



Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>

Emergency Services Surtax public information request

Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>

Sun, Feb 14, 2016 at 3:17 PM

To: Neugent-George <Neugent-George@monroecounty-fl.gov>

I strongly believe that Key Largo should incorporate. They would be much better off. The best I can do for them is to provide accurate information so that they can make their own decisions. I wouldn't take the unwillingness to incorporate fifteen years ago to mean they are thrilled with a county commission who makes sure they pay much more for services than their neighbors in the other unincorporated areas.

I chalk it much of it up to the county's never-ending spin machine. It makes it hard for any citizen to sort reality from bullshit. The iPhone Bandit, in particular, is a tireless liar. As soon as one falsehood is debunked there are ten more to take its place. It would be very difficult for your average person to figure it all out. Especially if they are working two jobs to pay for all the extra costs unfairly imposed on them. Hence the blog.

As for "bombast" and "tone" - if the county's activities are to be described accurately, strong words are necessary. There is no way to soft-peddle the Cudjoe Regional fiasco and the overall unfairness of wastewater funding. There is no way to soft peddle the recent behavior regarding the Emergency Services Surtax. Lying is lying. Unfairness is unfairness. Irresponsibility is irresponsibility. Tip-toeing around to spare the county's feelings only confuses the issue. May as well tell it like it is. Your staff lied. They got caught at it. They don't like that. Boo-hoo. I'm not very sympathetic. Kissing their butts won't change a thing. It only makes it more comfortable for them to continue lying. That's the last thing anyone needs.

If you read the blog, you'll see that it is numbers-based and fact-based. It's about fact-checking. People do read it and reach out to me by phone/email. That feedback helps me decide what to write about. The local press will occasionally pick up an item. Then more people read the blog. And so it goes.

You seem to take Key Largo's unwillingness to incorporate as permission to treat them unfairly. It seems to be all about taking advantage of people who let you get away with it. Or to put it more accurately, are not well-positioned to stop it. I believe county government should work at a higher ethical level. I think you would see better results if you took a fact-based and fair-minded approach. Sleaze actually doesn't work out so well on a practical level. That is something you should have learned from the Cudjoe Regional fiasco.

I can't control the outcome of all this. But I can put the information out there. What people choose to do with that information is up to them. I am lucky to be in a position to be able to do that right now. If it leads to positive change - great! If not - well I tried. That's really all I can do.

On Sun, Feb 14, 2016 at 11:47 AM, Neugent-George <Neugent-George@monroecounty-fl.gov> wrote:

Margaret,

There is a tremendous amount of content in your email I completely disagree with.

Other content within your email is only arguable due in large part due to interpretation by the two partisan groups. The fair-minded, who are listening and understanding the information before them will, if put to referenda, make the decision. Hopefully the right one.

You know that capital expenditures, for the most part, don't equate to operating cost of fire stations. Cudjoe Regional has the most rural and longest, in miles, district within the county's jurisdiction. I, to some degree, think we have spent more money than we should have, but only in arguable degrees.

Key Largo had the opportunity to incorporate and turned it down by 2-1 vote.

Recently there was talk about incorporating... It got NO traction.

You have to recognize that you find yourself in the minority when it comes to how Key Largo folks feel about this commission. I know that to be a very simple, non-detailed interpretation of the outcome - but, that is the inarguable conclusion.

In conclusion I read and listen to the case you make and data you provide, it's helpful in a couple of ways,

however, I sort through your just as I do with our Staff.

With your acrimonious bombast you would be better served on the Republican Primary campaign trail. 😄



George

Sent from my iPad

On Feb 14, 2016, at 10:13 AM, Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

No. Key Largo absolutely would NOT benefit. Key Largo spends the lowest on fire service by far. That is a necessity for this low-moderate income area - which was slammed HARD by Monroe County's negligently unfair wastewater funding policies. It's nice that the county FINALLY made a \$1 million payment on the swap agreement, but there is a long way to go to repair the damage. You and I both know that if it was up to the county, Key Largo wouldn't have seen a dime. You were quite content to under-fund them and allow them to pay more. Your staff went out of their way to interfere with state and federal funding for Key Largo. They lied every step of the way and I'm sure they continue to lie. Why would they stop now?

This proposal only ensures that Key Largo (and Key West) will subsidize the unincorporated Lower and Middle Keys once again. The tax is allocated based on how much each area spends. The county spends the most by far. It's a formula that incentivizes fraud and waste - Monroe County's specialty. I definitely see why it would appeal to the BOCC.

I'm not sure exactly why Monroe County fire costs so much more, but it is probably due primarily to waste/fraud/administrative incompetence - just like the wastewater projects. If people in the Lower/Middle Keys don't like how much they have to pay they should take it up with the government agency responsible. Requiring Key Largo/Key West to subsidize that foolishness is improper and inappropriate.

The wastewater projects were bad enough. But this is a life-health-safety issue. I never thought the county would sink this low - but here we are. Staff is already feeding the public misleading information and refusing to explain the busts in their "analysis". Using your staff's own numbers, there is no way families will only pay \$125 more in sales tax. It's a mathematical impossibility. We're just supposed to accept whatever bullshit they feed us I guess. Your staff has always tried to lie with numbers. Unfortunately for you, they are terrible at it.

I will definitely be looking into exactly why Monroe County fire service costs so much. All those expensive new fire stations. Who built them? Did they cost more than necessary? How do staffing levels compare? How do pay scales compare? How do service levels compare? Are lower income areas who must economize being forced to subsidize higher income areas who spend wild? What about that discount your staff used as an excuse for the higher costs? Hopefully, Bob will improve his attitude because there will be a lot of information requests coming. He can stonewall all he wants, but I will keep asking. And I will post about how the county responds.

The county resents every single penny out of the 304 that is spent on Key Largo. You've made that very clear. This is despite the fact that Key Largo is the largest generator of that tax in the unincorporated area. Replacing one sales tax with another doesn't save anything. I guarantee that if this new sales tax is instituted, the county will only find new ways to squander property tax money. If taxpayers see any break at all, it will be temporary.

I don't regard this as a "conspiracy". It is worse than that. It is "business as usual". Poor analysis. Misleading information. Unfair funding policies. Looking to Key Largo/Key West for a bail-out. It's the wastewater projects all over again. It is institutionalized waste and unfairness. The county sees nothing wrong with any of this because it is ingrained habit. But you know the negatively affected public won't like it. That's why your staff lies and stonewalls when asked for information. They know exactly what this is all about. They just don't want the public to know.

I know I am way early on this issue. But the information needs to be available to people for the

November election. The three worst of the worst on the BOCC are up for re-election. It would be great if they could be replaced by better candidates. (Hell, my cat would be better!) There will definitely be blog posts about how certain BOCC members and their cronies benefit from this new tax. I only looked at one so far. And it was very revealing. That should be up sometime in the coming week.

On Sat, Feb 13, 2016 at 3:43 PM, Neugent-George <Neugent-George@monroecounty-fl.gov> wrote:

Thanks for your input. Public research input is exactly what we are getting before putting it out for referendum vote. It would require 60% of the vote and won't happen this year. As I said, it would seem that I'm in the break even category. Tavernier would benefit along with the rest of the unincorporated areas. There are no conspirators here. I think Key Largo would, too, benefit because we will save 304 fund money that is being spent on capital?

GN

Sent from my iPad

On Feb 12, 2016, at 5:40 PM, Margaret Blank <margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

Geographically: Key West and Key Largo generate the sales tax and lose out. Marathon, Islamorada and Ocean Reef break even. The only area that makes out is the unincorporated lower and middle keys. That's because of the high millage rate for fire and the fact that they generate very little sales tax. You should look at why costs are so high rather than look to other areas to cover your excessive bills. If only u had done that with sewer!!! CR \$49 million over and counting!

How does service in the different areas compare?

Income- wise: Folks with lower incomes will also lose out. Especially renters. Everyone's wringing their hands over these folks when it comes to affordable housing. How does it make sense to impose another regressive tax on them? That \$125 number is bogus. The math doesn't work and other sources do not support it.

Out-of-county vs. Local: the highest value properties in the Keys are owned by people who do not live there. Under this ESS scheme, they will pay nothing for fire protection. Their local tenants and customers will pay. Staff's claim that locals pay 100% of the property tax is completely bogus and everyone knows it. Staff is directing your eye toward the average sf home. There is a bigger picture they are concealing or are too lazy to consider.

By the way, I am an owner who lives away. I pay property taxes and I would make out on this deal. But I still do not support it. It incentivizes irresponsible spending and penalizes the local work force. Bad policy piled on top of bad policy.

Your staff provides inaccurate numbers and inadequate analysis. Then they stonewall when asked to support their claims. You should read the blog if u have a chance.

This ESS tax is crappy. I'm slamming it hard. Already slammed in the free press. Got lots of positive feedback. People do not seem to like it at all. Nor should they.

When Key West is done with Peary Court I'm sure they will turn their attention to this.

On Fri, Feb 12, 2016, 4:57 PM Neugent-George <Neugent-George@monroecounty-fl.gov>

George@monroecounty-fl.gov> wrote:

I'm not really following you.

I'm under the impression sales tax would pay for cost to provide fire & emergency. Millage for F&E would be removed from tax bill. And yes, some would get a bigger savings however they've been paying more over the years. Living in Marathon I'd break a bit above even. I think? Tavernier and other uninc. Areas would do better. And for me that's OK.

Sent from my iPhone

On Feb 12, 2016, at 1:32 PM, "Margaret Blank"

<margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

George,

Here is a link to staff's "white paper" included on the January 20 agenda.

<http://fl-monroecounty.civicplus.com/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/7563?fileID=7414>

The agenda backup claims a 40%/60% sales tax split, but it is not supported in any way. It is simply asserted. Bob finally sent the supporting documentation. I find the initial unwillingness to do so very interesting. Forgive me, but I'm not going to take what the county says at face value. Neither should anyone else. Ever.

If Carruthers and staff are trying to sell some "tax shift" then they had better make sure that the numbers have a sound factual basis. Even with the documentation provided, the \$125/year figure does not make sense. The math supports a figure of over \$400. That needs to be resolved in the Sunshine without the usual flim-flam.

At this point, it is becoming apparent that this "shift" benefits out-of-county property owners more than anyone. It is definitely detrimental to local families in certain low-moderate income areas. That's really what this is really all about, isn't it?

Best,

Margaret

On Fri, Feb 12, 2016 at 11:38 AM, Neugent-George <Neugent-George@monroecounty-fl.gov> wrote:

Margaret,

I don't know about a "White Paper," however, it is well documented that tourist pay between 52 & 55% of sales tax. As for what the average person pays for sales tax annually I'm not sure, but I believe I pay more, substantially more, in ad Valorem. As for cost of fire and emergency it's simply about density & distance (ruralness) of the unincorporated areas. The information on this subject exist.

George

Sent from my iPad

On Feb 12, 2016, at 10:57 AM, Margaret Blank
<margaret.h.blank@gmail.com> wrote:

So what you're telling me is that there are no documents available to support the claims made in the "white paper". My goodness, that's quite an admission. What else have you all lied about? Never mind. I've got a whole blog devoted to that.

The 40%/60% sales tax split was pulled out of thin air. And obviously so was the claim that locals pay 100% of the property taxes. The free-floating \$125 figure cannot be reconciled to the mathematically supported \$417 figure. And there is nothing to justify the excessive cost of fire services the county provides to the Lower and Middle Keys.

For shame. This is low even for you all.

On Fri, Feb 12, 2016 at 9:36 AM, Shillinger-Bob
<Shillinger-Bob@monroecounty-fl.gov> wrote:

Margaret:

To the extent records that are responsive to your request already exist, we will provide them. To be clear, the Public Records Act does not impose any duty or obligation to create records or to respond questions posed.

<image002.jpg>Bob Shillinger

County Attorney

Monroe County Attorney's Office

1111 12th Street, Suite 408

Key West, FL 33040

(305) 292-3470

(305) 292-3516 (fax)

No trees were harmed in the sending of this E-mail, however, a great number of electrons were terribly inconvenienced. Please note that Florida has a broad public

records law and that any communication with the County could be considered a public record. If you do not wish for your email address to become a public record, use the telephone or some other method of conveying your message.

From: Margaret Blank
[mailto:margaret.h.blank@gmail.com]
Sent: Thursday, February 11, 2016 3:39 PM
To: Kolhage-Danny; BOCCDIS2; BOCCDIS3; BOCCDIS4; BOCCDIS5
Cc: Madok-Kevin; Shillinger-Bob
Subject: Fwd: Emergency Services Surtax public information request

Hello;

This is my second request for the following information about the proposed Emergency Services Surtax. Please consider this a formal public information request.

1. Your "white paper" claims that non-residents pay zero property taxes. This is clearly false. There are hundreds of hotel properties in the Keys, and thousands of residential properties used for seasonal/vacation purposes. Please provide data to back-up your statement.
2. Please substantiate your claim that tourists pay 60% of the sales tax.
3. You claim that Keys families will only pay \$125 more per year because of the additional sales tax. But the math, using numbers provided in the "white paper", clearly indicates that they will pay over \$400 more per year. Please explain the contradiction.
4. Please provide more information on the "insurance discount". How much is it? How much more will a property owner pay if they are more than 5 miles from a fire station? Do all property owners in the Keys receive this discount? Were more fire stations built

beyond what is necessary for safety in order to secure this discount? If so, why should these property owners receive additional subsidies from county-wide taxpayers?

5. The cost of operating Lower and Middle Keys fire/rescue is far higher than any similar entity in the Keys. Why is that exactly? And why should taxpayers Keys-wide subsidize this through the sales tax? What cost-saving measures have been considered?

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Margaret Blank**

[<margaret.h.blank@gmail.com>](mailto:margaret.h.blank@gmail.com)

Date: Fri, Feb 5, 2016 at 8:07 AM

Subject: Emergency Services Surtax public information request

To: Danny Kolhage

[<boccds1@monroecounty-fl.gov>](mailto:boccds1@monroecounty-fl.gov), George Neugent [<boccds2@monroecounty-fl.gov>](mailto:boccds2@monroecounty-fl.gov), boccds3@monroecounty-fl.gov, boccds4@monroecounty-fl.gov, boccds5@monroecounty-fl.gov

Cc: "Madok, Kevin" [<Madok-Kevin@monroecounty-fl.gov>](mailto:Madok-Kevin@monroecounty-fl.gov), "Shillinger, Bob" [<Shillinger-Bob@monroecounty-fl.gov>](mailto:Shillinger-Bob@monroecounty-fl.gov)

Dear Commissioners;

I reviewed the documentation supporting the Emergency Services Surtax proposal. It was extremely misleading - to put it in the politest possible terms.

1. The claim that locals pay 100% of the property taxes is blatantly false. Hotels, motels, time shares, vacation rentals, and seasonal homes are all occupied by visitors.

2. Your claim that tourists pay 60% of the sales tax needs to be substantiated. Where did this number come from? How was it calculated?

3. Your claim that the increased sales tax burden on local families will only amount to \$125 per year makes no sense. The "white paper" says that \$34 million will be collected

from this additional sales tax. If tourists pay 60% and locals pay 40%, that means that \$13.6 million will come from local families. According to the census bureau, there are 32,629 households in Monroe County. That amounts to an additional sales tax burden of \$417 per year.

4. A review of financial documents indicates that the Lower & Middle Keys Fire and Rescue District 1 has the highest costs by far of any entity in the Keys. The "white paper" claims this is because of geography and "insurance discounts". Please explain the "insurance discount". How much is it? Who benefits?

5. Have you reviewed the cost of the Lower & Middle Keys Fire District to determine why costs are so much higher? Excessive staffing levels? Excessive compensation? Waste? Fraud? Inefficiency? If not, why not?

I've already written about the subject and plan to write more.

<https://therealpoop.org/2016/02/05/emergency-sales-surtax-white-paper/>

<https://therealpoop.org/2016/02/03/emergency-services-who-where-and-how-much/>

<https://therealpoop.org/2016/01/21/monkey-math-emergency-services-surtax/>