

To Repeal or Not to Repeal, That is the Taxing Question

In June of 1979 a significant change occurred in Murray City's government. That year, three months before I moved to the Commonwealth, the 12-member council passed an ordinance to elect members "At-Large" rather than by specific geographic Wards where they had been elected at the time, based on equal numbers of residents within those boundaries.

Melvin Henley, who would eventually become a Representative in the Kentucky House for the 5th District, was Murray's Mayor, elected in 1978 to a four-year term. Calloway County had almost 17,000 Democrats and just over 3,700 Republicans.

It's hard to remember why the council changed from electing representatives by Ward to an "At-Large" group but finding willing and capable candidates in all the districts was likely the reason. I was Murray's newest electronic journalist in the fall of 1979 at the local AM-FM radio station, a key source of news for many in those days. But I digress.

Apparently, there's not a problem attracting would be council persons in the At-Large world of Murray politics these days. 34, mostly enthusiastic, candidates (a few have dropped out from the original 36) have stepped forward to run in the May Primary Election scheduled next Tuesday May 22nd. The motivation for most candidates appears to be the newly enacted payroll tax and ultimately how to fund our city government without it.

To encourage accountability and dialogue, the Republican Party of Calloway County sent a letter to each candidate. A copy of it was published in this newspaper. In summary it said, "Starting at the beginning of this year, this payroll tax has imposed a disproportionate burden on the working men and women of this community, even though the city's infrastructure and services benefit all who live here. The next city council will need to decide whether it will repeal this new tax or continue to unfairly saddle its citizens with this tax by allowing it to remain. As a candidate for Murray's next city council, we believe the taxpayers and citizens of Murray deserve to know about your position on this issue. We request that you take a stand on this issue..."

The letter included a simple question, "Will you pledge to vote to repeal the payroll tax currently imposed on the working men and women of Murray if elected to the Murray City Council?" Over the course of several days just, over half of the candidates responded.

According to the response, it appears there are four groups that line up around the payroll tax issue. Group 1 candidates, aka, the original taxers. Group 2, candidates who are waiting to see, Group 3 candidates that did not respond, and, Group 4 candidates who pledged to repeal the payroll tax as the question was asked.

Group 1, the original 6, less one (Jason Pittman is not running) who along with current Mayor Jack Rose (who is not running) enacted a convoluted payroll tax system for those working within the city limits, has apparently doubled-down on making the tax permanent. Only one of the Group 1 candidates, Jane Shoemaker, responded saying she would "not pledge" to repeal the tax if elected. The other 4, were silent (Billington, Bohannon, Bolin, and Miller).

Group two includes candidates who wouldn't commit whether they support the payroll tax or would repeal it, a kind of wait and see response. This is made up of 5 members. (McCuiston, Rouse, Seiber, Strieter, and Wright)

Group three candidates did not respond to the letter. This group is made up of 12 individuals. (Spann, Evans, Knight, Elder, Chapman, Gish, Garland, Hill, Tetrev, Gorham, Hudspeth, and Murnane.)

Group four, made up of a dozen candidates, have pledged they will vote to repeal the payroll tax. That group includes: JOHN MARK ROBERTS, JEREMY BELL, LINDA CHERRY, BURTON YOUNG, PAT SCOTT, RON GLADDEN, SUE HOOD, BARBARA COBB, DONNIE WINCHESTER, MICHAEL SHAYNE MORRIS, JANE BRANDON, and ROBERT BARKER.

In a spirit of fairness to those candidates in group two who wouldn't commit one way or the other and made several comments in their response, the Republican Party decided to provide a link, so the public can see their complete unedited comments at the Party's website, www.callowayrepublicans.org.

Less than one week from today is your chance, if you reside in the city, to go to the polls and let your voice be heard.