

by Scott P. Richert

## Small Is Beautiful

The City of Rockford is broke. That does not mean, of course, that it is insolvent or bankrupt; after all, it is rather hard for any government with the power to tax to end up in that position (though some occasionally do). Like so many other cities of its size today, however, Rockford has projected expenses for the coming fiscal year that far outstrip expected revenues from taxes and other sources—in other words, what any father, looking at his household budget, would define as broke.

The power to tax, however, provides the city with a different set of options from those available to the father. In this current economic slump, the head of a household does not have many ways of increasing its revenue; he may be lucky simply to keep his job. By necessity, he either has to cut expenses (the prudent, though possibly painful, course) or to borrow to make ends meet, pushing those expenses further into the future to a time when, he hopes, he will have a little more cash in his pocket. The city, however, can generate more revenue through a simple majority vote and, thus, avoid the issue entirely. And that, unfortunately, is what Rockford's aldermen have chosen to do.

On Monday, February 3, the council voted to increase the telephone tax by 500 percent (from one percent to six percent), to tack a five-percent tax onto the city's water service, and to increase garbage-collection fees by \$24 per year. While the city did delay about \$3 million in capital purchases and laid off a total of 29 full- and part-time employees to close its \$7.5 million budget gap, the aldermen failed to address the underlying causes of skyrocketing city expenses. Four of the fourteen aldermen voted against the telephone tax; only two voted against the water and garbage fees.

Ald. Frank Beach delivered an impassioned speech, arguing that the city had failed to consider all possible cuts and that the tax increases would only compound the problem by further impoverishing Rockford taxpayers and driving businesses (which have to pay the increased telephone tax on every line) out of Rockford, and, a week earlier, Ald. Pat Curran had pointed out that unionized

city employees were not being asked to give up anything—even a portion of their raises—to help balance the budget. (Rockford taxpayers fund the healthcare of each city employee to the tune of \$12,000 per year—a plan that far outstrips those of most private-sector workers.) Most of the “debate,” however, sounded like the Bush administration's rhetoric over its Iraq policy, with alderman after alderman declaring that the “easy thing to do” would be to vote against the tax increases and congratulating himself for his “courage” in raising taxes in order to maintain the current level of city services.

There were some interesting moments, however, that the local media failed to notice. Ald. David Johnson, a Republican, announced that he would be voting for the tax increases because, he argued, he had no choice: The cost of city services cannot be significantly trimmed because the growth in those costs has been driven largely by the expansion of Rockford through annexation. Over the last ten years, during which Rockford's population rose by 7.7 percent (or 10,689 residents), the size of the city has increased from approximately 45 square miles to approximately 60, an increase of 33 percent.

The problem, as Alderman Johnson later acknowledged in an interview, is that the cost of fire and police protection, of snow removal and street repair, and even of water, sewer, and garbage collection, may be driven more by geography than by population growth. Rockford police today need to cover one third again as many miles as they did in 1990, and firemen need to be prepared to respond to emergencies in areas farther removed from existing stations. Much of the cost of garbage collection is road time, and the cost of providing and maintaining water and sewer lines depends less on the number of houses connected than on the length of the mains and the sewers.

Because deannexation is not really an option, there is no easy answer to the current budget shortfall, but there is an obvious step that the council could take to keep from making it worse: Quit annexing unincorporated areas of Winnebago County. Responding to a multitude of



studies over the past two decades that show that, in the long run, the costs of annexation usually outweigh the additional tax revenues, cities across the United States have taken a more cautious approach to annexation, often requiring developers (who typically make the annexation requests) to pay for a cost-benefit analysis before they will consider an annexation proposal.

Here in Rockford, however, at the same meeting where the tax hikes were approved, the council voted 14-0 to approve one annexation proposal and 13-1 to approve another. (Bob Greene, the Democratic alderman from Ward 1, the fastest-growing ward in the city, voted against annexing property that would be added to his ward.) In light of those votes, it is hard to believe that the council is taking the budget crisis seriously.

With the highest crime rate in the entire state (higher even than Chicago's!) and property taxes that are still, even after the end of the school-desegregation lawsuit, some of the highest in the country, Rockford needs to get its priorities straight. Yes, refusing to annex more property will undoubtedly slow down development, but, since the American Farmland Trust consistently ranks Northern Illinois as one of the most endangered farming areas in the country, that may not be such a bad thing. And with Rockford now occupying about 12 percent of the geographic area of Winnebago County, developing new population centers—and new centers of political power—may benefit the county as a whole.

Just a little over a week after the council meeting, the local Gannett paper reported that Aurora may have surpassed Rockford as the second-largest city in Illinois. I think we should let the title go. What Rockford needs now is a healthy contingent of Little Rockfordians. c

## Letter From the Russian Federation

by Wayne Allensworth

### A Place Called Home



Kazan was preparing for her 1,000-year anniversary last August when Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived to address the World Tatar Congress in what once had been the center of a Tatar khanate. The goal of the congress was the “spiritual unification” of the Tatars, scattered across Russia and the world. I do not know whether President Putin paused to reflect on the lengthy and bloody history that has bound the Tatars and the Russians to this same land, though his somewhat tense reception at the congress, and the questions it raised about Russian citizenship and the old problems of ruling a multinational state, probably reminded him that all the tactful utterances he could make would not change history or alter the fundamental loyalties of the Tatars.

The Tatars—a Turkic, Muslim people of the vast Russian steppe—succeeded the dreaded Mongols as the scourge of old Rus. Their repeated invasions of Moscow’s realm inflicted heavy losses on what had become the center of medieval Russia. By the middle of the 16th century, the various Tatar khans in Kazan, Astrakhan, and the Crimea began coordinating raids that won them booty and slaves, wreaking havoc and terror on the Slavs. Thus, in 1551, Czar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible), launched a sustained offensive against the Tatar khanates. After attacking the Crimean Tatars and the forces of their ally, the Turkish sultan, Ivan advanced on Kazan. After a six-week siege, his forces used gunpowder to blast through the city’s fortifications, storming and conquering it in a swift, bloody battle. Princes Mikhail Vorotynsky and Andrey Kurbsky led the first detachments into the city, winning the bitter battle and themselves a place in Russian history.

Ivan the Terrible would win his own place in history, chiefly for his brutality,

his war on the Russian nobles, and the expansion of both the territory and the administrative mechanisms of the state. Some would later claim that the Georgian bandit Joseph Stalin fancied himself Ivan’s true successor, even as he prudently invoked the symbols and history of old Russia to mobilize the masses in the “Great Patriotic War” (World War II) and to justify his own rule. To this day, the Man of Steel is remembered by some nationalists as the “red czar” and a great Russian patriot.

Ivan had answered the national question the only way he knew how: “If one people must dominate, then it must be mine.” Stalin followed suit, answering Lenin’s political query “*Kto Kovo?*” (roughly, “Who will dominate whom?”) in an unforgettable way. Many Russians still cannot understand the difference.

The thorny problems of history, national identity, and the question of common citizenship for Tatars and Russians would not go away during Putin’s trip to the provinces. Those who did remember their history must have smiled when, during an informal meeting with journalists, Putin noted, without a trace of irony, that Kazan had once been a center of trade for Russians, Scandinavians, Arabs, and Tatars and that the city, now rediscovering its Islamic and Turkic identity, “must serve as an example of religious and inter-ethnic peace, well-being and accord.” It was easy for him to say, since, in this instance, the Russians had been the victors.

In spite of Putin’s shallow sermonizing on peace and accord, the friction between Kazan and Moscow had begun even before his arrival and did not let up during his visit. Tatar President Mintimer Shaymiyev had told the congress that he would fight what he called Moscow’s attempts at recreating a unitary state—that he, as leader of the Tatar people in Russia and around the world, would fight any attempts to diminish Tatarstan’s hard-won sovereignty, including the republic’s right to a separate Tatar citizenship and to be recognized as an autonomous entity within—or, as an earlier version of the Tatar constitution put it, “associated with”—the Russian Federation. The preservation of the Tatar republic, its peculiar statehood, and the controversial provisions of its constitution, Shaymiyev intoned, provided the Tatar nation with the

“structures necessary for developing our language and culture.” The Tatars were, after all, Russia’s second-largest nationality, with about five million people—and the Tatar president complained loudly for the benefit of local media that Moscow’s census-takers were planning to divide the Tatars into various subgroups, artificially diminishing both their numbers and their political clout.

Shaymiyev also mentioned the threat globalization presented to national identity, stating that “we cannot allow the Tatar nation to be dissolved in a globalist flood.” (Moscow was attempting to join the World Trade Organization.) He further appealed to the other non-Russian peoples of the federation—particularly his “brother Bashkirs”—to join the good fight against the encroachments of the “center” and to enhance the national republics’ status. The Tatar leader, who has near-dictatorial powers, prudently did not mention the flow of money from Islamic organizations within Tatarstan to Chechen insurgents, something that has irritated Moscow for years and has stimulated the “center’s” efforts to rein in the overly independent Tatars.

The delegates at the congress were every bit as aggressive as Shaymiyev in stating their complaints: Some raised the census issue; others, the question of quotas for representatives of non-Russian nations in the state apparatus; and another broached the delicate question of whether Muslim women could wear their headscarves for ID photos.

Putin was tactful but did not back away from any of Moscow’s stated intentions concerning non-Russian republics: He insisted that Tatarstan modify the offensive sovereignty and citizenship clauses in her constitution and even politely insisted that Russian ID documents would be difficult to use if faces were obscured by headscarves. He conceded that Moscow should support the efforts of Tatars to institute the study of their native language, but he stated that he would resist efforts to impose any quota system on state appointments. Putin, however, became noticeably irritated by one delegate’s contention that it was difficult to be a Tatar—to be conscious and protective of his identity and to raise his children as Tatars—outside the national republic. Putin sharply replied, “So, it’s not easy to be a Tatar in Bashkor-