

Let the Voters Decide On Home Rule

Fiscal problems have reopened home rule discussions in DuPage County. Home rule allows a government entity to tax, spend, and regulate beyond limits set by the State. Recently, the County Finance Committee heard a home rule presentation by (describe the guy's position rather than name) where it was stated that the only manner in which the County could obtain both a County Executive form of government and home rule power was by referendum. The presentation reiterated clear language in the Illinois Constitution, which requires that to become home rule a County must have a chief executive officer elected countywide and hold a home rule referendum. However, a county cannot merely declare itself as having a chief executive officer. State law, reinforced by case law, mandates that voters must have their say. To date the DuPage County Board has not put a question about a County Executive form of government or home rule referendum on the ballot.

Despite plain Constitutional language, case law, and expert testimony, Chairman Schillerstrom is opposed to asking voters for home rule power. The Daily Herald reported that the Chairman would rather have a judge declare DuPage County home rule.

Becoming home rule will absolutely help the County address budget problems. Home rule power also allows for other privileges, such allowing the County to bypass state procurement laws. However, obtaining a back-door judicial determination is not a legally sufficient option. The voters must have their say because of the significant change in powers that the County would have. What is a more basic principle of democracy than voters approving the degree of power a government entity has to impose taxes, regulations, and to spend taxpayer money?

There are valid reasons why DuPage County would benefit from home rule. Rather than circumventing his constituency through a legally insufficient avenue, Chairman Schillerstrom and the County Board should bring the issue to the people.