

Opinion

Editorial: Time for taxpayers to take a stand

Monday, December 14, 2009

Delaware County Council held a public hearing on a proposed 2010 budget last Wednesday in the county council meeting room.

The \$308.6 million budget reflects a \$5.6 million increase over the current budget. It includes a proposed tax increase of .359 mills, which would bring the total millage rate to 5.184 and increase taxes \$48 to about \$680 for the average homeowner.

The budget is scheduled for adoption at Tuesday's meeting, which begins 10 a.m. in council chambers on the second floor of the Government Center. Before the vote, residents will have another opportunity to voice their opinion — although Delaware County Council Chairman Linda Cartisano does not anticipate suggestions will cause any delay.

One county resident Wednesday complimented the “good turnout” at the public hearing, considering he was one of only two people at the annual hearing in the last year or two. However, only 19 people took the time to comment on a likely 7.4 percent hike in county property taxes in 2010.

While few people made the effort to travel to Media to discuss the planned county tax hike, the course of 2010 preliminary budgets by municipalities has found some residents packing local meetings.

Upper Chichester residents spoke out at Thursday night's township meeting, but commissioners still adopted a 1-percent earned income tax.

Tax hikes are the rule of thumb throughout the county this year, ranging for a high of 66 percent in Bethel. Upper Providence council proposed a 48 percent hike. An 11 percent tax hike was included in Aston's 2010 \$10 million preliminary budget, and on and on.

The reasons elected officials give for tax increases focus on the bad economy. The question that should be on the lips of every working man and woman is, why in a time of lost jobs and pay cuts, are taxpayer-supported budgets the only thing that keeps going up? This is a very pertinent question in this state because tax news for those working in Pennsylvania is worse than for residents in most states.

A study by the Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy (ITEP) concluded working families in Pennsylvania pay a far higher share of their income in state and local taxes than their wealthiest counterparts.

In 2007, middle-class earners paid nearly double the share of their income in taxes than the very wealthiest Pennsylvanians. For minimum-wage earners, the share of family income spent on taxes was even larger.

The study examined state and local taxes in all 50 states, ranking Pennsylvania's tax system as the ninth most regressive in the nation, meaning taxes fall disproportionately on middle-class, working and poor families to the advantage of the richest taxpayers.

“Middle-income and working families get shortchanged by Pennsylvania's tax system, and wealthy Pennsylvanians reap major benefits,” said Sharon Ward, director of the Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center. “Pennsylvania should reform its tax system to shift more of the costs of vital services to those who can better afford to pay.”

The study found Pennsylvania families earning less than \$19,000 - the poorest fifth of Pennsylvania taxpayers - pay 11.3 percent of their income in state and local taxes.

Middle-income Pennsylvania taxpayers - those earning between \$35,000 and \$56,000 - pay 9.6 percent of their income in state and local taxes.

The richest Pennsylvania taxpayers - with average incomes of \$1,369,600 - pay only 5 percent of their income in state and local taxes.

If the overly-taxed don't make elected officials worry about the safety of their never-ending jobs, the trend will continue. Nineteen people paying attention to a hike tax out of a county of half a million is not good. That poor ratio exists in most tax years in school districts, towns and up to state government.

To change the way those in government continue to pile taxes on the backs of working Pennsylvanians residents to pay for their salaries and benefits, staffs and pet projects, those paying taxes need to pay attention, attend meetings and throw out of office officials who live the good life on the wages of those still employed in this state.

URL: <http://www.delcotimes.com/articles/2009/12/14/opinion/doc4b2586c8f3067045940924.prt>

© 2009 delcotimes.com, a **Journal Register** Property