



# THE TAOS NEWS

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## Editorial

### **Taxpayers caught in the middle of annexation controversy**

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The relationship between the town and county continues its downward spiral with their continued feud over annexation of the Taos Regional Airport. The town will spend up to \$25,000 to appeal a district court ruling that negated its planned annexation.

Meanwhile the county pledged \$20,000 to fight the town's appeal although county manager Steve Archuleta said the commission would spend "whatever it costs."

And guess who is paying for an appeal and whatever it costs? Yes, taxpayers.

In December, Judge Jeff McElroy ruled the town's legal department didn't follow proper procedures when it attempted to seize the airport, plus a six-mile strip along U.S. 64 that would connect it to the town's border. For instance, McElroy said the town petitioning itself to annex an airport it owns violates due process by the New Mexico Constitution.

Taos Mayor Darren Córdova called McElroy's ruling "political," which we believe is an interesting criticism given a town election is March 4. By the way, Córdova's opponents are Town Councilor Fred Peralta and Taos County Commissioner Dan Barrone, all players in this annexation mess.

Córdova said the court ruling could impact the ability of this town, or any town, for that matter, to ever annex.

Now, let's step back when the idea of annexation was first mentioned. The town was expected to come up with a \$1.4 million match for the \$24 million runway project largely funded by the feds. What better way to come with that \$1.4 million than the gross receipts taxes generated during the runway construction project?

How about the county's offer to provide the GRTs generated by the construction project? That way annexation wouldn't be necessary.

This option made absolute sense to us.

But the mayor flatly turned it down because he said he didn't trust the county.

The county's offer was still on the table as of last week. But is it too late to come to a reasonable solution? Perhaps, since the mayor signed a contract with a lawyer five days after the Dec. 18 ruling when he told a reporter the town would not pursue an appeal.

(The mayor is permitted to approve contracts for professional services if they are under \$50,000.) Frankly, we are disheartened two governments that are supposed to be acting in the best interest of their constituents can't come to a reasonable solution without getting the lawyers involved. Certainly the \$45,000 now earmarked for legal services could be used instead toward the matching contribution.

There is no doubt making the airport's runway safer is a worthwhile undertaking. But we wish town and county officials would set aside politics and reach a conclusion for funding the airport project that doesn't put a squeeze on taxpayers.

At last week's mayoral forum, the three candidates all pledged to work more closely with other local leaders on common issues. That's an election promise they could keep today.