

## Mourning the loss of State mortgage tax

County officials and editorialists across the state continue to bemoan the loss of the state's mortgage tax this summer.

The editorial writers echo county complaints that it's not fair for the Legislature to take away such a big revenue source for counties, and the tax produced \$47 million last year. One wrote that the tax, assessed at the rate of 26 cents on every \$100 borrowed, was hardly a burden on home buyers or farmers.

But most of these writers are fans of big government spending and never saw a tax they didn't like.

Bankers and real estate agents had pushed for repeal, arguing that the tax did not apply to any federal loans, including those with a federal guarantee or those made through a federal agency, such as Farm Credit.

About that, at least, the bankers were right. It was unfair for private banks to have to compete with federal agencies who didn't have to collect the tax. And on farm loans today, the fee adds up to big bucks.

One argument that county officials and opinion writers alike made was that repealing the mortgage tax would "force" counties to raise their property taxes yet again. Many claim the property tax is "regressive," since it affects those on a fixed income more than the wealthy, but the property levy has the virtue of being noticeable and somewhat painful when people have to pay it.

County officials no doubt liked having a handy source of revenue that most people never saw. Shifting the burden to the property owners will make the bite more real for taxpayers. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

Left unchecked, county commissioners tend to let spending rise. There's always pressure from employees to raise wages and benefits, while the state and federal government press counties to increase spending on dozens of programs, one after the other.

New federal standards make everything from running an ambulance to operating a sewer treatment plant to paving a road more expensive every year. A host of "free" grants tempt officials to spend more and more, with little thought to how they will pay for programs later.

When counties have money, as in recent "windfall" years when oil and farm assessments have shot up, there's temptation to raise wages, buy new equipment, improve services. Then, a year or two later, when the windfall has blown away, why surprise, they'll "be forced" to raise the property tax.

No one plans it that way, but hardly anyone ever plans for it *not* to happen.

County officials naturally want to make things better. They want to build up the ambulance service, buy equipment for the road crew, start new programs now and then, apply for grants and get federal "funding." "Off-grid" revenue like the mortgage tax makes these things easier.

But if they go raising the property tax now, blaming the Legislature for doing them wrong and shifting the burden, why maybe taxpayers will take notice and demand a stop to ever-increasing budgets.

And that would not be a bad thing at all. — Steve Haynes



## Questions surround release of prisoners

Many of our government operations are classified and rightfully so. That said, however, we still have a responsibility to question their activities and the current situation with Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl requires our immediate attention.

I want to believe obtaining the release of the young soldier will prove a good thing, but for now the jury is still out. Securing Bergdahl's release through an exchange of prisoners and not seeking prior congressional approval clouds President Obama's campaign promise of transparency.

Why did the young man leave his post unarmed? Perhaps he was disenchanted with the war or became intrigued with the Taliban. We do not know, but we do know he is a U.S. soldier and our responsibility. One former soldier said most of them, at one time or another, became weary and unsure of the U.S. position in the Middle East. But they don't all walk off the post either. Bergdahl's motivation for leaving

### Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



is still being investigated.

President Obama has some serious questions to answer too. When a president uses a situation to point to their good works, it seldom goes well. Just ask George W. Bush and his Mission Accomplished speech. His claim to victory on the ship's platform haunted him throughout his presidency. President Obama's photo op with Bergdahl's parents, I fear, will haunt him as well. Too many questions were left unanswered and too many agencies ignored when the President made the final call. It is one thing to send in SEALs to rescue a prisoner, it is quite another to negoti-

ate the release of the so-called Taliban Five. The Pentagon and several intelligence agencies had objected to their release for years. These Guantanamo Bay prisoners have had the dubious distinction of being too dangerous and too great of a threat to be released.

Many opposed the exchange, including former President George W. Bush's legal advisor, Jack Goldsmith. He says, however, President Obama probably acted lawfully in negotiating Bergdahl's release. The dissension and accusations regarding the exchange are being flung from both sides of the aisle. Each president has the advantage of surrounding themselves with qualified and trusted advisors of their choosing. Each president has the responsibility to collaborate with intelligence agencies and security officials and to remember just because we can do something doesn't necessarily mean we should. [mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net](mailto:mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net)



Dear Editor,

I would like to praise a Norton Area Resident, Dan Lauer for allowing me to continue my journey from Avon, CO to Dayton, OH, last April. On Friday Night, April 25th, I collided with a deer west of Norton on US 36, and the damage included a busted radiator to my vehicle. Being a weekend, I was told the soonest the repair could be made would be the following Tuesday. I contacted Dan at Kansasland Tire, and he indicated that if I could possibly find a replacement radiator in Hays, KS, where he was going that evening he would pick it up for me. A radiator was available and not only did Dan pick it up, he installed it on the following Sunday morning, his day off. Consequently, I was able to continue onto my destination.

Your community should be proud to have a caring local resident such as Dan which says a lot about the people of Northwest Kansas.

Ned Myers  
Dayton, OH

## The joys of babysitting babies and felines

May was such a busy month, you have no idea! Not to worry, I'm about to tell you!

Mo is one! Ah, where did our baby go?

College graduation at OU! As an ardent KU fan told me, these schools need to go to Kansas State and observe how they do graduation! There is no excuse for the madness we witnessed at Norman.

But it is now official, Elizabeth Maughan, PHD. She has a job. Not the job she might have hoped for but a job and as Patricia says, "A husband". My husband says I've been spoiled for too many years to understand how a gal longs for a perfect mate!

There have been medical appointments for the mother-in-law. Applying the "Hagman Principal": no one died! But they could have, the hubby witnessed a guy almost have an aneurism in the waiting room over the wait time. The VA has nothing on that particular medical group. Good thing no one had a gun!

Now I'm cat sitting. Kate is moving. She sold her house in Garden City! Yeah! The new job began May 5 in Wichita. She is staying with Aunt Sue, who has a cat!

In the meantime it was between Elizabeth and me who got Kate's cats. Elizabeth was supposed to come up and help with some projects so rather than move the cats to Oklahoma it made sense they come here.

I almost had to provide references to get the gig until Kate got a reality check from a friend who is moving from Utah to New York.

### This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



It wasn't a glowing endorsement of my potential. It was this: "At least your mom offered to keep your cats; my mom suggested we take ours to the pound!"

I hope those cats travel better than Domino and Linus. Domino will not go in a pet carrier. If you manage to get her in she gets herself out! Linus gets car sick.

Once installed in the basement however, they are very calm. Still Kate insists they need human interaction. "Mom, you have to spend time with them!"

So I decided to watch the Royals down there. The kitties may learn some new words. Practicing restraint will be good for when I babysit Mo June 16-20. (If Elizabeth shows up to watch the cats!) In whose world do the needs of cats trump the grandson?

My perfect mate is not going to help with the cat venture! Thought he might babysit the grandson!

I work on my latest needle project, twilling, while socializing. I keep the thread hidden because someone's cat died from swallowing thread clippings. I fold the scissors up after each use so there will not be any sharp edges.

I also cut out a quilt with a rotary cutter. That went pretty well until

Linus decided to lie on the cutting mat. I dumped him off. He went over and sniffed the project box; it is about the size of a shoe box. He circled it several times, and then tried to curl up in it, all 15 pounds of him. When that didn't work he attacked the box!

I understand his frustration. I also lash out when hints are dropped about my weight!

I'm reluctant to attempt to actually sew in the basement because I'd need to iron. I asked Kate what the cats do when one irons. "I don't iron!" was the reply.

Actually trying to socialize with the cats is a waste of time. Mostly they sleep. Whatever they do when I'm not down there must be exhausting!

At least Kate found a house in Wichita. So cute!

But now there is a problem with the appraisal. I'm in shock. Houses in Wichita seem cheap. Though not cheap enough for that appraiser!

If it is back to house hunting, I'm advising her to offer \$30,000 under asking, the sellers may be offended but those houses are not going to appraise at asking.

Bigger question: how long am I cat-sitting?

When she called about the problem with the appraisal Kate said, "I'm glad the cats are in good hands!"

Ahhhhh-----Makes me feel all warm and fuzzy: cat like!

Guess I better go socialize. Or clean the litter box. You have no idea! Don't worry; I'm not going to tell you!

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