

Who's Driving the Property Tax Boat? Local Government is!

Everyone can relate to the story of the little boy who gets into the cookie jar, and when caught by his mother with crumbs all over his face and shirt cries, "It wasn't me"!

It was this anecdote that came to my mind as I observe the reaction to the property tax outrage of taxpayers, by members of local government. If your mayor or council member has pointed the finger at someone else, I'd take a look at the property tax cookie jar right away.

Actions by state government have certainly added to the complicated, arbitrary, and capricious nature of the property tax system in Indiana. There is much the state can do to fix this situation but the job must begin and end with your neighbors holding local elected office.

Speaking as a local elected council member in Indiana with eight years of experience in the job, I strongly assert to Hoosier taxpayers that the driving force, the primary reason for the substantial increases in property tax is your local government, run by your local elected officials.

Why is this? First, and most importantly, it is the unending, insatiable, ever increasing demand for your money. This demand never goes down; it always goes up. Many local government officeholders have a limitless list of reasons why they always need more of your money, and why you don't. They're wrong.

Adding insult to the property tax injury are the additional levies sought by local government outside state imposed limits; increases or shifts in fees without a corresponding decrease in taxes; the shift in who pays the money, courtesy of abatements; direct payments and loan guarantees to special interests; the substantial hidden tax increases made possible by TIF districts. All this is courtesy of your local government. They are the reason that your property tax doesn't go up 4-5%, but increases by double digits or more.

Local income taxes were sold to citizens on the premise that they would decrease property taxes. They did precious little to accomplish this and much to increase the frenzy of local government spending.

There comes a point where enough is enough with regard to taxation. I reached that level quite a number of years ago. I hope that many more are there now, since receiving their tax statements and then glancing at their paychecks.

The answer does not lie in electing superior or smarter people to office who will "do better". There are plenty of good, smart people running for or holding office.

The answer is to limit government to only those things that local government both can and should do. Quite frankly, that is not nearly as much as they attempt to do now. The Constitution of the State of Indiana confirms this.

There seems to be no end to the discussion by state and local government on how to tax citizens to operate government. What's lacking is debate on reducing the size and scope of government. If you want immediate, bipartisan, and unanimous support on a single policy question, ask this one, "Who among us Hoosiers feel they are not paying enough already in taxes"? I have yet to meet the man or woman, of any political stripe,

who sincerely believe they are not paying enough.

The problem with property taxes begins and ends with spending by local government. Property taxation must go down, and by a large amount, and that will happen when local government stops spending so much.

So what is the average taxpayer in an Indiana city or county to do?

Citizens must demand an end to special deals for some at the expense of you and your neighbors.

Citizens must demand that those who present a laundry list of their particular “good idea” show some personal responsibility and pay for it themselves; to stop using government to force others to pay.

Citizens must demand that services which are truly part of government duties be subject to the competition of the free market.

At one time in Indiana this was the norm for the average Hoosier and was what they expected and demanded of their government. The first city or county in Indiana that returns to this level will be the one to again begin to enjoy the fruits of freedom, manifested by limited government, free markets, and personal responsibility.

I hope it's mine.

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