

Roth: Clean water, local control and Oklahomans united against SQ 777

By [Jim Roth](#), Director and Chair of the Firm's Clean Energy Practice Group. This column was [originally published in The Journal Record](#) on October 31, 2016.



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There is no question that this year's political cycle has been a particularly divisive one. On the national level, the rhetoric is ramped up to unprecedented levels, and there's a clear divide in our country that may take generations to heal.

Republicans and Democrats can't even agree with other Republicans and other Democrats; forget trying to find common ground across the aisle – unless you look at one of the state questions on the ballot in Oklahoma. Seemingly out of nowhere, a diverse coalition has emerged, and Republicans and Democrats alike are united in their opposition to State Question 777.

As you may know by now, SQ 777 is a proposed constitutional amendment that will make it virtually impossible for our Legislature, municipalities and administrative agencies to implement reasonable regulations on any aspect of the agricultural industry. No industry in Oklahoma currently enjoys this type of constitutional protection. And in my opinion, none should.

SQ 777's proponents rail against government overreach and claim it will protect farms from burdensome overregulation, but Oklahomans aren't buying it.

In fact, by preventing our local officials from having a say in future agriculture policy, SQ 777 will invite increased attention and intervention from federal regulators like the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In other words, if Oklahoma so severely restricts its ability to self-govern, the only authority left to fill the void will come from Washington, D.C. And we Oklahomans know better that the best form of government is that which is closest to the people, here at home.

Those opposing SQ 777 cite a wide range of concerns: protection of our water; making sure our laws banning cockfighting and puppy mills stay on the books; and safeguarding family farms from the havoc wreaked by corporate, foreign-owned farming operations all factor in to this unlikely band of naysayers.

And this band of naysayers is diverse and growing.

Those opposed to SQ 777 include Oklahoma City Mayor Mick

Cornett (R), Cherokee Nation Chief Bill John Baker, Coach Barry Switzer, Gov. Brad Henry (D) and Gov. David Walters (D), just to name a few. Organizations against SQ 777 include the Intertribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, League of Women Voters and Save the Illinois River.

The Cherokee County Republican Women and the Cherokee County Federation of Democratic Women have even signed a joint resolution in opposition to the proposed amendment. Now that ought to tell us all something when leaders in both parties come together to protect our Oklahoma rights.

Municipalities of all sizes from Broken Bow to Oklahoma City have voiced their concerns as have the Oklahoma Municipal League and the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments. Newspapers across the state are also urging voters to reject the proposal.

While their reasons may differ, opponents of SQ 777 are united at a time when vitriol and discord have become the norm.

I hope on Election Day the ballots will show what recent polling shows on SQ 777, Oklahomans are in agreement. We must vote no on this dangerous, unnecessary proposal.

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