

Good Morning, my name is Richard Harper of the Concerned Citizens of Franklin County, Inc. (CCFC) I want to thank you for inviting us to this hearing today. Sitting here today with me is Allan Feifer, President of the CCFC.

CCFC is a grass roots organization dedicated to reducing taxes for the citizens of Franklin County. To set the stage, at a recent County Commission meeting our County Commissioners and a Constitutional Officer stated that high taxes are nobody's fault. CCFC won't let them off the hook that easily because it is their fault. Decisions made over the years have guaranteed the problems we have today. Over time, quietly, but deliberately Franklin County has changed into what it is today; a rural county that continues to deliver few vital services but has increased its budget to staggering levels simply because it could. Take a moment to look at the collateral materials we brought with us today. They tell the story of a county with a flat population over the last seven years but with an appetite for OPM, otherwise known as Other People's Money. Our county budget has increased from just over \$16 million in 2001 to about \$50 million in the current budget cycle. We've added 30% more employees, from 150 to 196 while reducing the hours they work from 40 to 35 in the process. And, oh yes...added the first traffic light in Franklin County history. Little or no road building at County expense, no bridges, no expansive public improvements, basically the same county you'd recognize from seven years ago. It's almost like Franklin County is in a time warp, except for one inconvenient truth. If the 2001 budget had been raised by the rate of inflation only; our county would have spent \$125 million over the period. Instead, our budget was raised an extra \$60 million over inflation. Money none of us can see. I guess Franklin County has the only \$60,000,000 traffic light in the state along with spending of almost \$5,000 for every man woman and child in the county.

There are myriad other examples of what a runaway county does when no one's watching:

- There is no oversight by the Commissioners in the early stages of budget creation

- There has been no direction by Commissioners to department heads in limiting their spending...they are given free reign to request what they may
- Many of the department heads are not qualified to create and manage budgets. They have no formal training as to best practices.
- A department head asks for and receives money for capital expenditures in one year. In the next year, he leaves that money in his budget and then asks for more money for new capital expenditures, thus compounding year after year excess spending and waste
- There are examples where department heads have not made an effort to seek lower costs for their supplies and other resources. For example, other counties are buying fuel at a much lower rate than Franklin County because our County Commissioners have not required that their managers spend as little as possible
- Raises for county employees are given out across the board without consideration of merit or performance
- Raise amounts are publicly debated without consideration of the CPI or what other counties are doing, loud cries of “chump change” were heard from the employee audience when using the CPI was mentioned at a budget workshop
- Many of the County's employees are family members of County Commissioners, creating a conflict of interest where policies, raises and other decisions are made in an effort to "take care" of their family and friends. As an example, last year, Franklin County's Chairperson voted for a \$2500 across the board raise for County employees, which included her husband. This in effect, increased her personal household income by \$2500
- Another commissioner introduced the need for a \$300,000 county “shop” that neither of the department heads wanted but would provide a requested department head job for a relative
- Although one Commissioner requested that the County go to zero based budgeting 2 years ago, the other Commissioners refused to implement it
- Roads are unpaved while services delivered are comparable to prior years

- Tax money is being spent on paving private roads and providing fill dirt for personal residences of friends or constituents of commissioners

How did this happen? Simple. The average citizen of Franklin County has been buffaloed. First, they're told the millage rate is among the lowest in the state but not that the county is taxing its citizens into oblivion. Second, it makes the specious argument that most of those taxes are being paid for by outsiders, and Franklin's citizens shouldn't care. Third, rising property values makes those of us homesteaded get lower and lower tax bills as the tax digest climbs past \$4 billion. Unfortunately, for the majority of property owners in Franklin County who are not homesteaded, it's like living in a totalitarian state where you are told what to do, you aren't represented! Many properties, owned for generations by moderate income families are up for sale due to an inability to pay property taxes. In more than one case that we know of personally, some of these homes had been built for their owners' eventual retirement, only to have the rug pulled out from under them financially. This is fundamentally wrong, is having the effect of changing the character of our County and needs to be addressed. Finally, our County Commission has stated that its citizens should only be concerned with the ad valorem portion of the budget. That the grant side is "free money" and why would we care if the County spends it? It's a fact that grant money comes and goes but the overhead created by those grants tends to get incorporated into the budget permanently. Again, this isn't right no matter how down home your commissioner sounds or how much they try to confuse the issues.

Concerned Citizens of Franklin County, Inc. (CCFC) is here before you today because Franklin County is out of control and won't stop unless made to stop. We've been made to feel that what we think does not matter. At some point you've got to ask the question, what have the citizens of Franklin County gotten for their money! Unfortunately, we are largely left scratching our heads.

The policies of free spending counties like Franklin are a slap in the face to a representative democracy. CCFC believes there have been decades of waste, inefficiency

and a “public be damned” attitude that must end. The rampant spending of Franklin County has finally come to a head. People are out of work and investors have flown the coop after being told pay up or get out. Recently at a county meeting an employee of the Tax Collector’s office and also the daughter of one of the Commissioners, screamed at citizens who were complaining about their taxes and said “Just pay your taxes or get out, we don’t need you!” Not one commissioner chastised her or asked her to be quiet. You can’t make this stuff up.

The present tax issues are not the fault of developers, real estate agents, employees of the county or greedy citizens. It is a fundamental failure of leadership and contempt for the individual citizen that allowed this to happen. Somewhere along the way the Commissioners of Franklin County forgot that it’s not their money.

We hope that this committee looks hard at the issue of taxation and overspending as they go hand in hand. No one is without blame, and for some of us the day of reckoning has arrived. We thank you for your time and attention and if we could answer any questions, we’d be happy to at this time.