

“Once again the county commission is considering the future of fire protection in Bradley County.” by Mel Griffith



Once again the county commission is considering the future of fire protection in Bradley County. Perhaps some history of county fire protection would be helpful. The first efforts at county fire protection seem to have been about the 1950s when there was one engine operated by the rescue squad. Starting about 1978 the county contracted with the City of Cleveland to respond to county fires. Because the response was so ineffective and unsatisfactory, a citizens committee was formed in 1992 to encourage the commission to provide better fire protection. In response, the commission appointed a committee of seven citizens to make recommendations for

the future fire protection in the county. The committee was rigged to recommend a ten year contract with the city, which it did, but three members of the committee submitted a minority report which recommended that Bradley County establish a volunteer fire department. That report was implemented by the commission in 1993 and resulted in the establishment of six county fire stations, since in-

“Merge” is a code word for takeover of the county fire department by the city.”

creased to nine by adding another volunteer station, a paid station downtown, and merging the Charleston fire station in to the county fire department. After the county fire department was started, volunteers were recruited and training got underway with very limited equipment. Then, the commission, in a fit of stupidity, turned the county fire de-

partment over to the city. This proved to be a disaster, and faced with the potential loss of most of the volunteers, the commission separated the county fire department from the city and appointed their own chief. Since that time, the county fire department has made remarkable progress and is now the best county fire department in the area. Now, the volunteers face the prospect of being rewarded for their years of hard work by being, once again, thrown to the wolves. It is being proposed to "merge" the county fire department into the city fire department. "Merge" is a code word for takeover of the county fire department by the city. This would be done through a 15 year contract, effectively tying the hands of future commissions to fix problems that are likely to arise. It is further proposed that control of the department be taken away from elected

officials and placed in the hands of a board made up mostly of bureaucrats and special interests, with only one elected official to represent the public. It is claimed that this will save about two million dollars a year. I believe most of this savings will come through inadequate fire protection in the rural areas. Furthermore, the county could save about the same amount just by canceling the current contract with the city.

Some questions you may want to ask your commissioners:

1. Why do you want to disrupt a system that is working well and replace it with one that is already a proven failure? Why fix what isn't broke?
2. Why would you enter into a 15 year contract for something that is risky and untried? Wouldn't 3 or 4 years make more sense?
3. Why do you want to take control of the fire department out of the hands of

elected officials and place it in the hands of people who don't have to answer to the public? Are you expecting a lot of complaints?

4. Couldn't the county save about the same amount of money simply by canceling the present contract with city?

- Mel Griffith raises cattle and chickens on his farm in the southern part of the county. He is the 6th District member of the Bradley County Commission. He also serves on the Bradley County Planning Commission.

Answers to this month's Crossword

S	E	R	N	A	S	T	M	O	A
D	I	R	O	T	O	G	A	R	G
A	R	A	T	E	G	E	H	E	A
E	H	A	C	A	R	T	K	I	N
L	P	A	S	P	A	N	D	P	O
	P	A	P	A	T	A	R	A	N
R	E	S	K	E	M	P	L	E	B
E	A	N	G	E	S	B	O	L	O
S	A	D	S	T	E	R	B	O	R
D	E	R	S	E	R	T	T	O	T
	F	R	A	Y	F	R	A	Y	S
T	H	R	E	A	T	H	I	N	G
L	E	R	O	L	E	S	T	H	O
L	A	B	L	O	R	N	A	L	O
M	O	A	N	M	A	L	B	U	M
G	R	A	F	A	L	B	U	M	G

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