

Questions and Answers, January 7, 2015

Part 1 of 3 dealing with senior property tax exemptions.

Q. Do you think that it is a good idea to exempt certain age groups from paying certain property taxes?

A. Any time you exempt one person from paying taxes, then another person will have to pick up their share. I will not weigh in on this answer directly except to say that I work very hard at keeping your county government portion of property taxes as low as possible (currently the THIRD lowest property tax rate in the State of Georgia out of 159 counties). While I have no control what so ever over Union County Schools or their property taxes, I also know that they have the SECOND lowest property tax rate in the entire State of Georgia. This is pretty amazing especially since we both have some of the best facilities and employees anywhere. What else could we do?

Q. Why do you think we are able to maintain our quality of life in Union County?

A. With us all working together, we are able to keep our facilities and services second to none and our education system one of the best in the state. Why do we want to change something that is working so well since Union County was founded?

Q. What happens when we start to exempt certain people or age groups from paying property taxes?

A. You only have to look at Lumpkin County (Dahlonega) where they have a senior school exemption on property taxes and their total property tax rate is over 60% higher than Union County. So if you have a home valued \$100,000 in Union County (no exemptions) the taxes are 707.24. But if you have that same home value in Lumpkin County, your property taxes are \$ 1,101.12!

Q. Are you trying to scare us in to not wanting any property tax exemptions?

A. No, but I think you should have some of the facts. Actually it is a very complicated issue when you start exempting anyone from any kind of taxes. The issue then becomes at what age do you start the exemption, 60, 65, 70 or 80? What amount of personal income is reasonable to use for the exemption? Who is going to determine the amount of income you have and who will be responsible for keeping up with it when it changes? How much personal information do you want to give the local government about your personal finances? Then there are unlimited options as to whether you exempt \$10,000 of property value, \$ 25,000, \$ 50,000, \$ 100,000, \$200,000 or all of the value. Do you exempt all property or just homestead property (where you declare your residence)? Then how do you calculate how much one exemption will cause the property taxes of those not exempt to go up under all the scenarios above? It is a very complicated issue.

Q. Is it fair to exempt seniors from part of their property taxes?

A. I am not the one to answer that question. It is a society question. I have heard the complaint made by some of the younger taxpayers in other counties that most of the emergency services, social security benefits and Medicare that are enjoyed by the senior population are now paid predominately by the younger people who are currently employed and they feel that more than makes up for the part of school taxes paid by seniors. It is an argument I do not want to get in nor do I want our community to be split over this issue, because it can become very divisive.

Q. I have heard some talk about exempting seniors from paying school property taxes because they have no children in school. What is the impact on a county when this is done?

A. Originally and for many years, the only counties to offer a senior property tax exemption in the past have usually been larger metro counties who have a large industrial/commercial tax base to help pay the lost income of school property taxes. But in smaller counties with less industry, the burden to make up the school taxes from those exempted must fall directly on the younger tax payers who are still working and are not retired. Usually, but not always, this is the group that have house payments, car payments and the burden of raising a young family. Generally in retirement, while the income may be less, the payments are usually drastically less with more disposable income, fewer debts and hopefully no children to raise.

Part 2 Con't next week