

More Governments Gone Wild

Written by Kathleen McCarthy
Wednesday, 23 November 2011 06:24

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[This issue's article on the Scott Emergency Communications Center \(SECC\)](#) further illustrates government overreach run amok, beginning with our state legislators. State law (Iowa Code 28E) enabled the creation of the Scott Emergency Communications Center, an intergovernmental agency composed of five separate entities: the Scott County Emergency Management Agency, Scott County, the cities of Davenport and Bettendorf, and Medic EMS. Funding SECC is enabled through more state legislation (Iowa Code 29C) that provided for an unelected board as a brand-new taxing authority, with no limit on how much it may levy. And, as the details emerge, SECC gets to operate with no oversight whatsoever.

Let us never forget that the SECC was sold to Scott County taxpayers as a 7,800-square-foot building to consolidate emergency dispatching and enhance 911 service, saving taxpayers money along the way. The Bettendorf City Council barely passed the measure to join this scheme, approving it 4-3 in December 2007. The intergovernmental agreement that formalized this financial boondoggle specifically dictates that all decisions shall be guided by the 2006 CTA Communications consolidation study. So how did CTA's 7,800 square feet balloon into 27,000 square feet by February 2009?

The dismissal by SECC Director Brian Hitchcock and Scott County Administrator Dee Bruemmer of the very study that is to guide their decision-making, as the intergovernmental agreement dictates, stands as testimony that citizens need to be very concerned, and extremely vigilant. Such dismissal suggests that there was never any real intention to follow CTA's recommendations to begin with. This is further evidenced by Hitchcock's claim of good stewardship by reducing the original architectural design from a 36,000-square-foot facility to 27,000 square feet.

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And your elected so-called representatives happily escalated the building costs from \$2.34 million to \$7.31 million, citing “preparing for future growth” as justification. A 200-percent increase in building size and costs alone for a county with only 5-percent population growth in the past decade is government gone wild.

To add insult to injury, the normal protections from overspending by local government were avoided altogether by Scott County colluding with the City of Davenport, which agreed to bond for SECC building and equipment costs of \$10 million, avoiding a referendum that would have otherwise been triggered for such a large county expenditure. By transferring the \$10-million bonding to Davenport, the SECC project eluded initial public approval, never mind any future oversight and accountability.

During an open-house tour of the new SECC, staff was asked what the goal was for improving 911 call-response times. The answer was 20 seconds faster, despite our region already beating the national average in response times. Now taxpayers are on the hook for what will likely be at least \$152 million in SECC spending over 21 years for a potential 20-second gain.

Granted, seconds can save lives. But the potential benefits are negligible when compared to the amount of increased debt and tax burdens residents must now shoulder. Taxes are currently up as much as 90 cents for rural residents, but no less than 65 cents per \$1,000 in residential home valuation in Scott County. And that’s just in year two.

It is even more maddening knowing that the current elected bodies are absolutely clueless about the consequences of their complete lack of stewardship in allowing entrenched bureaucrats and staff to run the entire show. These folks have dropped the ball so severely that nothing less than an entirely new Board of Supervisors will suffice, along with an overhaul of the city councils and state legislators – all of whom must possess the capacity for comprehending and governing the business of these political subdivisions. This go-along-to-get-along mentality of the majority of our elected leaders, encouraged and nurtured by the two-party political system, has got to stop if we the people have a prayer of asserting any level of accountability.

Repealing the SECC’s no-cap tax should be the next order of business. There is no reason that this facility should not have to justify its budget, and seek approval, just like every other government entity. As it stands now, regardless of property values, economic conditions, or

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individual taxpayers' ability to pay, Scott County residents are financially obligated for the perpetual funding of this monstrosity. Each time a budget is submitted, the intergovernmental agreement states that the county "shall approve a countywide special levy ... to fund said budget." This means no adjustments, let alone declining it altogether because its expenditures are not justifiable to anyone but those bureaucrats benefiting from them.

Case in point is the new budget approved just last week by the SECC board, which provides for a newly created \$66,000 position, and a 1.5-percent salary increase for all employees. While the rest of the country is struggling, this special class of workers benefits because a no-cap tax gives this new bureaucracy an unlimited source of funding!

Iowa Code 28E also suspends certain constitutional protections, including arrests without warrants or due process, and seizures of private property – all under the claim of an "emergency." There is no such thing as a local, state, or national emergency so dire that it need suspend the Bill of Rights.

Yet nationwide, municipal police departments are being armed with military-grade weaponry, non-lethal crowd-control technology, armored personnel carriers, and more. This use of military force on domestic soil against American citizens is specifically prohibited under the U.S. Constitution and state constitutions, including those of Iowa and Illinois. But who is stopping this proliferation on domestic soil? Certainly not we the people. And if not we the people, then who, pray tell?

The problem is not confined to Scott County. This ceding of authority to regional entities is a phenomenon that is occurring across the country. Huge government facilities are being constructed all along the nation's major transportation routes, some posing as regional emergency-management centers like ours. My fear is these facilities are, or will become, federal fusion centers, under the purview of the Department of Homeland Security. Meanwhile, the financial responsibility for the construction and operation of these federally controlled fusion centers is coming from the respective county and municipal taxpayers.

In other words, the lion's share of these federal facilities, including the covert programming being executed within, is being paid for by local taxpayers, who have no access, let alone oversight of any kind – not even through elected leaders. This is unprecedented. And under these conditions, those operating these facilities are unaccountable to the American people. The line has been drawn, folks. It's time to get off the couch. Mark my words: Soon some kind

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of state/federal partnership with SECC will be announced, and the county will laud it as an offset to the expenditures we are now incurring.

The quid pro quo for local bureaucrats' and elected leaders' cooperation is the promise of future funding via federal grants – monies local taxpayers have no control over, but which ultimately obligate us in other ways without our consent, usually restricting the use of our own private property. I hope I am wrong but fear I am not.

But it is even more foul than you know. Most of the legislation these days – federal, state, and now local – is a complete departure from the rule of law as originally established by our founders. We are mostly adjudicated under administrative procedure, which is pure rule-making and has virtually no adherence to the foundational law of the land – the state and U.S. constitutions, including the Bill of Rights. You must revisit these documents to fully understand how far off the reservation we've gone. Man- or woman-up, or never complain again. If you can't civically participate, then by your inaction you give a green light to governments gone wild, whether local, state, or federal.