

OUR OPINION

Toxic effects of SDS fiasco continue to linger

After three years and more than a million dollars in lost opportunity, Rabun County taxpayers at last received some welcome relief last week from the political malpractice that spawned the Service Delivery Strategy fiasco.

As predicted in the space for nearly a year, it took a senior judge in the Georgia judicial system to accomplish what local politicians simply could not bring themselves to do: put the taxpayers above petty politics and the good of the entire community above divisive tactics masquerading as thoughtful statesmanship.

Judge Albert B. Collier recently ruled that the taxpayers of Rabun County have been punished enough for the misguided turf wars that foolishly squandered time and treasure that can never be recovered.

Judge Collier told the Georgia Department of Community Affairs to lift sanctions on Rabun County that resulted from the inability of county and municipal elected officials to reach an SDS agreement.

To encourage cooperation among the many fiefdoms that represent taxpayers in any given community, laws were written that offer what was believed to be the strongest possible incentive to come to the bargaining table. Failure to reach an SDS agreement means local government entities lose the right to receive state financial assistance, grants, loans or permits.

And it worked, mostly. Only a handful of Georgia counties failed to reach compromise on their differences and hammer out a workable SDS strategy.

Judge Collier said, in essence, that Rabun County will have an SDS agreement one way or the other in the near future. He correctly ruled there is no need to wait until the ink is dry on the pending agreement before local entities can again seek state funds to help strengthen our community.

As far as an SDS goes, all that remains is to draw sharp lines on areas of responsibility and put the agreement in place. Whether the finished product will please everyone is highly doubtful, but it will put this sorry chapter in Rabun history behind us.

Unfortunately, the toxic effects of the battle will continue to linger.

Next month, Rabun residents will be asked to approve a new Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST), a one-cent tax earmarked for local improvements.

We urge that voters approve this SPLOST, and will make our case in coming weeks as to why we believe that passage of the SPLOST is in the best interest of the taxpayers of Rabun County.

But there are many who, because of the SDS experience, simply don't trust local elected officials and question their competence in handling the SPLOST funds.

While we don't agree with that point of view, we respect that it's a heart-felt, genuine reaction to three years of turf protecting and legal shenanigans.

In politics as in life, you generally reap what you sow.

We hope and encourage voters to support the SPLOST initiative, and then keep a sharp eye on the money.

It's the right thing to do for the good of Rabun County.

If you want to punish the politicians who captained the ship during the SDS fiasco, vote them out of office at the first opportunity.

YOUR OPINION

Voters should send a message with SPLOST

On March 19th Rabun County voters will be asked to extend the current SPLOST for local governments.

Certainly, this is a marked improvement over the last one (that we are currently on) that managed to disenfranchise our county seat of Clayton from one penny of revenues.

For a tourism heavy county like ours, SPLOST taxes are generally a good thing because it is a way for all of our visitors to help pay for local infrastructure. Because of this I generally support SPLOST as a fair and just way to fund local needs. Unfortunately, I must vote No on this upcoming proposal.

After four years some of our municipal governments are

still feuding with the county over the SDS (Service Delivery Strategy) which denies all local governments the opportunity to receive grants from the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

It is not enough to simply say some of the funds will be for road repaving and improvements ... which roads? How do you measure success at the end of the current SPLOST to see if promises were kept?

What I do see is the county operating in an arbitrary and capricious fashion. Deciding to move the Visitors Center without even talking to the Chamber Director, Tony Allred, which operates the center. Was this done because he dared to challenge Commissioner Will Nichols four years ago?

What about the wasteful

\$200,000 Coroners building newly built just outside the Clayton city limits with the intent to antagonize the city over who gets the honor of treating the wastewater whenever the toilet gets flushed?

Our SPLOST cannot become County Administrator Darren Giles's slush fund for waging war with the city of Clayton and until this damn SDS matter finally gets resolved the only real pressure we a voters can exert is to apply as much pressure to all of our local elected officials, and their full time hired administrators to force their hand. When SDS is resolved, sure, I will gladly vote for a SPLOST that spells out clearly articulated projects for the coming years.

Ed Henderson

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LETTERS

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Resolve SDS, then consider SPLOST

It is no secret to informed Rabun County citizens that our local political leaders have served us poorly in recent years. This is particularly true of the majorities in both the Rabun County Commission and the Clayton City Council. Their inability to compromise with each other is responsible for the now more than three-year stalemate over a Service Delivery Strategy (SDS). This stalemate has cost the county well over a million dollars in state funds and hundreds of thousands of dollars in attorney, consultant and court fees.

On March 19 (early voting begins three weeks earlier), the Rabun County commissioners will ask us, the citizens, to vote "yes" on the new SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax). Does it make sense that we citizens approve this additional sales tax when our leaders have failed us in bringing Rabun millions of dollars in state money via the SDS?

We need our elected officials to resolve the SDS before we sign off on providing them with millions of dollars more of our money through a new SPLOST tax.

Carolee Williams

SPLOST will benefit local taxpayers

The opportunity to vote for SPLOST is nearly here. The beauty of this fundraiser is the residents of Clayton nor Rabun County have to

pay increased property taxes to fund needed projects due to the tourism business that many have worked diligently to create. Every purchase made by a non-resident contributes to our financial health. Clayton desperately needs this SPLOST money to fund our Downtown Infrastructure Project. We anticipate replacing aged water/sewer lines, burying power and communications lines and walking on sidewalks which we can all be happy with!

Clayton held and slightly reduced city taxes this year, as we value our precious quality of life and cost of living. However we have many needs for equipment to replace what is old and worn out as well as more new water/sewer pipes, meters and pumps. Our Public Works Director is proving himself committed to the long overdue updating of our system. With SPLOST, Clayton will be able to meet the Heart of Rabun's past due and pent-up needs! We have suffered for six years without SPLOST, and are very excited for the future of downtown.

With gratitude, Rabun County and Clayton have obtained mercy due to the hard work and diligence of some elected officials and the court has Granted Relief from the 2015 imposed Sanctions when the SDS agreement was not updated. Recently an ad was noted in the newspaper questioning the need for SPLOST. Without SPLOST for a second time, Clayton's property taxes will likely be forced to increase as many needs in the city simply cannot continue to wait and certainly, the county would increase theirs again as they did in 2018.

Clayton and Rabun County are blessed to have extremely smart and savvy citizens from

rich and varied backgrounds with immense knowledge and experience who can really make a positive impact on our community. Though it'd be wonderful to announce SDS was totally resolved, we are still working on it and are now under judicial supervision so it will get done, but the mercy given of being without sanctions is relief to receive much needed money. So to anyone aware of specific grants thought lost - Please, roll up your sleeves, help us, and let's get the applications submitted - thank you!

Elizabeth S. Chapman
CLAYTON CITY COUNCIL

Vote 'no' on upcoming SPLOST

How do we know our county government has too much money?

One clue was when they built an unnecessary \$200,000 coroner's office.

A second clue is when they installed sewage lines from the coroner's office to the sewage plant without having an agreement with the owner of the sewage plant concerning the hookup. Oops! But what do they care, it's not their money!

A third clue was when the county bought that former model house at Seed Tick Rd and announced that it will house the Chamber of Commerce Welcome

Center, the Tourism Development Authority and the Development Authority. Now, that may be a wonderful idea, but the problem is the county has so much money that they bought this building without bothering to check with those organizations and some of them (they all have independent boards) do not want to move. Oops! Too much money to care. It sits empty. It's your money!

A fourth clue is when the county builds a structure and claims it is a "farmer's market." There already is a real Farmer's Market and it's on the main highway. The county's is hidden behind the Civic Center. I call it "Stonehenge in the Floodplain". And a year after it is opened there are still no bathrooms near it. Perhaps they have so much money they never even bothered to check to see if they can build restrooms in a flood plain! Oops! It's not their money...it's ours.

Fifth clue - SDS failure. Millions of dollars lost. County ignores it. So what can a citizen do? Rabun County just raised your property taxes by over 11 percent. Did you hear me? I said 11 percent.

But we do have an upcoming SPLOST to vote on. You should vote "NO." In addition to reducing the amount of money Rabun County has to waste, you would be reclaiming one percent on every-

thing you buy in the county. Pretty nice. And do not listen to the old, tired justification for SPLOST - "Tourists pay (60 percent, 70 percent, 75 percent, you choose) of SPLOST." Check the license plates at Ingles, at Wal-Mart, in downtown Clayton, in Dillard. Over 50 percent are from Rabun County. We pay the SPLOST! Claw back your 1 percent! Vote NO on SPLOST.

Pete Cleveland
TIGER

Dr. Hatcher spot on with his remarks

As always, the message in a recent column by Dr. Hatcher is spot on. Many aren't aware that the greatest accomplishment of the last century in improving health was the creation of vaccines. In fact, most experts estimate that more lives have been saved through prevention of communicable diseases than any other single medical advance. Sadly, we now see a misguided group of anti-vaxxers that has compromised even our herd immunity and the cost in human life may continue without at least 95 percent of the population immunized.

As Dr. Hatcher mentions, our current Public

Reeves BRIDAL REGISTRY

Brittany Donahue & Burton Law

March 23, 2019

Katie Reece & Jeff Lovell

April 13, 2019

ELIMO

Live at the
Colonial Theatre
Canton, NC

7PM
FEB. 15



**Our leaders¹ failed to agree on a
Service Delivery Strategy.**

That has cost us:

- Millions in state funding and grants
- Tens of thousands in lawyers, court fees and consultants

**Should we vote to approve additional funding
for capital projects through a Special Purpose
Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST²)?**



**Rabun County Coalition
For Good Government**

**Learn more. Visit rcc4gg.com
email: rabungoodgov@gmail.com**

¹ Rabun County Board of County Commissioners and the Clayton City Council

² SPLOST is up for voter renewal in March 2019