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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Jackson County Missouri**

**August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

In a recent press release the County Executive has once again accused me of wrongdoing. As with his past false claims, I want to ensure that I clearly spell out the facts for the public. Only in Frank White's twisted interpretation of government service could helping a taxpayer who is incapable of helping themselves be seen as a bad thing. As background I offer the following for consideration by authorities and the public.

In 2023, hundreds of taxpayers reached out to my office begging for help in fighting the unlawful assessment increases. In a few cases when trying to educate taxpayers, I realized that for various reasons some were unable to represent themselves and lacked the financial resources to hire a third party. So, I volunteered to help them enter their appeals, gather evidence and upload that evidence. The Assessor and Board of Equalization insisted that no taxpayer would be afforded a hearing with the BOE until they had met in-person with Assessment and BOE staff, so I even hand carried some cases of immune compromised or otherwise incapable taxpayers into the Assessment/BOE office.

In no case did I ask for any special consideration from the staff and I never "argued" a case, I simply presented the evidence and asked for a determination after waiting in line with the public. In many cases the values were corrected by staff because it was obvious that the assessments placed on the properties were egregiously inflated. In a handful of cases the values could not be agreed upon and in consultation with the taxpayer we elected to proceed to the BOE as is every taxpayer's right to do.

My motivation for helping these constituents was two-fold. First and foremost, they needed help and had no other option. Second, and perhaps more importantly, walking through the appeals process firsthand allowed me to identify significant issues that need to be corrected in the assessment and appeal process. These issues are so profound that a judge found that many taxpayers were denied due process due to administration's failure to architect and execute a process that was fair and accessible for all taxpayers.

Several weeks ago, one of those cases finally came before the BOE. This specific taxpayer is not a "corporate

owner,” he is an individual who is elderly and lacks the acumen to appeal for himself and happens to hold his properties in an LLC. He provides affordable and stable housing to approximately 12 local families. The continued affordability of these homes for their residents was jeopardized by the unlawful increases that Frank White and his Assessor placed on thousands of Jackson County property owners. During the hearing, I did not identify myself as an elected official and I had no reason to believe that members of the BOE knew who I was, based only on my voice. My name is shared by almost one hundred individuals in the Kansas City Region, so short of identifying my voice they could not assume I was an elected official. There are also no prohibitions against elected officials helping our constituents, except in Frank White’s strangely twisted value system.

White’s cruel effort to keep Jackson County residents from getting help from their elected leaders isn't just represented in this latest press release and accusation. This vitriol has been demonstrated in the last year’s official policy of this administration. I will offer two instances.

First, from late 2023 when we negotiated the 2024 budget I advocated for one simple change in the budget and the administration agreed. This was a budget line of \$250,000 for "taxpayer advocates" who could do exactly what I had done for taxpayers - help those who could not help themselves. The administration agreed to this appropriation of funds and then throughout 2024 REFUSED to hire a single individual into the role. They had broken their promise to me and demonstrated that assisting our taxpayers would not be something they would actually support. So, when the appeal in question came before the BOE, two years later, there was still nobody to help this taxpayer.

Second, for my entire time in elected office, I was able to work with various county departments to help my constituents. In truth, this is the most rewarding part of the job. From notifying Parks and Rec about a tree blocking the Rock Island Trail, to helping get roads fixed and helping taxpayers, I am proud of my demonstrated advocacy for residents throughout all of Jackson County. This type of advocacy is why we have elected representatives. There has been frequent push-back by Frank White as members of the Legislature try to assist constituents. Then finally, earlier this summer the unspoken truth that Frank wants to be all powerful and ensure that the Legislature can't help our constituents was turned into official policy. In the attached memo Frank directs all county staff not to meet with or speak with members of the Legislature without the expressed permission from the county’s top elected official.

Concerning the compensation discussions which are ongoing related to the Board of Equalization, I am trying to correct several things related to the BOE. Among them, is addressing the belief that BOE members appeared to be compensated LESS than what is required by federal law. Additionally, BOE members were promised additional compensation by the administration as an incentive for them to accept the important roles that they fill for the county. Note that such promises (offering to pay more than is legally authorized) are highly unethical and this administration has a demonstrated history of doing this. In fact, the Legislature had to fulfill a similar empty promise by the administration to the previous members of this same board just last year. I believe that legally compliant compensation should be enacted by the Legislature, rather than promised without substance to our citizens as an incentivize to serve. Other changes I will include in legislation will help ensure that there are fair and objective standards of evidence codified for the BOE and appropriate autonomy between the BOE and the Assessor’s office. Such changes are vital as we seek to restore confidence in the county’s administration of the property tax system.

*Harry S. Truman, Presiding Judge.*  
1927-1934

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