

Election Advice For Those Not Paying Attention

Here's my biannual election advice for right-thinking (and usually left-leaning) voters. I originally wrote a long column containing persuasive reasons to vote for the local option sales tax (as well as a new courthouse annex) this Election Day, but it's preaching to the choir for most People Paying Attention.

Unfortunately, it seems that many elections are decided by People Not Paying Attention. I'll give them credit for making the effort to get out and vote, but once they have made their mark next to the one candidate or issue that is important to them – what the hell – they may as well vote on the other stuff on the ballot whether they know much about it or not.

The trouble with unsexy issues like courthouse annexes and local option sales taxes is that you really need reasons to vote for them; the default knee-jerk response is NO, I don't want my taxes raised. If you're Not Paying Attention, you don't have those reasons.

Take it from me, these things need to pass. It's no accident that most (if not all) of our local newspapers and public officials agree on this. They are Paying Attention.

No, the world won't end if Johnson County fails to become the 98th county in Iowa to adopt a local option sales tax. But if you were Paying Attention, you'd know that last year the Iowa Legislature made significant property tax changes dubbed "the largest tax cut in Iowa history."

Due to these changes, Johnson County will lose about \$650,000 in year one and Iowa City will lose about \$1.5 million. The state of Iowa is expected to backfill some of this shortfall, but nobody knows how much or for how long. Soooo...we either lose some city services and employees, or find another tax source, or both. Pass the sales tax; it's not as regressive as most people think, and we may as well let all of our county's visitors in on the fun.

I know, some of you Actually Paying Attention on both the farther left and right are voting against this measure for unrelated but principled reasons; more power

to you. I hope you lose. Be wary of anyone trashing this proposal without offering a viable alternative of their own.

No, the world won't end if Johnson County doesn't build a courthouse annex. What do I care? I can't remember the last time I saw the inside of the courthouse. Even though the proposal doesn't include a badly-needed new jail (don't get me started), it needs to finally pass.

Yes, there are still some goodhearted folks out there who refuse to endorse any upgrades until our county's justice system matches their fantasy world. Let's give credit for having made great strides, agree we have much further to go and vote for the long-overdue infrastructure to support what can reasonably be expected.

Some of the sentiment during the last courthouse/jail election was to the effect of "We don't need to be building the Taj Mahal of courthouses. True, but we don't want to be operating out of a giant Quonset Hut, either. Look at the price tags attached to other major capital projects currently under construction – they make \$33.4 million actually seem reasonable.

A couple of brief comments on the Loeb sack/Miller-Meeks and Braley/Ernst battles. First, wildly inaccurate attack ads seem to work best on People Not Paying Attention. If you find yourself forming opinions based on them, shame on you.

Second, I'd dearly love to abandon Mississippi as the only other state never to have elected a female congressperson or governor. But is it too much to ask that she at least be a Democrat?

Finally, feel free to vote for John Etheredge for Supervisor if you are so inclined. He's not getting my vote because there are also two well-qualified Democrats running, but he's not bad. For a Republican.

Writer's Group member Dave Parsons isn't running for anything because his hands are full straightening out used paper clips at the business he co-owns on the Coralville Strip.