

9-19-18 County Judge's Article

WHERE DO YOUR TAX DOLLARS GO?

This is the gist of an article that I wrote about three years ago. I thought it would be good to go over these points with you again since I and the commissioners have been getting quite a few complaints lately about our county roads, and also considering our decision to cut about half a million dollars from our county road budget for next year due to the loss of tax revenue resulting from the Luminant shutdown and our effort to hold the county tax increase to a minimum.

Often when someone calls complaining about their county road it will be accompanied with the explanation that they pay several thousand dollars in county taxes and they don't feel that they are getting their money's worth when it comes to keeping their road maintained.

Well, let's say, for example, that you have a nice home on County Road 100 and you pay \$4,000 a year in ad valorem taxes. What do you get for your money? That's the question being asked, \$4,000 in road repairs? Not hardly.

First of all, some \$2,600 on the average of that \$4,000 is going for school taxes since on the average our school districts in Milam County have a tax rate of over \$1.35 vs. the county rate of 73 cents per \$100 of valuation (our new rate for this coming year). That leaves about \$1,400 of your tax payment for county taxes (presuming you don't pay any city taxes). Of that amount, in this coming year's budget, only 32.5% of the county's tax revenue is allocated to the commissioner's accounts (or \$455 in our example) and it will be split equally among the four precincts. So your commissioner will be allocated only about \$115 of your money, that won't fix many potholes.

The other \$945 (67.5% of the county taxes) goes to the county's General Fund which your tax dollars also must help pay for. This part of the county's responsibilities (which unfortunately in a democracy makes it your responsibility as well) include the Sheriff's Department and Jail Operations which is over 40% of the general fund budget, all the county court operations (district court, county court, and four JP courts), prosecutor's office (DA and county attorney), probation offices (adult and juvenile) indigent defense (over quarter of a million a year), indigent health care (some \$400 thousand per year), county records, maintenance of county buildings, and on and on.

The bottom line of all this is that of the taxes that you pay, only a small portion goes toward the maintenance of county roads. County government is charged with a large number of responsibilities and obligations by the state as well as local citizens that our tax dollars must cover; the road in front of your house (if you live in the country) is only a small portion of the services that your local taxes must cover.