

Citizens for Common Sense



Aug 2013

Seeking government that is responsible and responsive to taxpayers in St. Joseph County, IN

It's Time to Re-invent CCS

Citizens for Common Sense
has for 20 years been a voice in local politics.
About 6 years ago, we expanded into state issues
because they had such a direct impact on our county.
About 4 years ago, we found ourselves in the Tea Party movement
concerned that if our nation did not reduce the size of government to
1) get financially solvent and 2) stop infringing on our rights
then there wouldn't be any state or county to worry about.

Today, there are many Tea Party groups in St. Joe and Elkhart counties.
Do we need Citizens for Common Sense anymore?

We believe the answer is Yes, because we have a unique role to play
in balancing state, local, and federal issues and holding Meet the Candidate events.

But if we're going to do this job, we may need to start meeting regularly – perhaps monthly
and designate people to be in charge of scheduling activities, and
most importantly, volunteers to monitor a) federal, b) state and c) local governments
and report back to the group with action items to discuss.

**Citizen for Common Sense
Annual Meeting
Thurs, Aug 15, 7-8:30pm**

**Mishawaka-Penn-Harris Library
209 Lincoln Way East, Mishawaka, IN**

There will be cookies and beverages, and ample time for your input.

Looking Back:

Twenty Years of Citizen Effort

- **1992** The first proposal of the Option Tax brought CCS together and the County rejected the tax.

- **1993** We incorporated. The County voted the tax down. Mishawaka proposed it after saying they would not, but ultimately tabled it, so the tax died.

Sheriff Nagy proposed a \$41 million jail but public reaction dropped it to \$30M. A citizens committee dropped it to \$26M (not including bond costs).

- **1994** We ran a quarter page ad against the tax. The County tabled the tax to set up a Fiscal Study Committee which ultimately proved a farce.

Citizens fought against an overpriced Juvenile Center but the project was approved and the price went up. Citizens did not fight the \$26M jail.

- **1995** Two option taxes were proposed. We ran a half page ad and two papers of our own. CEDIT passed but the County rejected COIT. South Bend Mayor Kernan ran a special edition to cover a missing ad, and South Bend passed COIT. Four county councilmen boycotted a second vote and COIT failed.

The day after Nagy's jail was approved, new Sheriff Speybroeck proposed a \$55 million jail instead. We requested a dual petition remonstrance.

- **1996** Citizens defeated the \$55 million jail 10,000 to 3,000 and we successfully pressed the legislature for improvements to the remonstrance laws.

The County and South Bend both passed COIT but the County failed to properly advertise. We took the issue to court and a judge declared the tax void.

Sheriff Speybroeck proposed a \$50 million jail and the County refused to let us remonstrate. We took the issue to the State Tax Board.

- **1997** The Tax Board ruled in our favor on the need for a remonstrance before a jail could proceed.

Both the County and South Bend passed COIT and it went into effect in July.

The County successfully reversed the ruling on the jail. When we attempted to appeal, we were sued.

- **1998** We fought the lawsuit against us all year, got a state law passed protecting others from such suits, and took part in a successful election process.

- **1999** The lawsuit against us was finally dropped. We responded to various minor issues that arose.

- **2000** We fought for fair settlements for 51 homeowners in the AM General deal. We also battled a Common Wage Ordinance and held it off for a year.

- **2001** We took on Mandatory Curbside Recycling, holding several successful aluminum can drives to raise funds, and filing an appeal of the "fee" in court.

We lost the fight on the Common Wage Ordinance, and protested a county Water & Sewer District.

- **2002** We lost the Recycling case and the Indiana Supreme Court refused to hear our appeal.

When the Option Tax hit its max, the County proposed a Wheel Tax, but we stopped it.

- **2003** We fought a major Wheel Tax battle. Despite overwhelming opposition at the hearing, it went thru.

- **2004** We served on a "citizens" committee that met all summer and failed to rescind the Wheel Tax. We also fought Leaf Pick-up and worked in local elections.

- **2005** We got the Common Wage modified to be discretionary, and began fighting a proposed Portage Prairie development. A countywide Water & Sewer District was set up despite our concerns.

- **2006** We got the Wheel Tax rescinded only to have the County Commissioners block the vote and keep it.

We unsuccessfully fought a Smoking Ban and were again active in local elections.

- **2007** When the state's Circuit Breaker hit St. Joe County with a higher ceiling on property taxes, we got involved in a statewide effort to end property taxes.

- **2008** We fought a Tax Abatement Ordinance that included prevailing union wages, and blocked an 11th hour (Christmas) attempt at a new option tax (LOIT).

- **2009** We lost the Tax Abatement Ordinance fight and also lost a new fight against the LOIT option tax.

The first Tea Party rallies were held, and we defeated a proposed Regional Transportation District.

- **2010** We held our first Meet the Candidates Nights. Locally, we promoted a Contract with St. Joe County. At the state level, we lobbied on several bills.

- **2011** We held Meet the Candidates forums for the city elections, pushed for Right to Work (ended by a walk-out), and worked to identify national candidates

- **2012** We held more Meet the Candidates forums, ran an Indiana Bill Watch, got Right to Work passed, and tried to eliminate the straight-ticket ballot option.

Nationally, we rallied for conservative candidates.

Leaf Pick-up

Government creating more for itself to do with your money

Leaf pick-up has been a contested issue for many years in St. Joe County. Some people appreciate not having to go out on their own and deal with their leaves. Others don't have leaves or already have a way of dealing with them and don't appreciate their tax dollars being used for everyone else's leaves.

One thing that should be clear to all of us is that leaf-pick-up is one more way to grow the size of government. It puts millions of dollars into the hands of elected officials who then retain the power that comes with overseeing those funds. Frequently it results in purchasing equipment or hiring people which we then pay to retain for perpetuity.

The county should not be in the business of leaf pick-up. This is one more private sector function that is best left for the private sector. Notice that no one wants to bid on

county-wide leaf pick-up. That in itself should signal that this is not a wise business venture.

More importantly, if the county has enough of our tax dollars to even CONSIDER something this prohibitively expensive, then they are obviously taxing us too much. We now have three option taxes: COIT, CEDIT and LOIT. Isn't it time to rescind one of them and return the tax dollars to the people they came from?

You've probably never heard of taxes going down. We looked it up. The last time South Bend city taxes went down was in the 70's – the last time they had a Republican mayor. South Bend still has a Democrat, but the county -- For the first time in decades, Republicans hold 2 of 3 seats on the Board of Commissioners. Isn't it time we eliminate either LOIT or CEDIT?

County Burn Ban

Government telling you what you can't do on your property

The big argument for having the county provide leaf pick-up is that they are also considering banning leaf burning. If people can simply rake their leaves into a pile and burn it down in a few minutes, then millions of dollars do not need to be spent picking them up, transporting them for miles in exhaust-belching trucks, and doing what with them? Lining our landfills?

But every year, concerns are raised about people having trouble breathing smoke. Let's not even get into the likelihood that more people are having trouble with particulates BECAUSE they are not getting regularly exposed to them – so their bodies have not developed the immunities that we used to all develop. Let's just deal with the fact that many people are having trouble.

The simple solution is this: Ask your neighbors not to burn during certain hours, or to pick one day when they do all their burning so you can arrange to stay indoors or away.

Too often, however, rather than walk over and talk to a neighbor, we ask government to enact a blanket rule on everyone in the county. That's quite a price to pay for refusing to be neighborly. If it has really come to that, let's at least have an amnesty week or a couple of designated days when everyone can burn and everyone who needs to can hole up or get out of town.

The choice is simple. Develop some people skills or force all your friends and neighbors to follow one more sets of rules and ultimately have to pay more in taxes. Hmmm.

Take Action!

Tell the county what you think of leaf pick-up and burn bans

Currently the County Council is considering banning all leaf fires in the county. They might include a provision that allows you to burn if you are not within 200 feet of someone else's home. Contact your County Council members and probably County Commissioners. Write a letter to the Tribune, too. It's how democracy works!

Burn Ban Hearing and 2014 Budget Hearing
Tues, Sept. 10, 6pm
4th floor, County-City Building
227 W. Jefferson
(corner of Jefferson & Lafayette)

Update on Mandatory Recycling

Remember in 2000 when the county imposed mandatory curbside recycling fees and a thousand people refused to pay – mostly because they were already recycling and didn't see any reason to start paying for a government program to do the same thing? We took the issue to court and we were not very happy when a judge ruled against us, saying "Municipalities can levy fees for their services whether you use them or not." Well, we're not IN a municipality. We're rural folks out in a county. That's why we objected in the first place! But the Indiana Supreme Court refused to hear our appeal.

You may be wondering what happened to all the folks refusing to pay. The truth is we have lost touch with most of them – **and would really like to hear from them**. Over the years, the County's Solid Waste Management District has tried various ways of taking people to court to coerce them to pay the fees, and one by one, we have heard of people paying off out of fear, disgust or misunderstanding.

One of the latest to go was Ron Gurk. The county called Ron to court in 2005 but he called in sick. Two years later they tried again, but the county itself postponed it. Then last month, they tried again but a week before the court date, Ron got a bill for a much lesser amount. Figuring this was some kind of settlement, Ron paid it, just to be done with it. Perhaps that payment was a mistake. They then froze his bank account and ended up taking the full amount they were after which included court costs.

One person still refusing to pay is **Sandy Hochstetler**. As you may recall, Sandy was the lady who originally took the recycling fee to court. She maintains that the fee is not lawful under the Indiana Constitution. "Even if I have to go to jail over this, I won't pay it," says Hochstetler who is a great-grandmother. "I don't use the service. I do my own recycling, I'm on a fixed income, and this isn't right." Sandy would like to hear from other hold outs. **If others are still refusing to pay, please call us at 272-7606.**

Indiana and Common Core

Common Core is a set of national standards for what should be taught in schools from Kindergarten to 12th grade. The federal government urged states to adopt the standards, threatening to withhold education funds if they did not. Indiana adopted them in 2010.

Although the standards have been adopted by 45 states, they've since faced a backlash over complaints that they erode states' authority. Our Indiana legislature voted in this last session to **halt implementation** of Common Core pending re-evaluation. Apparently, Indiana's hesitation has also caused Michigan and Pennsylvania to delay implementation, and other states are watching as well.

While Indiana is meeting to re-evaluate, Jackie Walorski and others in Congress have voted to prohibit the federal government from imposing Common Core. The main argument is that a state is in the best position to set its educational standards, not the federal government.

A Common Core hearing was scheduled for Monday, August 5 at the Statehouse. People speaking pro and con were docketed from 1:30 in the afternoon to well into the evening. Watch newspapers, get online, or get on our e-mail list and we'll let you know what transpired. We will also post when future hearings are to be held. To subscribe, send an e-mail to **citizensforcommonsense@gmail.com**.

Wesco Eliminates Inheritance Tax!

This past spring, one of our state representatives from St. Joe County, Rep. Tim Wesco was able to get a bill passed to eliminate the Inheritance Tax in Indiana. Originally set to expire Jan. 1, 2022, the inheritance tax was retroactively repealed beginning Jan. 1, 2013.

"It is very exciting to see the inheritance tax being eliminated as a means to provide financial relief for Hoosiers who want to keep farms and businesses in the family," Wesco said in a news release about the legislation. "This tax served as a

reason for Hoosiers to retire elsewhere, which is a message we do not want to send to Hoosiers. We want to be encouraging to all Hoosiers who have dedicated their lives to building a business and provided for their families here. As an added benefit to this tax being eliminated, the size of government will be reduced as less tax professionals will be needed to administer this tax."

Citizens for Common Sense commends Tim Wesco for his work on this and other issues affecting all of us.

At the national level ----

If you are not on our e-mail list, you are really missing all of the last-minute announcements. We have had some great conversations over the past several months about state, local and national issues! Here's a sampling of what's been on our national radar:

Farm Bill & Food Stamp Bill

People were alarmed when Congresswoman Jackie Walorski voted in favor of the Farm Bill which includes subsidies for farmers and the massive Food Stamp program. Walorski contended that Hoosier farmers need the predictability. Others argued that farmers need to be out from under government restrictions. In the end, Walorski called local group leaders including us to ask our input on splitting Food Stamps out of the Farm Bill, which we urged her to do. After the bills were split, the House Speaker did not allow amendments to the Farm Bill. The Food Stamp remains to hopefully be downsized.

Tax Reform

Our Senator Dan Coats has issued a joint statement with Democrat Senator Ron Wyden from Oregon calling for an overhaul of the tax code. Our readers are encouraged to read Americans for Prosperity's proposal for Tax Reform at <http://americansforprosperity.org/legislativealerts/tax-reform-restoring-economic-growth-through-neutrality-and-simplicity/>

NSA Bill

There were two amendments before the House. The Nugent amendment simply stated that data would not be collected on US citizens. The Amash amendment would have defunded significant portions of the NSA. After much discussion, our Congresswoman voted for Nugent and against Amash. Citizens for Common Sense subsequently surveyed its e-mail list to find out where people stood on tracing phone calls and recording phone calls.

If you don't want to miss future surveys, send an email to citizensforcommonsense@gmail.com and let us know you want to subscribe. For full-blown conversations, we plan to set up a forum on our website so people won't get swamped with emails.

Here are the results of the survey on limiting the NSA which we forwarded to Congresswoman Walorski:

How much liberty will you give up for security?

Our answer was pretty much an overwhelming "None!"

As for the 4 break-out questions:

1) If a known or suspected foreign terrorist calls into the US, do you want the NSA to be able to identify who they called without a search warrant? **64% of us feel it's okay to identify who in the US is receiving a call from a foreign terrorist without a search warrant; 36% of us want the search warrant.**

2) Once the person in the US who was called is identified, if they prove to be a NON-citizen, do you want their call records investigated without a search warrant? **50% of us feel it's okay to see who is getting phone calls from a non-citizen recipient of a foreign terrorist call without a search warrant; 50% want a search warrant for calls made by a non-citizen in the US.**

3) If the recipient of the call IS a US citizen, do you want their call records investigated without a search warrant? **96% of us do not want any further tracing of calls by a US citizen (who received a terrorist call) without a search warrant; only 4% approved**

The above questions were about phone records that only tell who was called, when, and how long the conversation lasted. We then added a 4th question about RECORDING the calls which many of the respondents had been volunteering anyway.

4) Do you want domestic phone calls, emails or other internet traffic RECORDED without a search warrant? **100% of us were against this. Two people who initially sounded like they were considering it, upon reanalysis were definitely a "No."**

*If you don't want to miss out on future surveys,
email citizensforcommonsense@gmail.com and put **SUBSCRIBE** in the header.*

CONTACT INFO

Jackie Walorski	U.S. Rep.	(574) 204-2645	http://walorski.house.gov/contact
Dan Coats	U.S. Senator	(317) 554-0750	http://coats.senate.gov/contact
Joe Donnelly	U.S. Senator	(574) 288-2780	http://donnelly.senate.gov/contact/email-joe

Indiana Senators -- phone at State House: (800) 382-9467

Joe Zakas	John Broden	Ryan Mishler	Jim Arnold	Ed Charbonneau
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Indiana House Reps. -- phone at State House: (800) 382-9841

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ST. JOSEPH COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

County Commissioners **Andy Kostielney, Dave Thomas, and Marsha McClure**
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South Bend, IN 46601 custserv@southbendin.gov

SOUTH BEND TRIBUNE

Voice of the People / South Bend Tribune / 225 W. Colfax Ave. / S.B., IN 46626 / vop@sbtinfo.com

HOW TO STOP OBAMACARE

Senators Ted Cruz and Mike Lee are trying to Defund Obamacare. They are doing so by pledging NOT to vote for a Continuing Resolution to fund the government, unless funding for ObamaCare is removed from it.

Will this shut down the government? Worst case: Essential components of government will continue, non-essentials will not.

ObamaCare is already having such a devastating effect on our economy and our healthcare that the majority of Americans want it gone. Even President Obama has acknowledged that it won't work, so he has delayed the mandate for businesses. How is this fair to us? We need to have the individual mandate repealed, too!

Please contact your Senators and Representatives to tell them that you'd rather risk a government shut-down than see ObamaCare funded. Tel them it's okay for them to vote for a Continuing Resolution as long as it DEFUNDS OBAMACARE.

Jackie Walorski	U.S. Rep.	(574) 204-2645	http://walorski.house.gov/contact
Dan Coats	U.S. Senator	(317) 554-0750	http://coats.senate.gov/contact
Joe Donnelly	U.S. Senator	(574) 288-2780	http://donnelly.senate.gov/contact

This will only work if thousands of us make these calls. Please call without delay!

Citizens for Common Sense Survey

- 1. Do you think our group ought to meet monthly?** Yes No
Comments

- 2. Would you be interested in helping with (mark your choice if any):**
 scheduling speakers/videos tracking our County & City issues
 tracking State issues and bills tracking national issues & bills
- 3. Do you think the County should pay for leaf pick-up?** Yes No
Comments

- 4. Do you think there should be a county-wide burn ban?** Yes No
Comments

Please mail responses in enclosed pre-addressed envelope – Must add stamp!