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## The Property Tax Blame Game

by Penny Farrar

In a guest column in Florida Today newspaper on 02/07/04, another play was made in the Property Tax Blame Game, by the current county property appraiser Jim Ford. You know the game, the game where the property appraiser wants us to believe that it's not his fault that our individual property taxes are so high.

The property appraiser has said that he has nothing to do with your property taxes. The taxing authorities (i.e. the County Commission, Cities, etc...) respond that they didn't raise property taxes that much, that it's the property appraiser's fault. When I ponder the Property Tax Blame Game, I envision a game of ping-pong with the taxing authorities at one end of the table, the property appraiser at the other and the ball that is being slammed vigorously back and forth as, we, the taxpayers.

One thing I can agree with is that we need more information readily available about our property taxes. However the proposed charter amendment, truth in taxation, seems similar to the Truth in Millage assessment notices that property owners receive each year, that was created to shift focus away from individual property assessments and redirect it solely to the taxing authorities.

The truth, both the taxing authorities and the property appraiser affect the amount of property taxes you pay each year.

Your individual property assessment, prepared by the property appraiser, determines your percentage of the overall tax burden that you are required to pay. Total taxable value, also set by the property appraiser, affects your individual property taxes as well.

We, as taxpayers, not only need to keep track of the amount of revenue being generated by property taxes, we need to keep an eye on the total taxable value and understand how changes in total taxable value affect our individual property taxes. Value not included on the property tax roll due to incorrect assessments, exemptions, classified properties and even Amendment 10

(SOH), decreases the total taxable value countywide and in turn increases the millage rate thereby increasing the amount of property taxes you must pay.

The problem with the proposed charter amendment is that it falls short of full disclosure. We need to extend the calculations to include information on how value taken off the property tax roll due to exemptions, classified properties and Amendment 10 affect changes in the total taxable value that affect our individual taxes. It does seem ironic, however, that if Property Appraiser Jim Ford is so interested in truth, why does he continue to deny that he has anything to do with our property taxes. The truth should start now by at least correcting the property appraiser's website. One of the problems on the appraiser's website that needs to be corrected is the Estimated Savings Resulting From SOH. To know the true affect of SOH, the millage rate used to determine taxes without the cap needs to be recalculated using the total taxable value that has been taken off the tax roll due to SOH which would make the millage rate lower than the millage rate with the cap. Now some politicians may consider this to be just a little white lie, but one thing is for sure, it's not the truth.

Sometimes I wonder if the taxpayer will ever get to be in the game or will we be forever the ping-pong ball in the blame game between politicians.

Penny Farrar is a candidate running for the office of Brevard County Property Appraiser.

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