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WAKE COUNTY GOP SAYS TAXPAYERS SHOULD HAVE FINAL WORD ON CONSTRUCTION OF PROPOSED 17-STORY BUILDING

RALEIGH, N.C. – January 8, 2010 – Wake County Republican Party Chairman Claude E. Pope, Jr. is strongly urging the Raleigh City Council not to commit to the construction of a new \$205 million, 17-story public safety center without giving voters a chance to consider both the design and method of financing the project.

Pope urged the council to consider using a bond referendum for new building construction. That would give taxpayers the final word on whether to proceed with the project. Mayor Charles Meeker wants to finance construction through Certificates of Participation, which he admits would result in an 8% tax increase. Meeker has said that moving now to construct the building will save money, but Pope believes that contention is dubious, noting that capital spending backed by bond referenda typically results in lower interest rates.

“The City of Raleigh already has substantially more debt than any other local taxing unit in North Carolina -- more than seven billion dollars as of June 30, 2008, whereas the next highest is only about \$4.5 billion,” Pope said.

“How much is enough?” he asked. “How much is too much?”

The Republican chairman also noted that important questions about the building’s design remain, including proposed inclusion of luxury office suites with private bathrooms, which have been questioned by some council members. “The police and other public safety officials should have cutting edge technology and the utmost in functionality. I would not begrudge these vital public servants anything that allows them to execute their difficult assignments more effectively,” Pope said. But he also wondered whether the luxury suites, even if justifiable, would wind up being occupied by politicians instead of public safety officials, and noted that an overly extravagant and expensive design could wipe out any savings in interest “even if the Mayor is right about interest rates, which I strongly question,” Pope added.

Pope also wondered whether, given Mayor Meeker's history of spending on downtown, his 17-story plan isn't motivated as much by a desire to add to the Raleigh skyline as it is to provide necessary new facilities for the police department.

“Let the people have the final word,” Pope said. “Raleigh taxpayers deserve to have their voices heard in an official and fair capacity like a bond referendum. If the council puts forward a sound proposal, they should not fear the judgment of the voters who put them in office in the first place. Openness and transparency are always preferable to decisions made otherwise.

“The council needs to consider all approaches on how to meet the increased public safety needs of the city. Proceeding with the construction of such a costly building in haste is no way to be fiscally responsible,” Pope concluded.

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