

Tarrant County Judge
B. Glen Whitley

Let's Talk Taxes

I love living in Texas and couldn't imagine living any place else. I began a career in public service, first, as a school board member, then as County Commissioner where I had the privilege to serve with the legendary Tom Vandergriff. And when Judge Vandergriff retired, I was extremely honored to succeed him as Tarrant County Judge.

Across the state we have over 20,000 local elected officials. In my opinion, the great majority of these public servants spend their time making the best use of their constituent tax dollars to provide the services their citizens expect.

Since 2006, Empower Texans and many of their followers have portrayed local elected officials as liberal out of control spenders. They have continuously claimed we are overtaxed and have been experiencing skyrocketing property taxes. In my opinion, both of these statements are false. Let me tell you why.

First, let's talk about the belief of being overtaxed. The property taxes we pay fund the services you and I receive from our state and local governments. These include public education, public safety, public health, road and bridge maintenance, courts, libraries, parks, playgrounds, and senior centers just to name a few.

In Texas, we primarily pay for these services through property, gas and sales taxes. We don't pay, and I pray never will, a state personal income tax. According to the Tax Foundation, Texas ranks 29th among states when comparing total state and local tax dollars collected. While this is a favorable ranking, you might ask whether this considers the low cost of living we enjoy in Texas. The Tax Policy Center answers this question by looking at total state and local tax dollars collected as a percentage of personal income,

which ranks Texas even lower at 37th. This just reinforces how effective and efficient your state and local officials are with the tax dollars you provide.

In my opinion, we are not overtaxed, but you be the judge!!

Now, let's address the claim of skyrocketing property taxes. When Empower Texans describes skyrocketing property taxes for cities, counties and schools, they typically discuss increases over long periods of time. Over ten years for example, the increases can range from 63 - 70%. But last I checked, we don't write checks in percentages. We write them in dollars. They also show large increases in total dollars levied, but conveniently fail to recognize the population growth over the same 10-year period.

A better perspective 2007-2017

Entity/Category	% Increase	The Local Perspective		
		2007 Per Capita	2017 Per Capita	\$ Change per Capita
City Tax Levy	63%	\$333	\$467	\$134
County Tax Levy	65%	\$245	\$338	\$93/\$28
School Tax Levy	70%	\$792	\$1,138	\$346

Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, U.S. Census Bureau, Author's Calculations

So let's look at the total dollars levied on a per person basis which is a more accurate way to look at growth in cost of services to each citizen. Over the same 10-year period on a per person basis statewide, cities' cost of services have increased by \$13.40 per year per person, counties' by \$9.30 (\$2.80 in Tarrant County) and schools' by \$34.60. None of these numbers seem to be skyrocketing to me, but once again you be the judge!



Shifting The Burden & The Appraisal Process

In Texas we fund the services we receive from state and local governments through primarily property, gas and sales tax. When compared to other states we rank 37th, and I feel good about that.

If you agree, then we can discuss how to spread the total among property, gas, sales and other taxes. Regardless of how we allocate, don't ever let anyone suggest we should ever consider a state income tax.

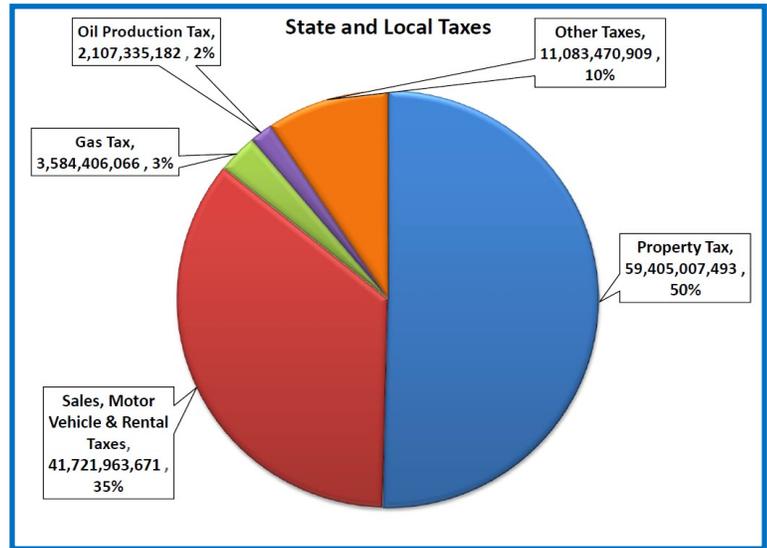
If we are certain we want to lower property taxes, then we must choose how much to shift to gas, sales or other taxes. Another alternative, in lieu of shifting the tax burden, is to revise the property tax appraisal system and/or to review current property exemptions.

I believe the appraisal system is in need of a serious overhaul. I have more than a handful of folks stating their appraised values went up between 50 – 150% in one year. How can this be?! We currently have an annual maximum 10% increase in taxable value for residential home-steads. Maybe the legislature should consider applying this to all property.

The legislature could also consider sunseting certain exemptions, much like they do for state agencies. Additionally, the legislature should

stop requiring the state comptroller to second guess appraisal district's appraisal values. The only reason for this is to increase the amount of school taxes paid by you and me thereby reducing the state's share of funding for public education.

Want to fix the property tax system? Start by asking our legislature to fix the broken appraisal system.



Tarrant County Legislative Delegation

Texas House

District 90 Representative: Ramon Romero, Jr., D-Fort Worth ...	ramon.romero@house.texas.gov	512-463-0740
District 91 Representative: Stephanie Klick, R-Fort Worth	stephanie.klick@house.texas.gov	512-463-0599
District 92 Representative: Jonathan Stickland, R-Bedford	jonathan.stickland@house.texas.gov	512-463-0522
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District 94 Representative: Tony Tinderholt, R-Arlington	tony.tinderholt@house.texas.gov	512-463-0624
District 95 Representative: Nicole Collier, D-Fort Worth	nicole.collier@house.texas.gov	512-463-0716
District 96 Representative: Bill Zedler, R-Arlington	bill.zedler@house.texas.gov	512-463-0374
District 97 Representative: Craig Goldman, R-Fort Worth	craig.goldman@house.texas.gov	512-463-0608
District 98 Representative: Giovanni Capriglione, R-Southlake ...	giovanni.capriglione@house.texas.gov ...	512-463-0690
District 99 Representative: Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth	charlie.geren@house.texas.gov	512-463-0610
District 101 Representative: Chris Turner, D-Grand Prairie	chris.turner@house.texas.gov	512-463-0574

Texas Senate

District 9 Senator: Kelly Hancock, R- Westlake	kelly.hancock@senate.texas.gov	512-463-0109
District 10 Senator: Beverly Powell, D-Fort Worth	beverly.powell@senate.texas.gov	512-463-0110
District 12 Senator: Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound	jane.nelson@senate.texas.gov	512-463-0112
District 22 Senator: Brian Birdwell, R-Granbury	brian.birdwell@senate.texas.gov	512-463-0122

