

## **"Isn't this our top priority?" Stephen Rose - Memo – July 30, 2008**

What is the No. 1 priority of the federal government? To provide for national defense.

What is the No. 1 priority of state government? To provide for public education, K-12 and higher education.

What is the No. 1 priority of local government? To provide for public safety.

So, with that in mind, I cannot figure out why anyone would do anything but vote for a renewal of a quarter-cent sales tax that raises funds to keep us safe.

Yet, there is always opposition to any tax. So, who has the better arguments, the supporters or opponents?

You be the judge.

Here, simply, is what the county is asking for and why:

1. Operational funds to run our expanding jail. The inmate population is soaring as our population soars. Not only that, but tough sentencing for crimes like DUIs, domestic violence, and sexual predator crimes is putting more offenders behind bars, and for longer periods.
2. A desperately needed crime lab expansion. Our existing crime lab is a joke. It was built over three decades ago, before clues like DNA nailed criminals. The tiny little space for a population of a half million, crammed with outdated technologies, makes prosecution more difficult. We must have this.
3. Expanded facilities for juvenile detention. This shouldn't even require an explanation. We have far more juveniles, and we have more juvenile crimes. The current facilities are woefully inadequate.

This seems like a no-brainer for anyone interested in public safety.

But there are misguided opponents out there, and here is what they have to say:

1. A third of the money goes to cities.

Cities are the units of government least likely to squander money. Besides, Overland Park alone is facing massive budget cuts, due to lower tax revenues. Opponents of this tax supported the same tax dedicated for schools when a third of the money also went to cities, as mandated by law. This is hypocritical.

2. The tax has no sunset.

This is a knuckleheaded argument. How in the world do you say stop to a tax that pays for the ongoing housing of prisoners? Do we just decide one day to end the tax and let them all loose?

3. House the prisoners elsewhere.

Where? We are already sending our deputies all over eastern Kansas, putting prisoners in jails hundreds of miles away. Does anyone think that makes any long-term sense?

4. Defeat the tax and find the money elsewhere.

It takes \$20 million a year to operate the jail. You don't find that kind of money by cutting other services. It is a 100 percent guarantee that property taxes will be raised if the sales tax fails.

The arguments against this proposal are lame. This tax not only should win. It should win in a landslide.