

PROPERTY TAXES AND LOCAL POLITICIANS

By Woodrow Wilcox

It is true that Governor Frank O'Bannon signed laws into effect that dramatically affected property taxes in Lake County, Indiana. Also, it is true that every state legislator from Lake County voted for the key bills that caused the dramatic increase in property taxes onto homeowners and small businesses.

But, the late governor and state legislators are not the only ones to blame for high property taxes in Lake County. It is the local elected officials of the school boards, towns, cities, townships, and county level who decide how much to spend and how much to tax. When they decide to spend, they decide to tax, also.

For some reason, in most of Indiana, local politicians are not as inclined to spend and tax as freely as politicians in Lake County, Indiana.

Lake County's local politicians don't think of property tax payers as fellow members of the community who deserve respect and fair treatment. Instead, many of Lake County's local politicians tend to treat property tax payers like doormats, serfs, or slaves.

If local politicians would just "hold the line" on spending, that would help. For example, Hammond Mayor Tom McDermott Jr. took office almost four years ago. He has increased the city's budget by millions of dollars every year that he has been in office. In fact, McDermott has increased the Hammond city annual budget by about THIRTY MILLION DOLLARS since he took office. So, Hammond is taxing and spending THIRTY MILLION DOLLARS more per year than before McDermott took office.

Do the math. If there are ten thousand homes in Hammond and the Hammond city budget were THIRTY MILLION DOLLARS less than it is and you spread the savings just among the ten thousand home owners, EACH HAMMOND HOMEOWNER WOULD SAVE THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS ON PROPERTY TAXES THIS YEAR!

Here is my point. Local politicians bear much of the responsibility for high property taxes. When local politicians don't "hold the line" on spending, taxes go up. Local politicians should consider their spending carefully. When they spend without regard to what local property tax payers can afford, they persecute property owners and harm the entire community when businesses and people leave to avoid high taxes.

Written in the fall of 2007.