



DICKINSON COUNTY

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March 3rd, 2016

House Taxation Committee

Senate Taxation Committee

Ref: Tax lid concerns

We know from talking with you all that you have received many public comments in support of the tax lid and its implementation. We can safely assume that anyone on the street that is asked if they like taxes or want to control taxes will reply the same. Nobody likes paying them, and nobody likes seeing them go up. But we all know it's not quite that simple!

We recently spent considerable time reviewing the information that has been published by the Kansas Association of Realtors regarding this issue. Yes, many of the numbers appear on their face to be alarming. However, let's not overlook that they were written for that purpose and meant to do just that, but the numbers only tell one side of the story, and we know as the local elected leaders responsible for levying these taxes that there is much more to the story than they purport or possibly even understand.

Interestingly enough and bothersome to us is the fact that nowhere in the numerous pages of information that has been published did we actually read any single thing about what the real causes for the increased taxes are? Do they really even care what these causes are? Does anyone in Topeka or outside of the counties and cities have any clue as to why these budgets have increased? Mr. Bell's articles use 1997 as a reference point so let's use that time frame for some comparisons. In Dickinson County in 1997, our Sheriff's Department had 5 patrol officers, one investigator, and four corrections personnel. Today, due to the call volume and criminal call activity, just to keep our communities and citizens safe, and in our Sheriff's own words, "keep us from drowning" we have 15 patrol deputies, two criminal investigators, 2 narcotics detectives, and 10 correction staff. Crime volume and calls for service have increased exponentially, the jail population has increased, and the types of crimes we deal with are more serious now than they were in 1997. Mentally ill individuals continue to be a large problem locally now due to closures of mental hospitals that in 1997 handled those issues. Not because we just wanted to add to our numbers of employees and create jobs, but because they are required to keep our county safe and deal with the problems we have in front of us. Then there is our EMS, (Emergency Medical Services). In 1997 we had two EMT's stationed at Abilene and two EMT's on call at Herington to cover the entire county. Today, due to the call volume and extreme changes in emergency medical capabilities, we have two (2 person crews) on duty in Abilene and one 2 person crew working in Herington 24 X 7, and these three crews can barely keep up with the calls that come in. To differentiate 1997 with 2015 even more, in 1997, the standard care was provided by person with an EMT level certification. Now days we have EMICT's (Emergency Medical Intensive Care Technicians) or Paramedics for short, that serve on these crews, meaning the difference in 1997 was pick the patient up and take them to the hospital, (and hope for the best) where they were treated, whereas, today's standard is treat the patient and stabilize them on the scene with the ability to do things like provide medications and IV's on the scene, and do virtually everything that can be done in the emergency room, but on the scene and much sooner, and we actually save lives! The ambulances are essentially a mobile hospital with heart monitors, defibrillators, and all the IV

meds needed. These and the training and personnel all come at a much, much higher price than they did in 1997, BUT WE SAVE LIVES! One must ask, what is a life worth?

And while we are discussing it, in 1997, we had just started into the realm of 911 services, where we could locate a 911 caller on their hard wired telephone line but have since migrated into the wireless age where we now have to worry about 95% of our 911 calls coming from cell phones or wireless devices that are challenging at best to locate, but the same federal requirements and mandates remain in place for us to be able to locate these emergency calls. Now today, in 2016, we are diving into another area called next generation 911, which comes at a tremendous cost to upgrade, much higher than the 2.7% CPI rate. Now days everyone has a phone, and uses it to call 911 for every single observation meaning we require more 911 operators, more equipment for them to operate, all coming at a cost that was not even present in 1997.

Then there are roads and bridges. As recent as 2005 a mile of 2" asphalt overlay cost us \$40,000 and today, in 2016 the same mile of the same material will cost us \$105,000. In 1997, a concrete bridge, depending on the size and length would cost around \$200,000 to replace, where the same size bridge we recently built on 1900 Ave came at a cost of about \$800,000. Again, a bit more than the 2.7% CPI level that Mr. Bell keeps being referred to.

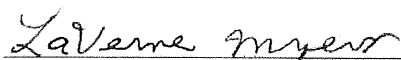
Then there is the reduction in taxes that we have seen since 1997 in the way of exemptions all across the board, of which you are all more than aware of, and that we have had absolutely no control over. The loss in revenue to local entities has been tremendous.

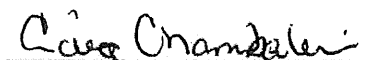
The last point that we would make is that as a realtor in Dickinson County or Johnson County, or Sedgwick County, if we were trying to sell homes that were located on a rough road, with potholes and cracks, that you had to drive 6 or 8 indirect miles to get to because the bridge that serves it was not able to be repaired and became dangerous, and the county was unable to afford the repairs, or provide quality EMS, Fire or law enforcement services to this location due to lack of funding, how easy do you think it would be to make the sale of that home? On the other hand, in our county and for the most part about all 105 counties in Kansas, having adequate public safety services, good roads and safe bridges, and just the peace of mind that when you call 911 someone will answer and help will respond, certainly is something that would help seal the sale. Not to mention good parks, fair grounds, senior services, mental health services, and all the other services that local governments provide. This list goes on and on. This is something that has become a public expectation, and it comes at a cost, and unfortunately the cost is higher than 2.7% annually.

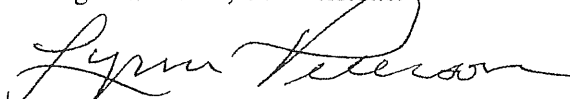
Therefore, when we see someone comparing the 2.7% CPI to a county or city budget, it makes us wonder if they have any clue as to what it takes to provide the level of services required to maintain the high quality of life that our local residents expect, deserve, and have become accustomed to? Sure, it would be easier to deal with if our population and tax base was increasing at the same or higher rate as the CPI, but the majority of counties in Kansas are seeing little growth, and their population numbers are declining, which results in less property taxes, higher mill levies, and the above services all come at the same or increased costs.

We would respectfully ask that you consider the big picture here, not be fooled by the misleading numbers game, and allow us as the local elected officials to manage our budgets without tying our hands behind our backs. After all, we, just like you, were elected by our citizens to represent their best interests, and looking at the **WHOLE** picture is certainly a part of that consideration.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.


LaVerne Myers, Chairman


Craig Chamberlin, Commissioner


Lynn Peterson, Commissioner