



**Office of the Metropolitan Council  
Matt Watson, District 11**

**COUNCIL ON AGING TAX VOTE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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BATON ROUGE – June 15, 2017

Why did I abstain?

It is obvious from my personal experience during the campaign and from reviewing the Legislative Audit that unethical activity was present on the part of the COA leading up to the election. Since then, I have done my own research, as well as consulted legal experts on election law, and found no laws currently on the books call for disqualification of the results of that vote given we were more than 60 days past the election. Remember, there could easily come a day when the shoe is on the other foot. Do we want to set a precedent so that what is deemed as lawful election results could be thrown out no matter what the proposal, tax or issue? If so, how much faith can we continue to have in the election process and by extension, democracy? I swore to uphold the constitution of our great state and country; I could not see myself voting against the will of the voters, even if I disagreed with their choice.

However, I have had extreme reservations as to the ability of the current director to run COA ethically or with any business acumen. For this reason, my colleagues and I spent nearly an hour debating additional restrictions and voted to put safeguards into the COA Cooperative Endeavor Agreement to protect both the taxpayers and the seniors that COA is supposed to serve. I am pleased with the great progress we made in this regard and I know the revised agreement will create greater transparency in the use of funds and operations. The revised CEA increases COA accountability by including the following: Metro Council will receive quarterly financial statements. It mandates that at least one of the COA board members be a councilperson. COA board meetings must be videotaped and made public. Every single staff member must be required to go through ethics training. Now there is now no way for a COA board member, the director, or staff to act unethically and plead ignorance.

Long story short, the vote to levy the tax needed seven votes to pass. Even with the safeguards we put into place, the history of the COA under the current director's leadership made it impossible for me to vote in good conscience with the other seven. On the other hand, I could not see myself voting against the outcome of an uncontested election. I would have liked to have had the option to defer to the next Metro Council meeting so we could have had discussions with the new COA board members, but that was not an option. This is obviously far from a perfect situation to many people, but I wish the new members of the Council on Aging board success in the very difficult but important job of righting the ship at COA. I hope they are all committed to the mission to always serve the seniors, not themselves.

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