

THE Durango HERALD

County commissioners unite to oppose collective bargaining

Monday, May 2, 2022

Montezuma and La Plata counties share a border, some telecommunications and health services, and a regional economy centered on our beautiful landscapes such as the La Plata Mountains and Mesa Verde National Park. And now, we share in a united front to oppose SB22-230, proposed state legislation that is being considered by the General Assembly. It would implement a top-down collective bargaining obligation on county governments across Colorado and could jeopardize our working relationships with our employees. Collective bargaining (a required negotiation process that happens after a workforce votes to unionize) has the potential to create an adversarial relationship between government and its workforce, instead of the cooperative relationship we currently share.

This bill only covers county governments and that makes no sense to us as your elected county commissioners.

Collective bargaining will necessitate additional staff time, legal resources, human resources expertise, dispute resolution costs and, ultimately, higher personnel costs. A conservative estimate is that an additional \$3,000,000 to \$4,000,000 per year would be needed just to set the program up in Montezuma County and \$6,000,000 to \$8,000,000 in La Plata County. Counties are primarily funded by property, oil and gas, and sales taxes, and this bill offers no money to help counties offset these expenses. Thus, we would have to cut into essential services to pay for it or raise taxes.

Counties, just like businesses and your local households, are facing increased operating costs due to many complex factors including supply chain issues. Unlike the Front Range counties and bigger cities, we don't have a deep bench to pull from to cover essential services for residents in the case of strike.

To be clear, counties do not oppose collective bargaining as a policy tool - in fact several counties around the state have embraced collective bargaining and it is working well in those jurisdictions. But, those are local decisions that should be left up to county commissions and their employees.

We are two diverse counties that work together on many things for the good of our residents. Mandating policy from the top-down and at the 11th hour in the legislative session will have dramatic impacts for our counties. We urge a no vote and ask you to write your senator and representative.

Jim Candelaria, Kent Lindsay, Gerald Koppenhafer
Montezuma County commissioners

Matt Salka, Marsha Porter-Norton, Clyde Church
La Plata County commissioners