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Truth-in-taxation (TNT). Sounds good but rather meaningless in that it implies actual facts or reality. Honestly, TNT is anything but truthful because, in a county such as Galveston, thousands to millions of dollars of revenue are removed from the calculations, remain off the table throughout the process and are known only to those with adequate knowledge to know what is missing.

We would all be better served if TNT was called Transparency in Taxation (after all, the legislation creating the current process is "The Texas Property Tax Reform and Transparency Act of 2019"). The Texas Constitution requires local governments to make property owners aware of tax rate processes and proposals and requires an opportunity for the public to attend public hearings or easily voice an opinion about government spending and taxation. That is transparency.

The first step in this process is creation of a budget followed by consideration of revenues likely to result from the most current appraised values. Public meetings are held along the way right up to adoption of the tax rate. Different governments have different calculations and rules with regard to notice requirements and spending limits but all advertise in the paper and online making it abundantly transparent.

By the time the tax bill is mailed in October – you had both an opportunity to impact the value in the spring and the tax rates being adopted right now. In August, Texas appraisal districts mailed postcards to every property owner. The postcards directed each to a website/database from which the estimated taxes on each property could be viewed if local governments adopted the rates being proposed. It further provided direct links via email, websites and telephone numbers to each local government and official.

The TNT worksheets and public hearing notices are included in the databases. They are also included on each government's website, on county websites (locally, visit galcotax.com both near the bottom of the homepage as well as under Property Tax/Truth in Taxation for an abundance of information) and have or are being printed in local newspapers. (As of the date of this writing, two local governments in Galveston County have already completed this process and Texas school districts will complete it by the end of August.)

The legislature understood that YOU could not attend every single meeting of every government taxing you. The legislature understood that YOU deserved transparency and the opportunity to voice an opinion before the ink dried on the paperwork. It took over six years to pass "The Texas Property Tax Reform and Transparency Act of 2019." Now, the burden is YOURS. Speak up. The squeaky wheel DOES get the grease and squeaking now is better than squawking later when the bill arrives and it is too late!

Additional information on TNT (particularly why is it less than truthful) will be made available in the coming days both to the media and online at the Galveston County Tax Office website and on Facebook (search for #TruthAboutTaxes).

Cheryl E. Johnson, PCC, CTOP, Galveston County Tax Assessor Collector August 19, 2021