

9-20-17 County Judge's Article

SOMETHING'S WRONG

Something is going on in our state government that bothers me and it was perpetuated in this year's legislative session big time by those that to my way of thinking ought to know better.

It's the age old problem of centralization, more or less. It's further complicated here in Texas by the fact that our friendly helpers at the capitol in Austin want to tell us what to do at the local level and how to do it, or in some cases they want to do it for us, but they want us to pay for it with local property taxes.

On top of that, they then want to blame us for property taxes being too high, and then this year particularly they arrogantly tried to pass revenue cap legislation to control us local officials' ability to implement tax increases when necessary, as though we could not be trusted to do it responsibly.

Our feeling is that the state officials are the ones acting irresponsibly by imposing these state unfunded mandates on us locally. Let me give you a couple of good examples. This session the legislature passed and the governor approved a 13.8% statewide increase in school taxes. This is a state wide average increase, I don't know how it will specifically affect each of our school districts here in Milam County. The Texas constitution charges the state government with the responsibility for public education and I am told that the state once funded some 65 plus percent of the cost a few years ago, but this current change drops their share to only 38% and the rest must be funded with local school ad valorem taxes. That's a big hit and a big reason our local school taxes are so high and are going to be even higher.

Another example is the indigent healthcare and indigent defense that are unfunded mandates that we are now almost totally funding locally to the tune of about three quarters of a million a year which is equivalent to 5 or 6 cents of the county's 70 cent ad valorem tax rate. These started out being funded by state and federal grants but are now left to the county to be funded with your ad valorem tax dollars.

As I've stated before, there is no question that our taxes are too high, but what our state officials are trying to do is the wrong solution; in fact, they are a big part of the problem by creating unnecessary costs. You the taxpayers are right to hold me responsible for efficiently running local county government, but I can't control what these guys in Austin are pushing down on us. In my opinion we've got to all give them a wakeup call.