October 2010 Volume 47

THE UTAH TAXPAYER

A PUBLICATION OF THE UTAH TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

Teed Off On Taxpayer Subsidized Golf Courses

Your Utah Taxpayers Association frequently disagrees with cities on the wisdom of municipal recreation centers. Mayors and the City Councils believe these extravagances will improve youths' health or prevent the spread of gangs. Color us skeptical, but those are at least plausible justifications.

Cities, counties and the state have no such fig leaves when it comes to golf courses. With taxpayers hurting, and the economy still recovering, there is no better time than the present for the state, cities and counties to stop taxpayer-funded subsidies for rounds of golf.

The Daily Herald recently reported that six Utah county cities collectively subsidize municipal golf courses with $1,388,139 per year. Because Cedar Hills did not respond to the Daily Herald's request, that figure excludes Cedar Hills' golf subsidy, certainly the best-known golf subsidy in Utah County.

As Table I shows, in FY 2010 Utah State Parks subsidized four state-owned golf courses with $1,375,668, just on their operations side. Taxpayers lost nearly $1.4 million because the state feels the "need" to make 18 holes of golf cheaper.

Table 1: 2010 Operational Expenditures and Collections at State-Owned Golf Courses

	Expenditures	Collections	Net
Wasatch	$1,470,538	$1,703,131	$232,593
Soldier Hollow	$2,069,874	$899,261	($1,170,613)
Green River	$306,705	$71,315	($235,389)
Palisades	$517,093	$314,834	($202,259)
Total	**$4,364,209**	**$2,988,541**	**($1,375,668)**

Source: Calculations by Utah Taxpayers Association with data from Utah State Parks and Recreation

With Utah's public golf courses costing taxpayers so much money, Utah ought to look to the private sector for solutions. The Privatization Policy Board recently received a report from Billy Casper Golf (BCG), a private firm that specializes in running municipal golf courses. This report showed that turning management of public golf courses over to the private sector can eliminate the need for taxpayer subsidies to these courses. BCG has even managed to successfully transform municipal courses in the midst of an economic recession and an overall decrease in golfing.

According to the National Golf Foundation, the golf industry is struggling nationwide. The number of golfers has dropped 9.2 percent over the last five years, and the number of new 18-hole courses is dropping precipitously. In 2009 alone, there was a net closure of 90 courses nationwide.

Despite dim industry trends nationally, after BCG took over management of Chicago Park District golf, the annual number of rounds of golf at their courses increased from approximately 145,000 in 2008 to more than 180,000 in 2009. That increase in rounds translated into an increase in golf revenue from approximately $3.6 million to more than $4.5 million.

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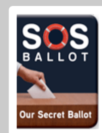

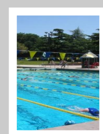

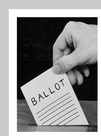

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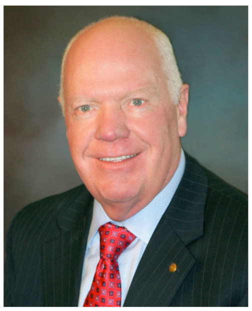
Similarly after BCG began managing them, Tulsa, Oklahoma's Page Belcher and Mohawk Park courses saw increases in play and revenue of more than 20 percent. The Chicago Sun-Times reported that BCG changed Cook County's Forest Preserve Course from a $1.5 million per year drain to earning a $1.5 million net profit.

BCG is not the only company who manages public golf courses. Vanguard Golf Management operates Thanksgiving Point, and recently received a contract to manage The Ranches Golf Course in Eagle Mountain. Orem contracted with Golden Fairways for management of Sleepy Ridge Golf Course, and Sleepy Ridge's only "subsidy" is purchasing irrigation water at wholesale prices.

Because private companies like BCG, Vanguard and Golden Fairways can't simply tap into tax dollars, they must create a golf experience that turns a profit. Utah needs to follow the example of dozens of public courses nationwide, and at least privatize the management, if not the ownership, of the state's publicly-owned golf courses.

My Corner: Who should appoint Jordan School District's new superintendent?



Association President Howard Stephenson

Dr. Barry Newbold, superintendent of the Jordan School District, recently announced that he will retire effective January 1, 2011. Unfortunately, the lame duck Jordan School Board is planning to choose the district's next superintendent before the new school board takes office. We believe the new board's first, and perhaps most important job, should be to select a superintendent who will guide the district for the next 10 to 15 years. Their lame duck predecessors should not make that decision.

The Jordan School Board is about to change in very dramatic fashion. J. Dale Christensen lost in the primary, and Randy Brinkerhoff chose not to run again. A third incumbent, board chair Peggy Jo Kennett, faces a stiff challenge from Nathan Gedge, who received endorsements from the UEA and the Utah Taxpayers Association.

Nevertheless, the current Jordan School Board is already holding public hearings to get input from voters regarding a new superintendent, ignoring the voters' most obvious message. Continuing and incoming board members have the support of voters, and should be responsible for identifying the key skills and characteristics of the next superintendent, evaluating candidates and appointing the district's next superintendent.

Few school board decisions are as momentous or long-lasting as choosing a superintendent. The superintendent sets the tone and direction for implementing the will of the people as expressed through the school board. Jordan will be facing a potential doubling of property taxes and decisions about a modified school schedule. The new board should be tasked with selected the superintendent to participate in those decisions. In addition, the superintendent negotiates contracts with the teachers union, represents the district to the Legislature, and is generally the face of the district to the public. Lame duck board members have neither the support of voters to make these decisions, nor the responsibility to work with the new superintendent.

Given the importance of this decision, the school board should respect the wishes of the district's voters, and let the new school board select the superintendent. Following the joint brouhahas of the Canyons splitting off and the 20 percent property tax increase in 2009, a tax increase that inspired the largest tax protest in the history of the Jordan School District, residents want the district to go in a different direction. They no longer want the same school board members making these kinds of critical decisions.

Current school board members claim the district cannot wait for the new school board members. In their view, the needs a new superintendent before the next legislative session. That claim is absurd. For one year, the school district can afford to rely on an interim superintendent, and the joint resources of the State Superintendent's Association, the School Boards Association, the State School Board and the State Office of Education. Respect for the clear desire of voters to see a long-term change of direction far outweighs the concerns of not having a superintendent chosen by the time the 2011 Legislature convenes.

Elections are opportunities for voters to voice their support or opposition for elected officials. When candidates lose elections it is a demonstration that the public has lost confidence in their ability to effectively represent voter interests. The June 2010 elections were an opportunity for Jordan School District voters to determine whom they trusted to make the best decisions for their district. The results of that election should be a clear message to the Jordan School Board that major decisions, such as the selection of a new superintendent, should be postponed until the new, voter endorsed board members can take their seats.

Save Our Secret Ballot- Vote FOR Constitution Amendment A

Political analysts are forecasting upheaval in Washington this November as Democrats lose dozens of seats in Congress and majority control. As a result, labor union bosses are realizing it is "now or never" and are anxious to push card-check legislation through a "lame duck" session of Congress right after the November elections.

Democratic leadership has already scheduled the "lame duck" session of Congress to start November 15th and the Employee Free Choice Act, also known as card check, has previously passed the House of Representatives. Card check legislation would eliminate secret ballot voting in employee representation elections. This means that any business with ten or more employees could be unionized without an election.

The Free Employee Choice Act, better known as card check, would allow union representatives to gather signatures from employees at any time or place in support of unionization, without oversight or supervision. No election or notification to employees would be required. Even if employees asked for a secret ballot election, unions would not have to honor their request. If union representatives gathered signatures from 50 percent of workers the business would unionized.

Secret ballots and elections are a basic tenant of democracy. In the case of unionization, secret ballots allow for private decision making apart from voter coercion, union intimidation or peer pressure. Without a secret ballot, unions could pressure employees into supporting unionization. Secret ballots are essential to protecting worker's ability to make choices in the best interest of themselves and their business.

For 75 years, federal law has protected the right for workers to have a secret ballot. Constitution Amendment A on Utah's November ballot will preserve this right and make all ballots private in local, state, federal and union representation elections.

Since the federal courts are still honoring state's rights on election matters, Utah (and other states) are pre-empting federal card check legislation with a proposed amendment to the Utah Constitution that guarantees secret ballots in all Utah elections, including employee representation. The Utah Constitution Amendment A would read, "All elections, including elections under state or federal law for public office, on an initiative or referendum, or to designate or authorize employee representation or individual representation, shall be by secret ballot."

Even with the impending "lame duck" session, unions are going a step further and taking card check regulations into their own hands. The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the federal agency charged with conducting elections for labor unions, is trying to assume the authority to enact card-check regulations that thwart secret ballots. The Save Our Secret Ballot constitutional amendment is the best way to protect against "lame duck" legislation and new bureaucratic "card check" power grabs by the NLRB.

States that enact the Save Our Secret Ballot amendment this November, such as Utah's Constitution Amendment A, will have the power to prevent the NLRB from imposing card-check and violating the right to a secret ballot. An overwhelming majority of Utahns support the right to a secret ballot. A 2009 poll conducted by WRS found that 83 percent of Utahns support secret ballots and that the majority of voters from Democratic, Republican and Independent political parties, support secret ballots.

Utah has the opportunity to amend its Constitution to protect itself from potential card check legislation this fall and NLRB card check bureaucracy and decrees. Constitution Amendment A is essential to protecting democracy in Utah and deserves to be ratified by voters in November.

Taxpayers Association Opposes Eagle Mountain and Provo Bonds

Remains neutral on Kaysville and West Valley Bond, Endorses Candidates

Provo City and Eagle Mountain will be asking voters in November to bond for expensive recreation projects in their communities. Provo City Council is proposing a $39 million bond to construct an elaborate rec center. Eagle Mountain is proposing a $7 million bond to build an outdoor aquatic center and lap pool. The Utah Taxpayers Association is opposing both bond proposals.

Each year your Utah Taxpayers Association reviews dozens of bond proposals throughout Utah. With over 240 cities and towns, 41 school districts, 29 counties and hundreds of special districts, bond proposals come in all shapes and sizes. However, the criteria for evaluating the proposals remains the same. Your Taxpayers Association weighs the cost to taxpayers against the actual benefits provided by the proposed projects. In the case of Provo and Eagle Mountain, the costs clearly outweigh the benefit to taxpayers.

The Taxpayers Association also reviewed the Kaysville Police Bond and West Valley City Parks and Trails Bond and remains neutral on them.

Provo City Recreation Bond

The Provo City Council is proposing a $39 million general obligation recreation bond to replace three existing, functional recreation facilities. Provo City has taken this November election as an opportunity to extend their recreation bond far beyond the needs of the facilities and construct an excessive recreation 'Taj Mahal.' The proposed 150,000 square foot facility would include three pools, a waterslide, party and game rooms, a kitchen, spa, lounge and state-of-the-art office, classroom and storage space.

After touring the current Provo recreation facilities and meeting with Provo Mayor John Curtis, your Taxpayers Association strongly encouraged the city council to reconsider the scale of their bond proposal. Provo's bond addresses necessary structural and aquatic repairs to its recreation facilities, but goes far beyond those needs.

The $39 million bond would be repaid over 20 years, with interest totaling approximately $17 million. The tax increase on an average home valued at $195,000 would be $76 annually. The tax increase on an average business valued at $195,000 would be $139 annually.

Your Taxpayers Association opposes the Provo Recreation Bond and the use of taxpayer dollars to pay for wants.

Eagle Mountain Aquatic Bond

Eagle Mountain is proposing a $7 million general obligation bond to build an outdoor aquatic center and lap pool. Eagle Mountain does not currently have an aquatic facility, but has access to other community aquatic programs within minutes. The facility is an unnecessary function of government and incredibly excessive. The outdoor pool would only be open a fraction of the year and the intended services of the facility are readily available throughout the community.

The $7 million bond is scheduled to be repaid over 20 years. The tax increase on an average home valued at $196,000 is $77 annually. The tax increase on an average business valued at $196,000 is $140 annually.

Your Taxpayers Association appreciates the efforts of Eagle

Mountain to move their bond election from June to November to improve voter turnout. However, the Association still strongly opposes the unnecessary Eagle Mountain Aquatic Bond.

Kaysville Police Bond

Kaysville City Council is proposing a $4.5 million general obligation bond to pay for a new police station. The current police facility lacks adequate training space, modern safety features and the seismic integrity to withstand a significant earthquake. The $4.5 million bond would rebuild the police station, expanding the size, increasing functionality and creating a critical emergency operations center.

The bond is scheduled to be repaid over 20 years, with interest totaling approximately $2 million. The tax increase on an average home valued at $258,000 would be $32 annually. The tax increase on an average business valued at $258,000 would be $59 annually.

Your Taxpayers Association has toured the existing Kaysville police facility and recognizes the need for an improved police station. However, the proposed 20 year bond repayment plan will result in excessive interest payments. A $4.5 million bond could easily be repaid in much less than 20 years and save taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest. As a result, your Taxpayers Association remains neutral on the Kaysville Police Bond.

West Valley City Park and Trails Bond

West Valley City is proposing a $25 million general obligation parks and trails bond. The bond would be used to create a four to seven acre "village green" to replace Granger Park as a gathering place and regional amenity. In addition to the green space, the bond would create or enhance seventeen neighborhood parks, including a dog and skate park. Numerous biking and walking trails throughout the region would be completed and tie into existing trails.

The bond is scheduled to be repaid over 20 years. The tax increase on an average home valued at $177,000 would be $25 annually. The tax increase on an average business valued at $177,000 would be $46 annually.

Your Taxpayers Association often opposes recreation bonds, however parks and trails creation and maintenance is a reasonable function of government. There is no private alternative to meet the outdoor recreation needs of residents. West Valley City's bond is economical in design. However, your Taxpayers Association opposes tax increases during a recession. As a result, the Taxpayers Association remains neutral on the bond.

Candidate Endorsements

In addition to bond proposals, your Taxpayers Association has reviewed and endorsed numerous political candidates. Incumbent candidates were evaluated on their voting record and adherence to sound fiscal policy. New candidates were evaluated on their propensity to oppose tax increases and their commitment to maintaining Utah's fiscal conservatism. The accompanying chart provides an abbreviated list of endorsed candidates, for a complete list visit www.utahtaxpayers.org.

Utah Taxpayers Association
November 2010 Endorsements

UT House of Representatives
David Butterfield (Utah, Cache, RIch Counties)
Jim Nielson (Bountiful)
Jason Epps (Salt Lake City)
William Clayton (Sandy)
Ken Ivory (West Jordan)
Derek Brown (Sandy)
Utah State Senate
Sen. Ben McAdams (Salt Lake City)
Sen. Wayne Niederhauser (Sandy, Draper)