

THE CONCERNED CITIZEN

Exposing the hard truth about Franklin County

CONCERNING ISSUE 5

Its Your Money

Does politics trump good common sense when tax dollars are involved? "The purpose of government is to enable the people ...to live in safety and happiness. Government exists for the interests of the governed, not for the governors," said Thomas Jefferson.

What happened to that goal?

Florida Tax Watch says Franklin County is the 6th highest in spending and has the 5th highest tax revenues per capita in Florida. That's terrible! Neighboring Gulf County rates 17th in both categories and Wakulla is 56th and 57th. It is very bad to be near the top in spending and taxes!

Big costs that affect everyone here (especially those on a fixed income who must do their shopping in county) are sales and fuel taxes for vehicles and boats. Our county levies a 1% local option sales tax plus a \$0.05 per gallon local option sales tax, a 1% healthcare tax, and will soon present a proposal to voters asking for an additional 0.5% tax for Indigent Care. Local taxation numbers should matter to all of us.

Our local spending and taxation rates compare more closely to urban Leon County rather than to nearby rural counties. Why is that? We have no vast array of services provided by our County. We have but a single traffic light. We have few county maintained roads. Our big bridges are state-maintained. Yet, most of our county departments and Constitutional Offices operate at higher costs per capita than similar-sized counties. True, we have many dedicated workers in Franklin County, but costs here are out of whack.

Each elected official knows that local people will be hurt with the latest proposed 8% tax increase. This latest 8% real increase



DID YOU KNOW OUR LOCAL SPENDING AND TAXATION RATES COMPARE MORE CLOSELY TO URBAN LEON COUNTY RATHER THAN TO NEARBY RURAL COUNTIES?

in taxes should be loudly protested by those to be taxed as simply unacceptable. But citizen complaints are ignored; those from dependent co-workers are not. It is hard for a public official to say "no" to their compatriots. Demands from those workers inside the government – that government which our elected officials are paid to supervise and control and manage – are difficult to ignore. Such demands often show disregard for the taxpayers who must ultimately pay for them.

County politics favor locals with deep roots. Yet, the long-term, best interests of all citizens, including multi-generational, newer long timers, recent residents and even visitors should be of fundamental importance to everyone. Almost 80% of ad valorem taxes are paid by people who aren't residents, or don't have deep local roots. "Great! That's the way it should be," you say. But, that 80% figure does not tell the entire story. Ad valorem taxes to our local governmental agencies are derived from a millage rate applied to property values, less exemptions. In addition, the Save Our Homes amendment protects homesteaded citizens from rapid rises in property taxes by limiting their annual increases. So, a property's actual or "just" value may be dramatically different than its assessed value. When property values were rapidly depreciating, most homesteaders did not see big tax reductions because they had not caught up with their properties real value. When the market went flat, they were paying less than the official "just

value." When property values rise again, delayed higher taxes will eventually be assessed and they will have to be paid.

Our elected leaders should be asking; "How can we reduce taxes on everyone and still provide needed services?"

By actually controlling costs and creating policies that improve the lot of citizens and property owners of Franklin County, we can grow the 'County Tax Digest,' which represents the total value of all properties. Only then can millage rates be decreased, thus lowering taxes for all. Our county and cities must encourage and support additional growth, developing long-term viability to compare favorably with neighbor counties. Visionary policies that encourage resource protection, residential, commercial, light industrial and our seafood industry which will 'lift all boats' is the better answer our local "governors" should initiate and develop. Sadly, such vital planning is absent in elected leadership.

Carefully watching the process of how government taxes and works is good for everyone. Jefferson understood the danger of leaders who forget their real purpose when he wrote; "...Government exists for the interests of the governed..."

Let's remind the "governors" in Franklin County that tax money is our money, not theirs.

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