

**January 18, 2008**

**In a few days, we as citizens will have an opportunity not often afforded voters. Amendment 1 will be on the ballot January 29 and will provide, in small part, a chance to pull the lever for a reduction in property taxes. Now, just consider for a moment exactly what this means. I suggest this speaks loudly to the notion that maybe, just maybe, some of our elected folks in Tallahassee are waking up to the fact that citizens are just a bit fed up with this property tax business after all.**

**Now, there are plenty of detractors and some make good and valid points. Yes, you could argue that it is unfair to newer property owners in that long term homeowners get to carry preferential assessments around while those who have paid more get taxed more. OK, maybe. However, remember that "Save Our Homes" is part of our state constitution and I would bet the chance that voters would take that one back is almost zero. About the same likelihood that our legislative branch will actually take serious and comprehensive action by themselves. Wanna' bet?**

**No, this is not the end all tax overhaul we need. Yes, it falls short and may seem in ways unfair to some. Yes, it is completely confusing in language. But, to leave this on the table would be a huge mistake. If Amendment 1 is not supported and approved by 60% of us, we all will have lost a great opportunity to do for ourselves what seemingly can't happen in the halls of government.**

**As one writer here the other day believes, this is not a Biblical battle of big versus small. Yes, it would logically follow that "wealthy" folks, like Donald Trump or the always nebulous large "corporation", obviously stand to save "thousands". This isn't very hard to figure out since their tax bills, in many cases, go into the millions. This is, after all, still America and what's wrong with people who promote political actions and causes they believe in and support? As an aside, I applaud the writer I'm speaking of. People who get involved in the process, regardless of their take on the issues, are essential. It is the very heart and soul of our Republic.**

**The turkey on the table is this; Property tax levies have doubled since 1997 and have increased 42% in the last three years alone. Yes, you read that right, levies have doubled in the last ten years. These increases far exceed growth in population and inflation together. The obvious question becomes; Have local government services improved by a like amount?**

**State and local governments have shown us, the taxpayers, time and again, that they themselves have little or no self control. They have agreed to budgets and spending policies to match these tremendous windfalls in revenues. Reminds one of the old drunken sailors on**

**shore leave story. Fact is, we truly had a wonderful opportunity to build reserves and plan for the future in some well thought out and responsible way.**

**Now local and state governments are screaming about budget shortfalls. Think about this just a moment. I give you a huge raise which doubles your salary. Everything goes great for a while but one day I say "times are tough and you need to take a 3-4% pay cut". Would this cause you enough hardship that the kids will be homeless and hungry? Some of the groups that purportedly represent our municipal and state employees would have you to think that kid's will go without a school and folks will just fall over in the streets for lack of emergency services. This is irresponsible, at best, and a position that I don't think those government workers would agree with. I bet you could ask them and they may have whole new take on efficiency and waste. Survey says....Leadership.**

**Most of the opponents are governmental employee unions and associations of governments. Go figure, governments have trade groups. That really has a bad sound to it, doesn't it? Taxpayers know that throwing more money at things like education just doesn't work. If it did, that would be wonderful since that is what's happening but the facts are clear, there is no direct correlation between more and more dollars and a corresponding value of public benefit. There is, however, a very clear direct correlation between more money and bigger government.**

**No, Amendment 1 is not perfect and it doesn't completely embrace the comprehensive tax reform we need. However, it is a step, maybe a baby step, in the right direction. Our elected representatives have shown they are incapable of fixing this broken wheel. There are some exceptions, thankfully. Our Bay County Commission voted to limit the county budget increase to 3% annually. That is very commendable indeed. But, by and large, government spending is clearly out of control by any measure. Numbers are numbers and double is double. Hard to hide that one.**

**Help our elected folks help themselves. Just like the households who pay these taxes, let's help them think about making choices and living within the means at hand. As a matter of fact, we the people can demand it. Smart people with names like Jefferson, Franklin, Madison and Adams paved our way Government is of the people, not the other way around.**

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