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Council begrudgingly gives support to TIME

Posted: Tuesday, Aug 5th, 2008

BY: Lee Pulaski – Lake Powell Chronicle

PAGE — The City Council is lending its support to a transportation initiative on the November ballot, even though council members expressed sentiments to the contrary at a special meeting last Wednesday.

Mayor William Justice asked the council for its input regarding whether the TIME (Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy) initiative should receive his endorsement. Justice received a letter dated July 20 from Gov. Janet Napolitano, as did Vice Mayor John Cook, who was absent from the meeting. Justice said Cook sent his in already, indicating his support.

In Napolitano's letter, the governor urges elected officials to join her in supporting the initiative, which would add another cent to the state sales tax. It would bring the state tax to 6.6 percent if the initiative passes and bump Page's sales tax to 10.725 percent.

Napolitano described the initiative as "a long term vision that will reduce congestion, ensure Arizona's economic vitality, offer a variety of modern transportation choices, provide thousands of new high paying jobs and preserve our spectacular open spaces. And with the rising price of gasoline, transportation alternatives are becoming all the more critical."

Justice said he had mixed emotions about the initiative.

"I do support it because I don't think anything else is going to happen to fix our roads. That's a sad thing to say because I think our Legislature should do something

to fix the problem, but they haven't been noted for doing that," he said.

Councilor Len Cook said he was not in favor of anything that raised taxes.

"We've got to start living within our funding that we have, find a way to make that funding go further without waste," he said.

The councilor added that initiatives like TIME require thousands of taxpayer dollars spent on hors d'oeuvres and other wooing techniques to convince elected officials and voters to approve the measures. He said the money could be put to better use.

"If this is a 'Let's increase taxes so we can fix our roads,' I say 'no.' Let's stop wasting money and fix our roads," Len Cook said.

He also questioned whether Page would see any kind of benefit from the tax. As an example, he pointed to Coconino County's parks and recreation sales tax, which Page residents are charged for but see nothing in return.

"I lost a \$25,000 sale today because our sales tax is so high," Len Cook said. "I'm not in favor of raising taxes, period."

Councilor John Kocjan said he agreed with what Len Cook was saying, but after seeing the budget for the Arizona Department of Transportation, he was concerned that officials might not get to any of its long-term projects without the funding.

Councilor Lyle Dimbatt also stated he was not keen on raising the sales tax, but it might be the lesser of the evils the Arizona Legislature is debating. He noted that some legislators are eyeing cuts to state-shared revenue, which helps keep small communities like Page going, as well as grant funds, which Page also depends on.

Dimbatt said there is even talk of increasing the gasoline tax, which is already 18 cents per gallon. The suggestions he mentioned do not require voter approval, he said, so the Legislature could implement them, and the people would have no say.

"I hope it doesn't come from state-shared revenue, because a community our size, we get sales tax, land sales and grant funding. That's about the extent of the revenue that comes to our community," Dimbatt said.

