

I can say that the County budget is, finally, moving in the right direction. There will be a good number of County residents and businesses who will be relieved that tax rates and fees, for a change, did not increase.

These Highland citizens, some of whom are known as the Silent Generation, were largely responsible for building the United States as we know it. They're now retired, and some are living on generational homesteads. Some of them, among the bottom 10% in this County income-wise, are trying to live on Social Security. It is this group, the bottom 10%, who suffer mightily from government taking continuously larger sums of their income, which is already spoken for.

It's easy to rationalize that "this [*fill in the blank*] is important!" until you look one of these people in the eye and realize that, to pay a higher tax rate, they're going to have to go without something essential.

Now, let's acknowledge that Highland County could be a case study in sameness—that is to say that the job, from a local government standpoint, doesn't change. The job that local government does simply does not grow. Therefore, local government itself should not grow.

With that said:

As I looked over the budget, from what I could see, the overall increase is a bit north of 7%.

Please note that last year's inflation was less than ½ that. Even adding in a modest gain in worker wages, we're still talking about ½ of this budget increase. So, budget-wise, we're still at a 2x multiple of inflation.

In the bottom line, the County's taxpayers cannot afford to let local government grow this way—to become the only growth sector in Highland County.

Again, I believe it's possible to do better at reining it in.

Next year, please look at inflation and real wage growth to fully understand what Department heads are asking for.

