragraph on the ballot. "They are very complicated and relate to many technical aspects of property taxes, debts, borrowing and loans, taxes, fees and charges," he added.

Representatives from Melissa Memorial Hospital, Holyoke Re-1J School District, Phillips County Commissioners, Phillips County Economic Development, City of Holyoke and Phillips County Fire Protection District were on hand to discuss how the ballot initiatives will affect their entities if passed.

Most of the afore-mentioned entities have passed resolutions opposing all three ballot measures. East Phillips County Hospital Board members passed a resolution on Aug. 24; Re-1J, Sept. 21; City of Holyoke, Sept. 21; and Phillips County Commissioners, July 19.

"Amendment 60 would cause us to have to pay property taxes which would be quite burdensome," MMH administrator John Ayoub said. He noted the property taxes would be roughly around \$360,000.

Ayoub also said the repercussions of the other initiatives would hurt the district as well.

Bret Miles, Holyoke Re-1J School Supt. noted the district currently receives about \$188,000 in specific ownership taxes. When the cost drops to \$2 a car, the district would receive about \$3,000, Miles said.

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“That is the source of state and local revenue that has no backfill provision,” Miles noted.

Miles said an issue that doesn't come to mind right away is that the school district operates all of the photocopiers on lease purchase agreements. The reason being it is cheaper, the maintenance is better and they have no value when done. Amendment 61 would prohibit those lease purchase agreements.

The school district has also used lease purchase agreements for school buses. Miles noted it was cheaper to pay the interest and get two buses at the low price rather than purchasing one bus one year and another the next.

“There are things your local entities are doing right now as savings to the taxpayer that go away with these initiatives,” Miles said.

Nici Bishop, director of Phillips County Economic Development, stated, “We try and support all of our local entities and businesses and it would cause a major downturn in our economic standpoint across the county. From what I've seen there is nothing that would benefit economic development other than people not having to pay as much for vehicle fees. But the repercussions will far outweigh the benefits.”

Commissioner Susan Roll Walters said the county currently receives about \$1.3 million for the road and bridge fund. If the initiatives pass, they will lose about \$800,000, or 40 percent of the budget.

“The biggest thing we have is purchasing equipment and employees,” Roll Walters said. “That's what's going to go away.”

The services the county offers will go away, or take longer with less equipment and less people, she added.

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One of the state functions Phillips County offers is the driving licensing ability. “We get a little back from the state but the ability to provide the service would go away,” Roll Walters said.”

She noted she has been telling people they will probably have to go to Sterling or Fort Morgan but recently found out they will probably have to do away with the services as well, forcing people to go to Denver.

“It’s going to hurt rural Colorado the most,” Roll Walters said.

Projected impacts to Highway Users Tax Fund (HUTF) funding for Phillips County from Proposition 101 were provided by CDOT. The projected loss from Proposition 101 is \$448,949.

Orville Tonsing attended Monday’s meeting representing the city and PC Fire Protection District.

“You might save money with one hand and spend it with the other,” Tonsing said.

He noted the thing that worries him the most about all three initiatives is someone else will be deciding how everything will run. “Who knows better how to run the hospital, the school, the county, the city, the fire protection district than the people that live right here?” Tonsing said.

As for the fire protection district, Tonsing noted things are currently in good shape but the thought of going back to 1992 levels worries him.

“If you have a fire at your house, bring gas to the station and we’ll be right out,” Tonsing said referring to what could happen. “We will try to never get to that point, but it could happen.”

The idea of a fire protection fee was brought up and if homeowners haven’t paid the fee, the fire

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department wouldn't go fight the fire. This recently happened near Boulder.

Other opponents around the state who are against the three ballot issues include Governor Bill Ritter, CU Board of Regents, RMFU, AARP, CO Cattlemen's Association, CO Corn Growers Association, CO Farm Bureau, CHSAA, Colorado Municipal League, NECALG and Progressive 15, just to name a few.

Proponents who have said they favor the initiatives include Colorado Union of Taxpayers, Colorado Tax Reform and Patriotic Resistance.

A couple of websites were given for people to visit to get better educated on the initiatives. They are www.bellpolicy.org and <http://www.votessmart.org>.

A similar meeting was also held in Haxtun on Monday.