

From the desk of Commissioner Bill Kendall

RE: Citizens can vote Nov. 3, 2009 for tax relief on their homes.

Q. I have been reading about a vote on Nov. 3, 2009 to increase Homestead Exemption, What is homestead exemption?

A. Homestead Exemption is a state law passed in 1937 that exempts homeowners from having to pay taxes on the first \$5,000 fair market value which is \$2,000 tax assessment on their home. The state passed another law about 10 years ago to increase the original \$2,000 exemption to \$10,000, and to reimburse local governments for the amount of tax revenue this took off the Tax Digest. During the 2009 session, the State legislature eliminated the additional \$8,000 the State had been giving homeowners through the local governments, and now your homestead exemption will go back to the original 71 year old \$2,000 for the 2009 tax bills on your home.

Q. Does this vote have to pass statewide?

A. **No.** This local Towns County Constitutional Amendment which will increase the amount of Homestead exemption to \$25,000 Fair Market Value or \$10,000 tax assessment at 40% only affects Towns County and is only voted on by Towns County Citizens.

Q. Does this mean that the issue is totally in the hands of Towns county voters as to whether they want to vote themselves this tax reduction on their homes?

A. **Yes** – if Towns County citizens go to the polls and more vote Yes than those that vote no then you will have voted yourselves tax relief on your home.

Q. If this bill passes on November 3, when will it take effect?

A. It will take effect for the 2010 Tax Bills. I tried to get the legislation approved in time to cover the 2009 tax bills; however there was not enough time to get it

through the Legislature, to the voters and the results certified to the Secretary of State Elections Division.

Q. Will this Homestead Exemption cover all houses in Towns County?

A. **No** – You can only have one homestead exemption. Anyone who has homestead exemption in another State or county cannot get another exemption in Towns County

Many of our part time citizens have second homes in Towns County but have chosen to keep their homestead exemption in another state or county because the taxes are so much higher there than in Towns County, and it is to their advantage to keep their homestead exemption at these higher taxed states or counties.

Q. When and what times are the Polls open for citizens to vote?

Listed below is the Ordinance and voting times that I recently passed in order to make it easier and more convenient for citizens to vote. During early voting for an election, the Ordinance requires that the Polls stay open during lunch time and on Saturdays and until 7:00 pm on some days so workers can go to the Polls after work.

TOWNS COUNTY ORDINANCE ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY TO BALLOT

WHEREAS. The Election Department office is closed for early and advanced voting during lunch from 12:00 Noon until 1:00 P.M. and on Saturdays, and

WHEREAS, many citizens are working and out of the County during the present voting hours and weekdays; and

WHEREAS, it is the desire and belief of the Commissioner as the governing Authority of Towns County that the cornerstone of our democracy is easy access to the ballot for all citizens;

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED that in order to provide citizens of Towns County improved access to the Ballot, the following days and hours for voter registration and early and advanced voting are hereby adopted:

REGULAR HOURS: (During off election time)

Tuesdays and Thursdays:

8:30 A.M. – 12:00 Noon and 1:00 p.m. – 4:30 P.M.

DURING THE 45 DAY PERIOD PRIOR TO A GENERAL ELECTION OR PRIMARY AND THE TIME PRECEDING A SPECIAL ELECTION:

Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays:

8:30 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. (see exception below)

Tuesdays:

8:30 A.M. – 7:00 P.M.

Saturdays:

9:00 A.M. – 5:00 P.M. (see exception below)

EXCEPTION: The Election Office will close at 12:00 noon on the Saturday prior to the Election and will be closed all day on the Monday immediately prior to the Election, Special Election or Primary to allow for preparation and set up for election on the following Tuesday (Election Day).

SO ADOPTED, this 16th day of July, 2009, to be effective immediately.

Bill Kendall, Commissioner

Towns County