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Lackawanna County fights for unfair taxes

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD / PUBLISHED: SEPTEMBER 10, 2018

Lackawanna County Commissioners Patrick O'Malley and Laureen Cummings are steadfast in their determination to ensure that property taxation in Lackawanna County remains as unfair as possible.

They already have evaded their responsibility to produce fair taxation by putting on the ballot the question of whether the county should conduct a reassessment and then rigging the ballot question to produce a "no" vote.

All of that, they say, was to protect people from tax increases.

Their fealty to taxpayers, however, stops at the courthouse door. They already have wasted more than \$350,000 in public tax money on lawyers engaged to limit the scope of a public criminal investigation into the Lackawanna County Prison. And last week, they sent an outside law firm to Lackawanna County Court to defend the indefensible — the failure of the Lackawanna County government to conduct a property tax reassessment since 1968 — for half a century.

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Lackawanna County Commissioners Laureen Cummings and Patrick O'Malley have committed county tax funds to maintaining unfair taxation. (Times-Tribune File)

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Three plaintiffs from Scranton have sued the county to force a reassessment, arguing that failure to do so has created a “disproportionate and extremely regressive tax burden” — which, of course, it does.

The Community Justice Project, which represents the plaintiffs, calculates that one of them pays \$1,112 more in property taxes each year than he would if the assessment were current and fair.

That is the point: While Cummings and O’Malley claim to be protecting people from higher taxes in running away from their responsibilities, the truth is that thousands of Lackawanna County residents already pay more than they should because the ancient assessment base guarantees an unfair distribution of the tax burden. Reassessment is not about raising taxes, it is about fairly taxing.

It is telling that, in its recent study of tax policy, the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry recommended a state law to require regular reassessments in every county to ensure accurate property values.

Courts in several counties have ordered reassessments in recent years. O’Malley and Cummings should stop wasting tax money on lawyers and meet their obligation to create an up-to-date, accurate, fair assessment base in Lackawanna County.

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Hal Donahue • 4 days ago

Lack of reassessment is a key indicator for bad local government and a very strong tool used by corrupt or plain greedy businesses and individuals to control the local economy. Most strong growing companies see this and just go elsewhere leaving the powers that be, the powers that be.

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TDOFB15IZWDF4KT → Hal Donahue • 4 days ago

spot on.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share >



The West LA Kid • 4 days ago

Cheese and Crackers need to be replaced by better menu choices.

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fredupvoter • 4 days ago

The commissioners are protecting a small group of LARGE land owners in the county by forcing many property owners to OVERPAY.

Toss them both to the curb during the next election

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TDOFB15IZWDF4KT • 4 days ago

This is a great editorial. I wish the plaintiffs & their reps much success in their quest for county wide reassessment. It may take place, just not in my lifetime. It would take place more quickly if we simply vote out Ms. Cummings & Mr. O'M. Wayne Evans, Ron Koldjeski are you listening?

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