

**Minutes of Meeting**  
**Meeting with Congressman Russ Fulcher**  
**August 22, 2019**  
**1:15 p.m.**

The Kootenai County Board of Commissioners: Chairman Chris Fillios and Commissioner Leslie Duncan met to discuss the following agenda item. Also present were Assessor Rich Houser, Coroner Warren Keene, M.D., KCSO Sheriff Ben Wolfinger, Prosecutor Barry McHugh, Treasurer Steve Matheson and Deputy Clerk Tina Ginorio. Also present were U.S. Congressman Russ Fulcher, Constituent Services Representative Terri Seymour, Region 1 Director Tim Kastning, Post Falls Mayor Ron Jacobson, Coeur d'Alene Mayor Steve Widmyer, and Hayden City Administrator Brett Boyer. Commissioner Bill Brooks was excused.

- A. Call to Order:** Chairman Chris Fillios called the meeting to order at 1:14 p.m.
- B. Changes to the Agenda (Action):** There were no changes to the agenda.
- C. Business (Discussion Items):**

**Round Table Discussion Regarding Issues Affecting Kootenai County**

U.S. Congressman Russ Fulcher greeted the group, expressed his respect for local office-holders and invited people to ask their questions.

KCSO Sheriff Ben Wolfinger expressed his concern about continued unfunded mandates being handed down to state and local government.

Congressman Fulcher commented that he felt the federal government had a role to play in funding certain things, despite being a conservative Republican.

Sheriff Wolfinger noted that KCSO had had a cooperative agreement with the Forest Service to provide services covering about 350,000 acres of public lands in the County since about 1977. He said when the agreement began in 1977, KCSO received about \$10,000 per year; this year KCSO received \$10,600. He pointed out that the cost of doing business had increased much more than that since 1977. Sheriff Wolfinger said his department had asked the Forest Service why the funding had not increased and was told that they had not asked for it.

Region 1 Director Tim Kastning asked the Sheriff to meet with him to describe the funding process and said he would help in any way possible. He also asked if the Sheriff would educate him on how tribal law enforcement worked.

Sheriff Wolfinger also brought up a current movement in Congress to alter banking laws to allow the proceeds from illegal drug sales to be deposited in banks. He stated that Idaho law enforcement officers saw this as a huge problem because it would benefit drug cartels. He predicted that money laundering would increase if they localized the banking laws to allow this. Sheriff Wolfinger said that he would see that information on this issue

was provided to the Congressman. Congressman Fulcher said that he would discuss this with Senator Mike Crapo next week when they next meet.

Coeur d'Alene Mayor Steve Widmyer expressed his concern about the "smoke days" Kootenai County had experienced over the last several years, particularly in August. He remarked that the smoke had a definite depressing effect on the economy, because people did not want to come to North Idaho when they could not enjoy the outdoors. He suggested that all affected parties should get together to discuss forest fire prevention and improved fire management. Mayor Widmyer reminded those assembled that the actual fires were often in Washington or Canada.

Congressman Fulcher noted that Idaho averaged about 700,000 acres burned in a year. He said a great deal of that was on federal land that had not been actively managed. He added that it had become more difficult to arrange timber harvests or clearing projects due to lawsuits and challenges. He said he thought that Governor Brad Little would be willing to work with him to try to arrange meetings with the different stakeholders.

Chairman Fillios commented that the Trump Administration was moving to de-emphasize the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) presence in Washington, D.C. and distribute them across the areas they represented. He asked if Congressman Fulcher thought this might be related to a move to sell federal land or provide for oil or gas leases.

Congressman Fulcher said he had no knowledge of those sorts of plans. He confirmed that he was aware of efforts to localize BLM.

Sheriff Wolfinger said that the Western States Sheriffs' Association had supported getting the law enforcement branch of BLM moved west, possibly to Salt Lake City.

Chairman Fillios asked if the Trump Administration was shifting more funds to fight international terrorism and assigning less to domestic terrorism.

Congressman Fulcher replied that he was not aware of a shift like that. He said resources would probably be reduced in Afghanistan and people would be watching to see if there was an increase in terrorist activity there. He added that the TAPS (Threat Assessment, Prevention and Safety) Act was under consideration, which would allow a massive increase in surveillance authorization.

Bonner County Resident Travis Thompson entered the meeting at 1:40 p.m.

Treasurer Steve Matheson asked Congressman Fulcher's impression of the urgency with which the 23 trillion dollar National Debt was viewed and where that fell in his personal priorities.

Congressman Fulcher responded that the issue did not seem to be receiving any attention at all. He voiced his personal concern regarding the National Debt and stated that he had not voted in favor of the current budget because he did not feel it was receiving the attention it needed. He added that he had brought this up to the President, in a recent

meeting, and that he was in the process of drafting some possible legislation to try to address it.

Hayden City Administrator Brett Boyer brought up the Clean Water Act in relation to the local sewer board. He said that the City of Hayden had recently had to borrow 16 million dollars for new infrastructure to treat phosphorus and other issues. He commented that they were now hearing about additional federal treatment requirements for wastewater targeting pharmaceuticals and other substances that they would not be able to satisfy with the facilities they had planned. He reminded those assembled that a large part of any improvements would need to be grant funded.

Congressman Fulcher said strong infrastructure was very important and he would try to help in any way he could.

Coroner Warren Keene, M.D. offered Congressman Fulcher data on the opioid crisis and suicide rate in Idaho. He said that Kootenai County resources were stretched thin; he had been writing to the DOJ (Department of Justice) to try to locate grant money to fund a pathology lab and other needs. Dr. Keene suggested that money be removed from sanctuary cities and repurposed. He also asked if Congressman Fulcher could look into having DOJ or Homeland Security to expand their rules on grant applications to enable smaller cities to afford necessary improvements. He provided a letter and the statistics on Kootenai County opiate and suicide numbers to Congressman Fulcher.

Congressman Fulcher reported that he had spoken with the Idaho Medical Association yesterday and discussed the opioid crisis.

Congressman Fulcher encouraged present to communicate with him whenever they had questions or concerns.

**D. Public Comment (Discussion):** This section is reserved for citizens wishing to address the Board regarding a County-related issue. Idaho Law prohibits Board action on items brought under this section except in an emergency circumstance. Comments related to future public hearings should be held for that public hearing. There was no public comment.

**E. Adjournment (Action):** Chairman Fillios adjourned the meeting at 1:59 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

JIM BRANNON, CLERK

CHRIS FILLIOS, CHAIRMAN

BY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tina Ginorio, Deputy Clerk

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