

August 2013

THERE IS NO POT OF GOLD AT THE END OF THIS RAINBOW

Guthrie and all of Logan County are in the midst of growth from a population and residential building boom. Representative Jason Murphey recently opined an article where he discussed the growth of revenue that school districts will see from collection of ad valorem taxes. This revenue growth is spurred by residential growth through new construction which is ongoing across Logan County.

According to Rep. Murphey's article, "Deer Creek, Guthrie and Edmond school districts are set to receive combined new growth revenues of over a million dollars from Logan County growth alone." To read the statement, I'm sure many of the patrons of the Guthrie school district assume we will receive enough funds to build fancy new buildings and purchase state of the art technology for our classrooms with the huge infusion of cash. Currently, we purchase the computers used in our classrooms from Edmond Public Schools when they have deemed them obsolete. What the article fails to mention is that through the current funding formula employed by Oklahoma, all school districts receive the same amount of funding per student regardless of where the funds come from. In other words, we will receive this money from your property taxes but additional funding we receive from the state is reduced by the same amount. There is no pot of gold at the end of the rainbow Rep. Murphey writes about.

Schools in this state are currently funded at a level per student that is lower than they were in 2008. It is well documented that Oklahoma has a long-standing history of funding education well below most of the United States. Consequently, many Oklahoma communities (either school districts or municipalities), have chosen through the years to tax themselves for large capital improvements for schools, public infrastructure needs or various other quality of life necessities. I propose the definition of "necessity" is specific to a community based on the values of its people. That process is often through bond issues where the needs are specific and listed on the ballot so the voters may decide their value. In Oklahoma, school bond elections are some of the most restrictive in the U.S. A 60% super-majority of the voters within a school district is required of an issue in order to pass. Rep. Murphey states, "when the debt is issued, the district is suddenly empowered with a rapid cash flow of other peoples' money." I assume the other people he is referring to are the voters who chose to vote yes on the bond issue and made the conscious decision to support education within the community by branding it a necessity. My thoughts are, "if education isn't a necessity in your community, then why not."

The Murphey article also mentions, "this has led to extremely questionable spending practices." State law requires any bond issue to complete the project proposed when the voters cast their ballots or that money must be returned to the citizens. He promises "more on that later" and I can only assume he is planning to offer evidence of such from a school district other than Guthrie. School finance is a complex issue that is nearly impossible to simplify within an article of this size so that it may be easily understood.

The quotes prove it is easier to cast doubt through bits and pieces of information than to have a rich understanding of the truth.

As for me, I'm hoping in the near future, the patrons of Guthrie Public Schools will not be fazed by the "red herrings" of a few and firmly make the statement that education in this community is a necessity. For the immediate future of GPS, despite the good news Representative Murphey brought us, we will continue to patch our outdated buildings and use outdated computers that have been purchased from Edmond Public Schools.