

## IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

# Nursing home shortfall: This is news?

Actually being wide-eyed and amazed, the Knox County Board nursing home committee tells us they are in deep do-do again financially because, quote: "the State is late in its payments." Anyone who has lived around here for longer than six months knows this routine has been going on, just in my personal observation, for at least 30 years. To add insult to naivete' the nursing home committee asked the county board for a loan from its general fund of \$564,000.

To complete the insanity, the board actually loaned them the money. Common financial sense says that anyone who has good credit can get a loan at a financial institution, otherwise, it's probably a bad deal. What gives county board members the idea that the nursing home can pay back a loan? This is the same entity that has used up one million dollars (one-half) of the reserves it's required to maintain. Expenses are regularly more than income.

Our courthouse employees who voted to have a union so long ago I can't remember, are being told on the one hand there is so little money the bargaining committee can't even come to an agreement, and on the other hand, these same county board negotiating committee members cheerfully dish out half a mil for a business that's been failing for years. Time to face it, it's like throwing money down an endless black hole. We're so used to kow-towing to the ASFME union members at the nursing home we don't have time or resources to help the new union members. We're so used to crying about the poor elderly who have no place else to go, that it doesn't occur to us to try to find another solution in order to keep them where they are.

I've written before about how the Knox County Nursing home is a sacred cow, and how anyone who questions it's ownership by the county is labeled cold, unfeeling and totally lacking compassion for the elderly. That's just political talk, of course, replacing the real reasons for the indignation, which are that those who run the home now and those who established it in the first place will defend it to the death (kind've like the

Taliban) whether or not it makes any sense, business or otherwise.

I have some solutions:

1) Since state payments have been late for as long as anyone can remember, maybe the county board committee should budget their money with that fact in mind. With excessive spending by the State of Illinois, with pork barrel projects lined up from border to border, with a recession experts have long predicted, the State doesn't have any money left. Surprise, surprise. Another example of fine financial planning. But let's not forget, the important thing is to elect incumbents to the legislature.

2) Maybe the county should hire a management firm to run the nursing home. It's been clear for decades that county board committees are not qualified to manage such an increasingly complicated and expensive medical facility.

3) I voted for the additional tax to support the nursing home because I feel that if county residents want it, we should be willing to support it. The tax money, distributed for the first time next summer, ironically is \$4,000 less than the amount just borrowed from the county's general fund. Now with the state announcing a reduction in Medicaid payments, any hope of the county board recovering that loan is slim to none.

Suggestion number 3, that we collect the full 10 cents on the dollar that voters approved by referendum.

The nursing home problem is constant and not new. I don't think we should sacrifice mandated county services, like law enforcement, for example, so we can prop up this enterprise. It's hard to justify taking half a million dollars from the county general fund when all departments have just been asked to shave 5 percent off their budgets for next year.

*Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at [cporter@galesburg.net](mailto:cporter@galesburg.net).*

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