

TAC identifies Public Enemy No. 1: The Taxpayer

The Texas Association of Counties (TAC) has identified Public Enemy No. 1 — the taxpayer.

At its recent annual conference, TAC included in the program a presentation entitled, “You aren’t paranoid, they ARE after you.”

Not all the focus was on taxpayers at this annual conference. Customer relations on the phone, “Mapping the road to retirement,” as well as “Are we having fun yet?” and “Ready, aim, retire” were all topics of discussion.

It appears many county association members are eager to prepare for retirement. But between their hiring and retiring, they are conspiring against taxpayers.

The presentation “You aren’t paranoid, they ARE after you” was given by **Kay Coles**, a consultant who touts a 30-year career in journalism, politics, and lobbying, as well as her work on ballot initiatives.

In her presentation to the county officials, available on the TAC Web site, she outlined the sins taxpayers have committed by wanting to:

- Ban taxpayer-funded lobbying
- Eliminate so-called “pay to play”
- Enact TABOR and tax limitations at all levels
- Promote so-called “government transparency” (her language)
- Defeat local bonds and tax increases
- Recalls

Wow! No wonder taxpayers are Public Enemy No. 1. Taxpayer advocates *are* after elected officials to provide government transparency.

How dare taxpayers ask for government transparency? Wanting to know how our public dollars are spent — the audacity!

Taxpayers value transparency. Texas state government has been rated No. 1 in transparency, but of the 254 counties in the Lone Star State, only 11 have their budget, financial reports, and check registers online.

So transparency is a problem for local offi-

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cial, according to Cole.

In her presentation, groups (such as Americans for Prosperity) which protect taxpayer interests and seek to lower taxes are referred to as anti-tax and anti-government.

“ Do local officials forget who hired them? ”

The presenter claims these independent taxpayer groups “hide the money” in that taxpayer advocacy groups don’t divulge their funding. The presenter fails to note that the taxpayer groups are not publicly funded, unlike government and associations of government officials.

Our forefathers envisioned citizens being government watchdogs. In 1791, Thomas Jefferson said, “Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves, therefore, are its only safe depositories.”

Do local officials forget who hired them?

One thing is for sure: though taxpayers fund TAC, from TAC, taxpayers get no respect.

The county association isn’t the only local government organization which has waged war on taxpayers. The Texas Municipal League (TML), in its official Feb. 2, 2007, Legislative Update, resorted to conduct unbecoming city officials and the organization that represents them at the State Capitol. The report went on to characterize AFP’s Texas Taxpayer Trust Tour and our taxpayer protection agenda, as an “Anti-City Jihad.”

Local officials turned out in droves last interim for the Taskforce for Property Tax Reform hearings. Almost universally, they wanted

no reforms which could limit their revenue, and they opposed taxpayer protections, telling taskforce members they did not want to seek taxpayer approval before increasing government spending.

Local government organizations need a reality check. The taxpayers who fund them are now tightening their belts. Even in good times, workers want to keep more of the money they work hard to earn. And they deserve to know where those tax dollars are being spent.

So why the resentment toward the taxpayer?

Ground Zero appears to be tax and expenditure limitations (TEs) such as the taxpayer bill of rights (TABOR), which requires government to get citizen approval before spending more than the increase in population and inflation, and other taxpayer protections such as appraisal caps.

Between 1980 and 2005, local government spending, even adjusted for inflation, increased four times faster than personal income. Even more disturbing, local government debt in Texas increased 207 percent, more than five times the rate of taxpayers’ income growth. We are leaving our children a legacy of debt, and it is growing faster than our ability to pay.

Millions are being spent by local government and their associations to lobby.

Taxpayer-funded lobbying, another topic in Cole’s presentation, appears to be a practice local governments are working to defend. We can compare it to having a quarterback whom we pay, and who huddles in our corner, but who gets on the field and plays for the other team.

The TAC annual conference presentation is a symptom of a mindset.

Our Constitution reads, “We the people...” not we, the government officials and bureaucrats. It’s time we, the people, stopped funding organizations which are waging war on taxpayers. ○

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