



HOME BUILDERS ASSOCIATION

NEWSBRIEF



The Official Newsletter of the Home Builders Association of Greater Southwest IL

The Voice of the Homebuilding and Remodeling Industries in Southwest Illinois. Representing Bond, Calhoun, Clinton, Greene, Jersey, Madison, Monroe, Randolph and St. Clair Counties

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Meet the Candidate Night

Brought to you by the HBA Political Action Committee

Article written by Rachel Davis with the Edwardsville Intelligencer



Representative Reitz, Mark Vogt with Vogt Builders, Mark Fulford with Fulford Homes & Ron Heath with 2-10 Warranty



Lieutenant Governor Candidate Jason Plummer



St. Clair County Board Member John West, St. Clair County Assessor Candidate Edwin Cockrell, Matt Lanter with Fulford Homes, Herschel Johnson, Tim O'Donnell & Steve Wilke with Wilke Window & Door

The Home Builders Association of Greater Southwest Illinois held a Meet the Candidates forum at VFW Post 5691 in Collinsville, for the purpose of dialoguing with state and local government officials about Illinois' economy and the state of the building industry.

Around 80 HBA members attended to network and talk with visiting officials from both the Republican and Democratic parties. These included Lieutenant Governor Candidate Jason Plummer; State Senator Kyle McCarter of District 58; State Representatives Jay Hoffman, Thomas Holbrook and Dan Reitz; State Representative Candidates Dwight Kay and Joseph Avellone; Madison County Board Members Jean Myers and Allan Schuler; St. Clair County Board Member John West; and St. Clair County Assessor Candidates Edwin Cockrell and Jennifer Gomric Minton.

The mission statement of the HBA is "To be the voice of the homebuilding and remodeling industry in southwest Illinois." With roughly 250 members, they are the largest homebuilders association in the state, offering consumer information regarding builders, remodelers, developers, and general questions on home purchases and improvements. "There's a lot more to our association besides advocacy for affordable housing," said Tracy Butler, HBA Executive Officer. "We offer a lot of education to our members, a lot of networking."

Thursday night's meeting was all about connecting HBA members with those in government who can help them—or hear them out. "We had a great group of candidates that showed up to support our industry," Butler said.

Those in local government came with ideas and concerns about the specific, local needs of Madison and St. Clair Counties. "I think the most important issue we're facing right now as a whole, and county wide, is the levy issue," said Madison County Board Member Allan Schuler (D-Granite City). "I think getting our levies built back up and getting them recertified is probably the biggest issue."

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Architectural flaws in the 1940s levies have led to the threat of decertification, which means mandatory flood insurance for residents in certain areas. Schuler said that if that happens, "there won't be development there, because no one wants to build where they have to spend ten thousand dollars a year on flood insurance." Obviously to the HBA, this is a big issue. "It's not just a river bottoms problem. The people up here in this particular area of Collinsville and Glen Carbon and other areas, they depend on the river bottoms for their drinking water and also their sewers."

Fellow board member Jean Myers (R-Troy) agreed. "We don't want people to lose their homes because they can't afford flood insurance," she said. Madison, St. Clair and Monroe Counties have banded together to create the Southwestern Illinois Flood Prevention District, a group which hopes to get the levies fixed and recertified within a five-year period.

Schuler and Myers both agreed that the county is in the midst of other problems as the financial crisis in Illinois worsens. "Of course we're having tough times right now," said Myers. "We all know that. But what we're doing is helping to meet these needs so when the economy does turn, we'll be in a good position to hit the ground running." As part of the Planning and Development Committee, Myers says every department in the county is working to cut spending and serve the public. "The county has been



Madison County Board
Members Jean Meyer &
Allan Schuler

very diligent about reducing the budget. Each department has been challenged."

"We're tightening our belt, there's no question about it," said Schuler, and added that the county is cutting their budget for the second year in a row. Some departments have taken a hit, and vacant jobs may not be filled until the economy turns around. Nevertheless, Schuler believes things will improve if everyone

can hang on. "The future of economic development—and development as a whole in the St. Louis Metropolitan Area—lies on the east side of the river," he said.

State Representative Jay Hoffman (D-Collinsville) also has hope for the area. He says his work on infrastructure, such as the improvements to IL 159, IL 157 and I-255, are in expectation of better times ahead. He says improving infrastructure is key "so that when we begin to get out of the recession, Illinois and our area in particular are going to be the leading area in economic growth." He says the HBA cares about the same issues—infrastructure, education, and quality of life issues such as parks and bike trails—things he says will make the area economically viable once the state gets back on its feet.

On a larger scale, says Hoffman, there are things Illinois can do to keep small businesses—like those involved with HBA—thriving. "Incentives to get people back to work... creating an environment that makes it financially feasible to put people to work is key." He says this can come through both state and federal funds.

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State
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Jay Hoffman

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State
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Dwight Kay



Meet the Candidate Night *(continued)*

Much of the talk at the forum centered around state government as a whole—where it's gone wrong, and how it can be improved to help Illinois in general, and small communities in particular. Many of the state-level candidates see small businesses as having an important role to play in the recovery of Illinois.

"Homebuilders are important because, obviously, they provide jobs, and jobs right now are at a premium in Illinois" said State Representative Candidate Dwight Kay (R-Glen Carbon), who is running for District 112. "We've lost so many to our neighboring states. The simple truth is that in the last 30 months we've lost nearly 400,000 jobs, 650 jobs per day. We need to keep these guys working and employing people, because until Illinois changes its policy and its decisions on jobs and businesses, we're going to continue to lose them. So I'm here to show support [for the HBA] and tell them what needs to be done in Springfield."



State Representative Candidate
Joseph Avellone (left) and
State Representative
Thomas Hollbrook (right)

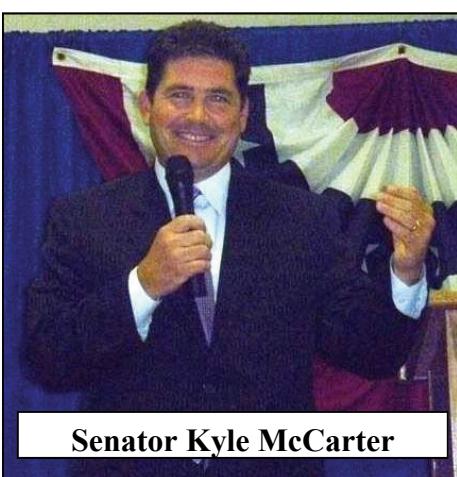
Another candidate concerned with Illinois' rapid job loss is Jason Plummer, a 28-year-old Edwardsville resident who is running for the position of Lieutenant Governor on the Republican ticket. Plummer is a strong advocate for the voice of the younger generation, both in business and politics, but it worries him how many college graduates flee the jobless Illinois economy. His visit to Collinsville is part of what he calls his Border Community Tour—a circuit that takes him to Illinois communities which border other states. He talks to businesspeople in these communities to get their take on why jobs are going over the state lines.

"What the Border Community Tour is all about," Plummer said, "is listening to people. A lot of politicians think that they have all the answers; all the answers are within that dome in Springfield, Illinois. And I think differently. I think the answers are out there with the people in the trenches on a day-to-day basis."

Plummer says he has heard dozens of personal stories from business owners who are suffering—because of workers' compensation issues, taxes, and other government failings. "We're meeting with small business owners and workers, talking about why their businesses and their jobs are at a competitive disadvantage to those across the border." The goal is to use these personal stories to get a handle on how to fix the Illinois economy in practical ways.

"The Homebuilders Association is a core industry," he said. "The homebuilding industry is a huge chunk of the economy, both local and statewide, and deserves our support. When you look at the macro perspective of the campaign, it's all about jobs and the economy. This is important to the economy, so it's important to me."

The last individual to address the meeting was Senator Kyle McCarter (R-Lebanon). He had hopeful words for the HBA, but a harsh message regarding state government. "There are some solutions to [these problems]. They're not as complicated as people think: we spent more than we had coming in." He lamented what he called a "lack of discipline" in Springfield, and said that since this economic downturn, state government has not been living within its means.



Senator Kyle McCarter

But he applauded the quiet, hard work of those like the HBA members who continue to work and contribute to the economy. He said that the government could feel safe in freeing up regulations for homebuilders and letting them conduct business as they see fit. "I trust risk-takers like you," he said.

Full audio recording of this event and the candidates comments can be found at www.hbaswil.org under the "news" tab