Editorial: 86% Smarter Than Commissioners Rowland & Schlegel

By Robert Thomasson

Commissioners Robert Rowland and Kurt Schlegel are completely out of touch with the residents in Elbert County. The voters spoke with unmistakable clarity on Tuesday, November 5th, when they said “No” to ballot measure 1C (increase in the mill levy) by an overwhelming 84% to 16% margin. I knew it would go down in flames, my neighbors knew it was a non-starter, real Republicans knew it was doomed, and probably even my barn cat knew it was never going to get off the ground. Everybody knew it would be a loser except for the two commissioners who brought it to the ballot.

The first mistake made by Schlegel and Rowland was when they announced at a budgetary meeting that they wanted a mill levy increase without any earmarks or accountability. These Tea Party commissioners discussed not wanting to have their “hands tied,” when it came to spending the increased revenues. Larry Ross tried to tell them that increased revenues without accountability was not going to go over well, but as usual, they never listen to the District #3 Commissioner, and this instance was no different. I believe they do not listen because Larry Ross knows his constituents and considers their wishes. Since Schlegel and Rowland seem to go out of their way to disenfranchise the majority of rank and file Elbertonians, they always react negatively toward Ross’s concerns.

Next, the dynamic duo of Schlegel and Rowland decided that they wanted the mill levy increase so badly that they would throw money at their huge perception problem. The BOCC, including Ross, decided to enlist the help of Dr. Tim Buchanan, a local resident, whose resume includes professor of Behavioral Economics and Psychological Systems at Regis University, for $15,000 to educate the public on just how badly the county is doing with their finances. While Dr. Tim Buchanan has a sterling reputation of helping people reach savvy economic solutions, his expertise on such matters was no match for the growing discontent that voters are feeling toward Elbert County’s fiscal mismanagement and the policy decisions of Schlegel and Rowland. There were 1,273 votes for the increase. That comes to a total of $11.78 for every “Yes” vote cast. Many agree with me when I say that the $15,000 would have been better spent helping the Elbert County Assessor’s office get back on track so that it could actually collect revenue the way the State expects us to.

Here are a couple of questions that the recent election outcomes raise: The first query is that, if the election results reflected an accurate cross-sample of the voters in Elbert County, then it is reasonable to say that the lion’s share of the “No” votes came from Republicans. If they are not listening to their party, then who is? We know it is not the Democrats or Independents! Commissioners Rowland and Schlegel often assert that most of the phone calls they receive are from concerned citizens who are offering praise for a job well done or who are suggesting a path
to solvency. It is obvious that these unnamed persons have more clout than those of us in the 86% who want more fiscal accountability. Are these calls from well-to-do Elbert land owners? Are these calls coming from political ideologues? Are these callers real or imagined? We are never quite sure who or what is driving the Rowland/Schlegel agenda. The only thing of which we can be certain is that Elbert County is being driven by an anonymous and small minority of people.

OUR COUNTY IS OUT OF MONEY. The state is withholding what little money (currently $102K) in the form of taxes that is coming in because we have yet to produce an acceptable audit having missed both the State’s deadline and an extension. We have cut services to the public to the bare bones. We are paying out untold thousands of dollars in legal fees and settlements on lawsuits. All of this is occurring while spending at the Kiowa courthouse is skyrocketing on computer equipment, failed web services, and a fleet of leased vehicles amassed for public employees to drive back and forth to work.

At least 86% of Elbert County voters refused to give the BOCC any more money because they could not be certain it would improve the county’s prospects given their poor performance. When are the 86% going to demand that their elected officials be held accountable? When can we expect county services on a par with every other county in Colorado?