

Dear Editor:

My deep appreciation to Steve Sowers for discussing my platform in his column Monday. There is little room for details on a door hanger or quarter-page newspaper ad, but many of Steve's questions were answered in my response to the RDN questionnaire, printed Feb.18.

* Steve is correct that the mayor does not control RMU. He is also correct that the mayor appoints the board, which does control RMU. This gives the mayor a great deal of leverage. One member of the RMU board has told me he agrees that the service availability fee falls hardest on senior citizens and people living on a fixed income, and would not be against abolishing that fee if the shortfall could be made up in other ways. I believe it can. Another board member has told me that he favors limiting the amount of money transferred to the city general fund. I think if the mayor makes controlling utility bills a priority, it will happen.

* I'm glad that Steve agrees with me that prudence in local governance is desirable. An example of a tax giveaway is the \$10 million TIF subsidy that the city voted to give to a wealthy St. Louis developer. An example of city hall fat that should be trimmed is the multi-million dollar city hall renovation at a time when the city tries to sell off dedicated parkland and charge our children to use city parks. This money could have paid for a new fire station with a potential savings of lives and property.

* If Steve thinks people trust city hall, I challenge him to come with me and talk to people as I walk the campaign trail. I hear complaints all the time: TIF, lack of neighborhood parks, inability to enforce building codes uniformly, skyrocketing utility bills, and many others. And yes, some of the comments I hear are quite personal.

* Here are a few common questions I hear while campaigning:

Can't they do TIF without eminent domain? No, state law combines the two inextricably.

What is a service availability fee? The \$16 per month fee you pay RMU to make electricity and water services available to you. You pay it no matter how much or little you use.

Isn't Buehler Park already sold? No, an option contract is not a sale. The question of whether Buehler Park can legally be sold is before the courts right now.

Clearly, there is a problem with communications and open government when people ask me these questions over and over again. Rolla Daily News editors, Janese Heavin and Martin Schwartz have done a lot to turn this around, but city government needs to do its part too.

I also thank Buz Harvey for quoting my testimony on the placement of nerve toxins at Fort Leonard Wood. To add to what Buz has already said, I suggested many years ago that most of the chemical school training could be done safely at Ft. Wood, but the training that involves live nerve toxins should be placed at Dugway Proving Grounds or some other installation as far as possible from human habitation. These toxins are among the most dangerous known to man. Less than one drop can kill a person. Amounts too small to measure can cause debilitating long-term illnesses such as Gulf War syndrome, which affects over 1/4 of our soldiers who served in the 1991 Gulf War.

I have visited the chemical training facility at Ft. Wood twice. It is a state-of-the-art facility, and possibly as safe as today's construction techniques allow. But, those who say that an accident can't happen, should recall the sinking of the Titanic, and the many other accidents that couldn't happen, but did.

I also suggested that as a safety precaution the Army graze sheep on the grass around the facility and monitor the sheep constantly for behavioral and developmental damage consistent with low-level nerve toxin exposure. Sheep seem to be particularly susceptible to these toxins. In one exercise at Dugway, a small quantity of VX nerve toxin escaped from the training area and killed over 6000 sheep grazing 27 miles away. The safety measure I suggested would be simple, inexpensive, and extremely prudent.

While I strongly favor economic development and high paying jobs, I do not believe that it is necessary to put our health and our children at risk to bring good jobs to the Rolla area. In this instance, I have put forth ideas that would have increased safety, while not lessening economic benefit.

I will continue to work for good jobs and a healthy environment for our children.

Sincerely,

Tom Sager
Rolla