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Friday, April 11, 2008

Give people concrete information

My take on the airport

By MIKE STOCK |

This letter is addressed to the JET group and others who are putting together the pro-airport tax newspaper supplements, display ads and letters which most of us have seen by now.

The general arguments settle around the largest companies with corporate planes who use the Tulip City airport and support a range of about 20,000 jobs through the transport of clients, sales staff, support staff and freight.

These discussion points are fine, and quite valid. However, you are hammering home the same message over and over: the same few, large companies with the planes are supporting jobs through their use of the airport, so we need to pass a millage to help their planes keep flying.

This message is valid, but vague at best. If you want to address the tax base of the Holland/Zeeland areas, you must provide some concrete examples of how the airport can benefit your neighbor in 3 to 5 years. For example, how many new jobs will be created as a result of this tax increase? Will your next door neighbor ever be able to pick up Aunt Millie from the airport? Will there ever be small regional airlines flying into Tulip City? What if I have a small business and want to fly in clients of my own -- is there support for regional air taxis in the 3 to 5 year plan? These are goals most people would support, I think, but they're never mentioned. How will this millage benefit me, even if I have to wait 3 to 5 years?

The pro-tax discussions mention improvements to the existing airport, but the runway was just extended. Please tell us what you plan on improving and how it will make the existing infrastructure better/safer and different from what has been done.

Also, you had best remember while you send out your materials that these companies are the large manufacturing base of this region -- and they have had plenty of turnover in the past several years. A large percentage of your audience is past-employees of these same

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companies and acting with compassion towards them, rather than shouting at them might be beneficial to your cause. And many of these families are having difficulty financially, suffering joblessness or foreclosure.

Give the population some concrete examples we can embrace. We all like to support our community. But please, no more brochures and ad copy touting the same five companies with planes -- we know, we get it. We already support them. What we need is to see how this millage will benefit others, directly. Personally, I don't begrudge the \$10, but your communications are coming across as arrogant and elitist, which is weakening your support.

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