

April 20, 2017

Lincoln County, as well as other counties and cities, has been facing difficult financial times. The 1% limit on property tax, coupled with the ever-declining shared revenues and increasing unfunded mandates from the state, has made it increasingly difficult to provide just the basic level of service. We feel that it is incumbent upon the Legislative Authorities of counties, cities and school districts, now more than ever, to make sure that the taxpayers, *as well as employees*, know how they are being represented during collective bargaining negotiations, which are among the most expensive contracts negotiated by any municipality.

The public, who by electing County Commissioners, City Councilpersons, School Board Members, etc., have entrusted us to wisely and transparently spend their money to provide them essential services. We believe that elected officials should not get to decide what the public should or should not know about how their tax money is spent.

In September of 2016, the Board of Lincoln County Commissioners adopted Resolution 16-21, resolving that union contract negotiations will be conducted in open public meetings. This Resolution *does not* preclude either side from meeting separately and privately to discuss negotiating *tactics*. It only allows the public to view the proceedings, not to comment or participate in any way.

The Resolution that we passed has huge, broad, local and state support. In fact, a poll conducted of registered voters in Lincoln County found that 74% of those surveyed approved of our Transparency Resolution, while 19% had no opinion and only 7% disagreed. Every major newspaper Editorial Board in the state has advocated for this and have published many articles supporting what we have done here in Lincoln County to bring better transparency to government. Everyone we have come in contact with thinks negotiating in public is a great idea, other than the representatives from the unions. Their stated rationale is that it “has real implications for our internal bargaining process” and that “Open negotiations are very foreign to us” and “people who implement policies like this are just out to harm the working folks and break up unions”. We are *not* trying to call out employees for asking for higher salaries or benefits or anything of the like. And, we are most certainly not out to harm the working folks! No matter what *anyone* says, that is simply not the case. The public and the employees *both* have the right to know how they are being represented at the bargaining table, because at the end of the day, it is the *public’s* money.

But, the unions just don’t like it and the law firms who negotiate for local governments don’t like it. Why? Because “that’s not the way we’ve always done it”. It’s all about the “process”. If the process changes, everyone stands to make less money negotiating.

By opening *your* contract negotiations to the public, it will help everyone better understand the financial situation we are all faced with. It sends a message that there is nothing for any of us to hide and that we are doing everything in our power to be as open and transparent as possible with public dollars.

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Former Washington State Attorney General Rob McKenna, in a recent article about Lincoln County and our Transparency Resolution, stated the union's opposition to open negotiations quite well. He said, "let's be clear about what they (the unions) are opposing: They're against the *public* being able to watch *public* officials bargain with *public* employee unions over spending the *public's* money. That's what they want to keep behind closed doors."

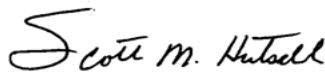
Our question remains: What does *anyone* have to hide from the *public* who we all serve? The answer should be absolutely nothing.

Much of the battle has already been fought and won. With the generous support of the Freedom Foundation, Lincoln County has prevailed at every step along the way with the Public Employees Relations Commission.

Attached is a copy of our Transparency Resolution and links to numerous newspaper articles and editorials throughout the state. If you have questions or would just like to visit about our endeavor, please feel free to reach out to any one of us.

Again, we, as the Board of Lincoln County Commissioners, urge you to resolve to conduct your collective bargaining negotiations in public. The decision may not be an easy one but your efforts will be appreciated in the arena of public opinion.

Sincerely,



Rob Coffman  
Chairman

Scott M. Hutsell  
Vice Chairman

Mark R. Stedman  
Member