

Special Cook County Board Meeting, Oct. 1, 2007

The meeting, scheduled for 9:00 AM, started at 9:35 AM. After the usual preliminary functions, the board recesses to allow the Finance Committee to hold a public hearing on the Commissioner Murphy's proposed ordinance to raise the Cook County Sales Tax to 2.75% (the current count sales tax is 0.75%).

The first speaker was Ralph Marterie, the executive director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. He reviewed the board's current dilemma of continuing an increase in expenditures without an equal rise in revenues. He pointed out that health care costs are a major part of the problem but he stressed that health care expenditures cannot be lowered because of the need to extend adequate health care to all citizens. He pointed out the avoidance of duplicity, elimination of waste, and improved billing practices would go a long way toward balancing the health care budget.

Some of the facts that he brought out are:

- 1) the county is currently operating on a budget that will end the year with a \$288 million dollar deficit
- 2) two-thirds of the services have a 2.6 % annual increase
- 3) changes in the federal medicare law will result in lower revenues (\$68 million this year)
- 4) 47% of Cook County patients are not covered by any health insurance plan
- 5) Cook County has one of the highest county sales tax rates in the US
- 6) There is an urgent need for the Cook County commissioners to reform the structure of Cook County Government and to reform the entire process of generating revenue.

When asked by one commissioner if he had any recommendations for eliminating waste and revising the revenue structure, Mr, Marterie stated that he could not make any recommendations because he was not given access to the information that he would need for that aspect of the study. There was encouragement by some board members for Mr. Marterie to continue the close alliance with the county and to continue his studies of Cook County Board procedures and practices.

A full report of Mr. Marterie's study was distributed to all board members and is available to the general public. [ed note: log on to www.ctbaonline.org for more information]

Some commissioner comments about Mr.Marterie's presentation:

- Collins—the problem is the immigrants who take away jobs and are a burden on our health care system
- Murphy—agrees with Mr. Marterie
- Moreno—can't cut health services-he agrees with Mr. Marterie
- Peraica—"looks like you were given a goal and then proceeded to justify it"- Mr. Marterie was working with incomplete information –most of the deficit is coming from the Bureau of Health
- Suffredin—wanted to know the status of retail tax bill that was introduced in the Illinois Senate by Cullerton

- Sylvestri—wanted to know how a 2% sales tax increase would impact the economy—“don’t rely on the state or federal government for support or help” (At this time Mr. Marterie made a comment about the need for a ‘transparent’ budget to insure proper oversight)
- Sims—“we should go after the delinquent hospital billings”
- Gorman—inquired about how can the system be altered (Mr. Marterie said that you can’t wait for the state to address the tax base problem. You need an advisory committee to agree on methodology and then make a study of revenues and expenses)
- Goslin –the tax cap law doesn’t keep abreast with cost growth- there are structural deficiencies in Cook County governance
- Butler—“if we had addressed this problem 4 years ago, we would not have this problem today”- the Board of health should be separated from the Cook County Board
- Schneider—“have you studied how to reduce inefficiencies and to streamline the cook county government?” (Mr. Marterie’s answer—“No, because we have not received the proper data to make the study”)
- Maldonado—47% of patients uninsured-some could qualify for Medicare

There followed public testimony by persons representing a number of unions, health care organizations, civic and business organizations, pastors, and community organizations. There were a number of individuals who spoke about how they were helped by Some Cook County health service. While the purpose of this public meeting was to discuss the proposed Sales Tax increase, a large number of speakers concentrated on the need to maintain or increase the health services provided by the county.

After a 15 minute recess (which lasted 35 minutes), the board voted to defer any action on the Murphy proposed ordinance to raise the county sales tax by 2% until the October 10 meeting. This was followed by commissioner Daley chastising the members of the board for being part of the problem and not aggressively pursuing a solution.

As in most board meetings there were outbursts of indignation and politics between the commissioners. Today it was Peraica vs. Daley, Peraica vs, Butler and Butler vs. Daley.

On a Peraica sponsored resolution to place a moratorium on passing any new tax laws in 2008, the board voted it down (11 nay, 6 yea).

It was a long meeting.

Bob Klonowski