

Comparing article on
property taxes to how it
was portrayed

Commissioners and chair Ty Wessell, I bid you good evening.

I understand that an article I wrote weeks ago for the Enterprise delving into the complicated equation for property taxes was discussed last week. I'm here to talk about the issue and answer any question you may have about the article and how it was portrayed.

last week
I was surprised to read ~~about the~~ *made pertaining to* misleading comments to the story. I've never been here to address a story, so this is kind of a first. I believe that commissions were sincere in what they said. I appreciate Mr. Wessell's reading of the original story and determining that it was factually correct. Ty, you've been a friend to me and a gentleman. Thank you.

I have no intention of throwing elected officials under the bus that I'm climbing out from under.

But most of those sentences started with "I," and that should not be the focal point of any discussion on public policy. Any story about taxation should center on the people who pay taxes. That was the intent of the coverage. Please allow me to discuss the Headlee Amendment to the state Constitution.

The amendment was designed to limit the growth of local governments in Michigan, with property taxpayers benefitting through lower tax rates. It requires local governments to reduce tax rates, known commonly as millages, when the revenue generated by those tax rates increases faster than the rate of inflation. New construction is omitted from the equation.

Headlee is the reason that local governments that had been levying 1.0 mills in property taxes every year are now levying half or less of that rate.

This year, however, an inflation rate of nearly 8 percent will allow local governments to increase property tax revenue by that same 8 percent rate without Headlee playing a factor. Local governments have the option of reducing tax rates if they so choose but likely will not be compelled to do so.

Final figures needed to precisely determine maximum millage rates won't be available until early summer.

Why does all this matter?

Here's my concern. I think people are feeling more and more disenfranchised from government. Maybe they say, "It's inevitable that I have to pay more taxes. I may not like it. But I'm only one person. I'm not smart enough to make a difference and besides, the system is rigged against me anyway."

Constituents in Leelanau County should be encouraged to participate in all factors of local government policy, including the setting of property tax rates. Simply dismissing efforts to explain the complicated property tax process as "wrong" leaves residents with a sense of fatigue.

Wessell
The main ~~write~~ stories like the one published Jan. 12 is to empower people, to help them to realize that they are government, and that are in control of their own destiny.

Thank you.

A sentence was questioned in a front page article published Jan. 12 in the Leelanau Enterprise. The article dealt on the affect of inflation on property taxes paid by property owners in Leelanau County. Parentheses added for context:

"And a second provision (Headlee) is more likely to stand down, prompting local units of government to levy property tax rates at a level that will allow tax revenue for existing property to increase up to 7.9 percent."

How sentence was interpreted at County Board meeting and in Enterprise story published Feb. 16:

"Mr. (Alan) Campbell's article on Jan. 12 about the increase in the tax rates, at least in my township, caused some alarm and Andrew (Giguere) met with one of the representatives from Leelanau Township and it sounds like the article was not correct," Wessell said.

An unattributed paragraph follows:

"The article stated that property tax rates will increase "up to 7.9%" this year; however, that is not correct.

How Headlee works:

The Headlee Amendment to the state Constitution

Sincerity test:

County commissioners seemed sincere in their questioning of the article, and certainly mistakes are part of the processes of governing and journalism.

Alan Campbell