

The Balancing Act of Governing by Ron Woody, Roane County Executive

Changing Government by Research, Study, and Analysis

October 13, 2014

As citizens we often ask and even demand certain services of our government and then are reluctant when it comes to paying for those services. Your local government is known as the government closest to the people and this government, whether it be a county or a city, often struggles with balancing the funding requirements of one group of citizens' needs or desires with other citizens' needs and desires. All this pushing and pulling could be called lobbying. Lobbying is often referred to in a negative way, but can be no more than an individual citizen or a group of citizens both educating elected or appointed officials and requesting action on what those citizens desire for the community. Generally, we see lobbying as an individual requesting something for his or her own benefit but it could be for the benefit of a community.

Citizens lobby for lower taxes or not to raise taxes. Citizens lobby to fund education more and express their willingness to pay more taxes. Citizens desire governments to support more nonprofits and increase the nonprofits' funding with higher taxes. Then others express their dissatisfaction with why the county is using tax money for nonprofit organization support. Individual citizens do not want restrictions on their property but do want to restrict their neighbor's property. Some desire recreation activities and some senior citizen services, veteran services, and social services while other desire economic development and others want our communities to stay the way they are; however, the way they are now is not the way they use to be.

Your elected officials often lose sleep at night trying to satisfy all the desires and needs of the public which cannot be done. What we try to do is find a balance of what is acceptable and best for the communities. Not all of what may be acceptable is always the best, but we do desire your input on where and what you want your county and cities to be.

During a September 2014 commission workshop/orientation program, we reviewed the challenges and opportunities which your county government is or will be facing in the near future. Further, the September 2014, Newsletter to the Commission noted in an article "The Next Ten Years" a few comments on items of consideration. Executive Summary #40 on the county website: www.roanecountytn.gov list in greater detail 37 items we have identified which your commission will be addressing in the future.

Why do we list these items and discuss the conflicts and disagreements which may be present with our listing? We see this as an opportunity to explain that working together we must balance the needs, desires, and wants of our citizens with the resources to meet what we can agree upon.

Did you know that operation of an Ambulance Service either by a government or the private section is not a required service? But what community would not have the service? So Roane County has the service then we debate the level of service the county is willing to accept, desires, and is able to pay for.

Did you know that in the 80s Roane County did not have an animal control department? Then there was enough demand for animal control that the local taxes were raised to provide for the service.

Who would want zoning in Roane County? No one. The mid to late 80s saw a change in the desire for zoning when a medical waste incinerator company discussed a plant on Lawnville Road. Citizens then demanded zoning which added another cost of taxpayer funds and restrictions on our properties.

We could go on and on about balancing government and government's goal of protecting citizens.

Say "Thank You" to your county commission, school board, city council member or other elected official, they have a tough job balancing the government. By the way, you may want to say "Thank you" to your pastor for some of the same balancing acts take place in our churches.

Visit our website at www.roanecountytn.gov to learn more about the projects and programs of your local government.

We having a lot of balancing to do these coming years.