

# County commissioners didn't sign, can't pay



For 40 years, Indiana has seen fit to give township assessors (1,008 total) a very wide latitude in assessing property. Over the years, the 11 townships in Lake County were assessed in such an inconsistent manner that the discrepancies in assessing were so obvious that everyone knew of the tremendous differences.

The state, however, turned its back and did nothing to correct the inconsistencies.

- It had the sole authority to set stringent standards for all townships to follow.
- It had the final say in approving all reassessments.
- It stood by and did nothing.

Under continual pressure, the state finally ordered an independent reassessment to correct the failures of 40 years.

- It took it upon themselves to set up a contract with a special outside firm.
- It said they would pay for the reassessment.
- It hired Arthur Andersen to do the reassessment.
- The price tag is \$25 million, or approximately four times the cost of current reassessment.

■ Andersen has no prior experience in assessing property.

■ After the contract was signed, the state decided Lake County should pay the \$25 million.

As president of the Lake County Board of Commissioners, I attended a meeting in Indianapolis on Jan. 28 to determine how Lake County would pay for the reassessment. As of this date:

- I have not seen any reassessment contract.
- The Board of Commissioners – Frances DuPey, Rudolph Clay and I – have not signed any reassessment contract obligating the taxpayers.

Yet, the state insists that the commissioners sign any and all claims presented on behalf of Andersen under this unseen contract. This is in direct contrast to the law that requires a binding contract be signed by all parties before payment can be made legally.

I informed the state officials that they signed the contract, they initiated the contract, and, as originally stated, they should pay for the reassessment.

Because of numerous factors, the financial state of our county is bleak. As a

county, we are not in any position to pay \$25 million for a reassessment whose initial responsibility lies with the state. Furthermore, I would never have voted to approve this contract as the cost is not only exorbitant, it is insulting.

I am not arguing the need for change. We have about 6,000 homeowners paying zero property taxes.

Lake County needs to have a fair and equitable assessment for all property owners.

Indiana needs to change the laws to ensure fairness in that every property owner pay a portion of the total tax needs.

I realize there is a desperate need for a reassessment, but we must be assured it is a complete and accurate procedure done by a firm with the expertise necessary to give the taxpayers of Lake County a fair shake without robbing them in exchange.

Until we have such assurances, I will not sign any claim that will obligate Lake County's taxpayers to pay for a contract its commissioners never signed and never had any opportunity to consider.

**Gerry Scheub is president of the Lake County Board of Commissioners.**