

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. My name is Mark Miller.

I'm here tonight to ask you to vote No on issue twenty-seven, the jail tax. Remember those numbers, two and seven, because they are what this issue is all about. Two stands for 200 million dollars. That's how much a new jail costs. Seven stands for 700 million dollars. That's how much they raised your taxes. The difference is a half a billion dollars. County Commissioners aren't exactly sure what they're going to spend it on yet, but they assure us they can figure that out after they get the money.

Ladies and gentlemen, you should vote No on issue two-seven because we don't need the jail and we can't afford the tax.

We don't need the jail because crime is down across the board in both the city and the county. The Enquirer said so, so did the Cincinnati Police Department, and the FBI. Population is also down, and so are tax revenues.

The only thing that's up is the amount of time people who have been arrested wait around to get their day in court. The Vera Institute for Justice are experts in jail operations. They did a study on our jail situation. They found that back in 1999 only 34% of jail bed-days were for people awaiting trial. The rest were people serving their sentences. By 2004, that number had risen to 81%.

That means four out of five people sitting in jail aren't there for punishment at all. They're waiting for the court system to get its act together. This tells me we don't necessarily have a jail space problem; we have a management problem in the criminal justice system. Get that 81% back down to 34% where it belongs, and there is no problem. Most arrestees bond out anyway. Something as simple as adding a night court would allow them to do that quickly, without clogging up the jail. The real problem is not lack of space. Jail operations have simply gotten out of hand.

Really, how do we rationalize a radical expansion of the jail when crime and population are both dropping? It doesn't make any sense. They need to clean up their operations, not build a bigger jail.

You should also vote No on issue two-seven because we can't afford the 700 million dollar tax.

Only 2 taxes are applied at the county level, property tax and sales tax. There are 88 counties in Ohio, and only one has higher property taxes than we do. Since the jail tax was enacted only one has a higher sales tax than we do. Therefore, we are pretty well maxed out on taxation. Also, every county around us has a lower sales tax; including Indiana and Kentucky. That means 86 other Ohio counties are getting the job done without a "crisis", without this sort of tax, and they are doing it for a lot less money than we are.

Just like a credit card that has reached its limit, being maxed-out on taxes is a very uncomfortable position to be in. Any new need or unplanned expense requires that we first cut something we were counting on, and then reorganize the whole budget. And that's exactly the position we find ourselves in. The county is projecting a 30 million dollar deficit and is planning to lay off workers. "Levy fatigue" is being cited by schools and social service agencies who are forced to cut programs rather than ask for the funds they need.

Our County Commission is bleeding every last drop of tax revenue out of the system before trying to solve the problem another way. School, mental health, and other levies will suffer for their short-sightedness. But it's the taxpayers who will bear the long term burden as higher income residents continue to move out, and Hamilton County businesses become less competitive.

The Cincinnati Business Courier says Ohio has the fifth worst tax climate in the USA for businesses. This is an improvement from second worst last year. I've already told you Hamilton County has the second highest taxes within the state. So this puts us near the very bottom of the nation in competitiveness. Why would new businesses want to locate here? How are we supposed to find jobs when they don't?

Look across the county line in any direction and you will find a growing, vibrant community. Meanwhile, Hamilton County has declining tax revenues, crumbling roads and sewers, an insatiable appetite for more spending, and residents are fleeing to Fairfield, West Chester, Batavia, Milford, Lawrenceburg, and Covington.

Think about it. Businesses and residents are both leaving. Who's going to stick around to pay that seven hundred million dollar tax that we need to keep the jail going? We need to vote No on issue two-seven. It's stupid to spend seven hundred million dollars to solve a two hundred million dollar problem. And experts say jail space is not the real problem.

This jail tax is nearly as expensive as the stadium deal. And for what? It won't solve the crime problem. It'll probably just make racial tensions worse. Either way it hinders the competitiveness of Hamilton County businesses, making it harder to keep jobs here. Their plan erodes our tax base, threatening all those who depend on public services.

You wouldn't waste seven hundred dollars on a television that you could get for two hundred bucks, would you? You wouldn't spend seven hundred thousand bucks on a two hundred thousand dollar house. So when you go to the polls, **tell them No**; you're not going to spend seven hundred million dollars on a two hundred million dollar jail.

Issue two-seven. Two hundred million dollar jail, seven hundred million dollar tax. It's too expensive, and we don't need it anyway. Vote No on issue two-seven.