

County jail sales tax proposition passes

By Jessica Miller
Staff Writer

A sales tax will fund operations and maintenance of Garfield County Detention Facility after voters approved a continuance Tuesday night.

The proposition passed by a margin of 4,728-3,086, or 60.51 percent in favor.

“I’m very thankful to the citizens of Garfield County for putting their faith in the county government, and into operation of the jail. It was something that was needed,” Sheriff Jerry Niles said. “When I first took office four years ago, it was one of my five or six goals that I wanted to complete in my first term, and so far everything that I put down as a goal to task myself with has come true. I’m very thankful.”

The one-quarter percent tax will be on the books for 15 years, Garfield County officials have said. Initially approved by voters in 2002, the tax covered the cost of constructing the facility. The original tax will end Dec. 31, 2017, and the new tax will start Jan. 1, 2018, and continue until Dec. 31, 2033.

Niles previously said an expansion of the jail would be possible in anticipation of an increase in incarceration, which he expects if State Questions 780 and 781 pass.

“It will make a lot of current felonies misdemeanors,” he said, explaining people sentenced to incarceration for misdemeanor offenses must serve their sentences in the county jail, rather than prison. “Even though those questions are called criminal justice reform resolutions, all they’re doing is basically an attempt to reduce state prison population. It’s, in turn, going to push people to be sentenced to county jail terms.” Initially approved by voters in 2002 — after the state threatened to close the former county jail — the

tax is used for the repayment of debt from constructing the new facility on South 10th, as well as for operations. Bond payments for the construction will end in spring 2018, but officials said the county needs the sales tax for jail operations. Some of the additional funds generated will be used to help pay for transport and court vehicles, Niles said.

Right now, one sheriff’s office vehicle is getting to ready to be retired, with 210,000 miles. Another vehicle is right at 190,000 miles. The fleet for work release also needs new vehicles — with 250,000 miles on a van, and two other vans and a car that are all approaching 200,000 miles.