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Rockford Area Realtors recommend ‘no’ vote on Home Rule referendum

ROCKFORD, IL, January 30, 2018 – After conducting a research-based analysis to understand the strengths and weaknesses of Home Rule in municipalities across Illinois, Rockford Area Realtors today recommended residents of Rockford vote ‘no’ on the upcoming Home Rule referendum in March.

The Realtor Association cited four main reasons for their ‘no’ vote recommendation:

1. Home Rule taxes disproportionately hurt working and low-income families hardest. Home Rule allows municipalities to borrow as much as needed and raise many taxes, all without direct voter input. This means more costs for residents, especially senior citizens and middle- to low-income households, who struggle to pay current taxes.
2. Home Rule cities across Illinois have suffered from risky ventures. A study by the *Chicago Tribune* found that numerous cities have gotten deep into “big debt” over projects. Home Rule “power can be used to benefit the politically connected, nearly bankrupt towns and stick a generation with IOUs for which they had no direct say,” according to the newspaper.
3. Illinois’ Home Rule lacks fundamental checks and balances. Residents in Home Rule municipalities have little chance to vet new taxes.
4. Home Rule taxation possibilities are virtually endless. Home Rule City Governments can enact a multitude of taxes including food and beverage, medical appliance, gasoline and sales tax.

“Weighing the pros and cons of Home Rule, we recommend the residents of Rockford vote no on Home Rule,” Steve Bois, CEO, Rockford Area Realtors, said. “Our utmost concern is the negative economic effects of Home Rule experienced in other Illinois communities and the financial risks Home Rule presents.

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Realtors also raised two additional ‘sticking points’ about the Home Rule legislation. “A vote for Home Rule doesn’t release Rockford from Springfield’s authority,” commented Conor Brown, Governmental Affairs Director, Rockford Area Realtors, “Home Rule cities cannot escape state regulations. They just add to it.”

Another concern is the lack of a concrete plan to reduce Rockford property taxes. “The main tax issue facing Rockford residents is property taxes,” Brown said. “There is no real plan to reduce property taxes. Even if there was a plan to lower property taxes, there is no guarantee that the plan would ever be realized. We have seen too many Home Rule governments across the state increase property taxes.”

Bois said that the Association’s “deep dive” into reviewing Home Rule communities across the state clearly showed Realtors that “Home Rule communities do not work better.”

Bois added, “We want Rockford to be an attractive place for businesses and residents to live, grow and prosper. Unfortunately, the research shows Home Rule runs counter to that ideal.”

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