

Reno is cheating taxpayers out of promised Fire Protection
Are your taxes being misused?

It appears that the City of Reno is receiving approx. \$4,300,000 annually in specifically dedicated tax ballot revenue as per below. However that money is being misappropriated to other than the ballot required purpose of "Hiring additional firefighters..." and the equipment and maintenance therefor. Also violating the ballots overall promises of "This will provide for improved fire protection coverage in all areas of the City. It will also shorten response time and expand fire protection services..." Research shows the opposite in effect today.

The questions here are:

Does the intent of the Ballot Measure R-3 establish a standard of firefighter staffing that the funds must be used for (i.e. per A.G. Opinion 2011-4: above the floor of 226 at time of passage).

If there a standard of staffing under the measure, is the City of Reno in compliance?

In 1996 Reno voters approved a measure known as R-3 for an increase in taxes at 7.15% of \$100 of assessed value. That measure brings in about four million dollars annually. Instead of using that money as required, Reno has fallen back at or below the 1996 floor in firefighters and equipment and is using that money in the general fund for other purposes. The 1996 floor was approximately 226 firefighters and per the Reno Gazette, current staffing is about 204. It recently fell to about 192 sworn firefighters but rebounded to the low 200s.

Somerset, Skyline Stations have been closed while RFD (IAFF731) received a massive pay raise (5.8% and \$1500 cash yearly)! Empty trucks sit unattended inside. Perfectly good 3 person crews (like Sparks and Washoe) are pulled out per union contract (Art 46). RFD labor contract prohibits volunteers.

Reno is placing the money in the General Fund and using it for other purposes. I refer you to the Nevada Attorney General's Opinion #2011-4 which in part said:

"The number of police officers funded by sources other than the revenue received under the Act must be at least the same number of officers as were funded and supported prior to the time the act became effective ..."

Because the public safety and various tax ballot measures are in the general fund and not shown on any tax bill, it allows for the inappropriate use of the monies.

The wording of the ballot measure, "Hiring additional firefighters..." seems clear. However to gauge voter intent, the ballot "explanation: also used the term, "...hiring additional firefighters..."

Again the voter was so informed under the "Argument For the Question": "...add additional needed fire fighters, equipment, and other expenses... "This will provide for improved fire protection coverage in all areas of the City. It will also shorten response time and expand fire protection services..."

It would appear clear that Reno has violated the provisions and voter intent under the explanation as it has not only failed to hire or maintain additional firefighters but has closed stations #19 and #7 as the City nearly doubled in size resulting in longer response times and degraded fire protection coverage.

In determining compliance with the measure and voter intent, the explanation and Argument for must also be considered.

It should also be noted the argument opposed was almost non-existent.

However, the Nevada Department of Taxation has issued a lengthy opinion (January 19, 2016: Copy on request) that, essentially the City may use the money for any fire purpose including pay raises. Basically add \$ to the top, and take money off the bottom. No ballot measure is worth the paper it is written on. Why would anyone vote for any ballot measure in which promises made are worthless? In reading the measure, the lawyers did a pretty good job in the wording- but all for nothing. This affects ballot measures statewide.

It should further be noted that this affects the public safety of all residents and visitors in Reno, not only from fire calls but medical calls which represent the majority of calls for service. It also affects the ability of RFD to respond to automatic or mutual aid requirements in adjoining areas thus affecting thousands in Washoe County outside of the City limits.

It should also be noted that complainant Church has exhausted all remedies including multiple written complaints and formal appearances before the Reno Council, Reno Financial Advisory Board, Washoe County Debt Commission, Washoe County Board of Commissioners, Washoe County Treasurer and Assessor, and State of Nevada, Department of Taxation and Committee on Local Government Finance (CLGF), and the Washoe County District Attorney's Office.

*2015 Ballot R-3 revenue: \$4,314,284.81 growing over 4% annually
(source: City of Reno & Washoe County)