

IN MY OPINION

Caroline Porter

Who's on first?

I don't have much sympathy for citizens who are upset about the ill-advised purchase of the Leibovitz Building by the Knox County Board. I've spent a lifetime trying to get people to pay attention to candidate qualifications and they just don't. Around here, it's fashionable to vote for Republicans for the county board. That's the political party that proudly announces it is not the "waste and spend party," like the Democrats.

In case you haven't noticed, those businessmen and women who proudly claim to be of the party that *doesn't* waste and spend — are wasting and spending taxpayer money like fools on a gambling boat. The problem is, the stakes are so much higher and they are spending OUR money, folks?

Mind you, I don't think there are Republican or Democrat solutions to county problems, but some excellent candidates for the board were eliminated in 2002 because of partisan voting. There are a number of new board members this year, so perhaps they can be forgiven for poor judgment, but there is no one to show them the way. Much as I like some of the county board leaders personally, most are not providing decent leadership. One of the problems is that the board is depending on people other than themselves for leadership and resources, not using their own collective good sense or doing their own homework.

The board depends too heavily on State's Attorney Paul Mangieri, who should be advising them on legal and parliamentary issues. His advice is usually right on, but it is advice. I've expressed my feelings about Allen Hallberg, county administrator, who continues to convince me he is more of a liability than a help. Sheriff Jim Thompson has his department to run, including the tremendous new responsibilities of the new jail and shouldn't be a spokesman for the board. I'm sure he doesn't want to be, but he is put in the position because of the lack of a knowledgeable and articulate spokesman for the county board.

Think of all the mistakes and messes in which we find ourselves — such as the purchase of the Leibovitz Building, market value estimated at \$139,260, bought by the county for \$330,000. Included in the appraisal of the property given to the board by the sellers, (how smart is that?) is the current rent received by the landlords from the county!

This is the second time the county board wasn't smart enough to spend money on its own appraisal and the result has been the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue. The first time was their refusal to pay for an appraisal of the Maytag Refrigeration property so the Illinois Appeal board overturned our local Board of Review and decided Knox County should pay BACK Maytag hundreds of thousands of dollars, which will directly effect school districts and other important services.

In the Leibovitz building deal, we are told now that the county will use a grant from the Illinois Department of Resources to help pay the bill, which, here again, will take away funds from school districts and other county taxing bodies. We should be excited to get rid of the white elephant of the Old Army Reserve Center on East Fremont Street, since we couldn't have sold it. Taking ownership of that awful building was another poor decision.

And why hasn't the issue of our space and lease at the Public Safety Building been resolved? Isn't anyone discussing it? It's not just Mangieri and Thompson who are responsible for solving that problem, it should be done by the county board, led by the chairman or the chair of the county board jail and sheriff's committee, with

the assistance of the county administrator. Maybe the city won't talk to us or come to an agreement because the county board does a poor job of communicating with them. Here again, the board has transferred its responsibilities to other elected officials instead of making its own decisions.

Years ago I heard the city police could hardly wait to use the space made available by the moving of the Sheriff's department to the new jail complex. Apparently we are still paying rent on the space. We should either get out of the lease or use the space ourselves. Lord knows we need it for other offices. Which leads me to another conclusion — the acquisition of

the Leibovitz building is just one more band-aid approach to solving the space problems of county offices.

And then there is the wall... the one the county has been bullied into building by the director of Head Start, who occupies a rented property and should have absolutely no say in what exists on county property. I think it's great to try to reason with people, but one can't reason with an irrational person. It's time the county board took a stand, ordered the wall be finished and the color be damned. I saw the prior mesh wall between Head Start and jail property and it was more than adequate to keep little children from observing any activity on the

jail property. Maybe the Head Start director can explain why the children are taken on walks around the block of the jail complex several times a day, making the building of a wall on one side a useless project.

The heck with the presidential elections in 2004, as important as they are. Let's concentrate on our county board candidates for once and elect candidates, regardless of political party affiliation, who can be counted upon for taking responsibility and using good sense.

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