

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I commend the Medina County Judges, Collier, Kovack, Kimbler and Lohn for suggesting delay of the courthouse project. Judges clearly told commissioners “we can wait”.

This year Commissioners must trim at least \$4 million from budget requests. There will be layoffs. Services will be cut. This includes \$1 million in cuts to the Sheriff's department, which more likely than not equates to the lay-off of correction officers and deputies. Unfortunately this is at the same time Judges have informed us they are experiencing increased crime attributed to the downward spiral in the economy and that they expect it will worsen. These are the facts this year - regardless of whether commissioners go forward with the project or not.

But next year and beyond, commissioners can ease budget problems by not having to make payments on huge debt taken out in order to go forward with the courthouse project at the present time.

The county receives 2.50 mills of property taxes called inside millage. All or any part of this inside millage is assigned by commissioners where it is needed. Right now, more than \$850,000 of it is designated to pay off loans. This is the funding being referred to by my fellow commissioners as “a different pot of money”. It is a different pot of money only because commissioners determine where it is to be used. Those funds if not needed to pay off debt, can be directed to the general fund for everyday expenses.

My fellow commissioners have said going forward with the courthouse project would not cost jobs and layoffs resulting in cuts to service. I believe those representations consider only the current year which does not fairly reflect the whole story.

This year the debt for the jail and prosecutors building will be paid off. The remaining debt to pay off the engineers building and renovation of the administration and professional buildings will also be paid off in the near future.

A new \$13 million debt will require commissioners to continue using the inside millage to pay down the debt for another 25 years. If new debt is not taken on at this time, those funds are free to be used for basic county services. This may allow us by next year to have available funds for our county judges and sheriff to deal with our increasing crime.

Columbus elected officials warn that local government funds could be slashed in half next year which would reduce county resources by \$1.5 million. This funding resource was already cut by 8 percent this year. Our County Auditor cautions that property

values are presently “soft” and could result in less income from property taxes. Our sales tax revenue is down along with other resources of income. Some of our departments, including Job & Family Services, Child Support, and ADAHM Board, have had drastic cuts in state funding in 2008 and we anticipate deeper cuts to already reduced services. By all accounts our economy has not hit bottom and is expected to get worse before it gets better. I believe we need to keep all available county resources to cover everyday operations.

I cannot support going forward with a project that supposedly will stimulate the economy by creating temporary jobs, at the cost of possibly laying off more county employees over the next few years.

Common sense tells me this courthouse project and resulting debt should be delayed. We should only move forward with this project when economic conditions are projected to be better – not worse and interest rates and costs are still attractive. I agree the project is needed, but I cannot prioritize it over loyal employees' jobs, safety and service to the public.

The best way to save taxpayers dollars is to not go in debt when you don't have to!
Is it reasonable to take on a \$13 million mortgage under our present circumstances?