

Increased assessments can create tax 'windfall'

County commissioners across the state are expecting a tax "windfall" next year from increased assessments on agricultural land. Some are already making plans to spend it, but that might not be the best idea.

For one thing, tax windfalls have a way of disappearing as fast as they appear. A county that spends a windfall to fix roads, add to its staff or give employees a raise often has to hike taxes later to sustain the spending.

And that leads to unhappy voters. Whether that will happen this time is anybody's guess. Commissioners have been complaining for some time that ag land was under-assessed, even on the "income" formula the state uses to set its value. But that same formula can produce dips in valuation as well as increases.

Assessors tell us that part of the increase this year is due to changes at Kansas State University, which does the math on land values for the state. That part of the increase might be permanent, at least until the formula changes again. But it's only part of the increase; increases in farm income the last few years account for the rest.

And farm income comes and goes. It's known for wild swings.

So the likelihood of this windfall disappearing, or shrinking, a year or two out is great. Plus,

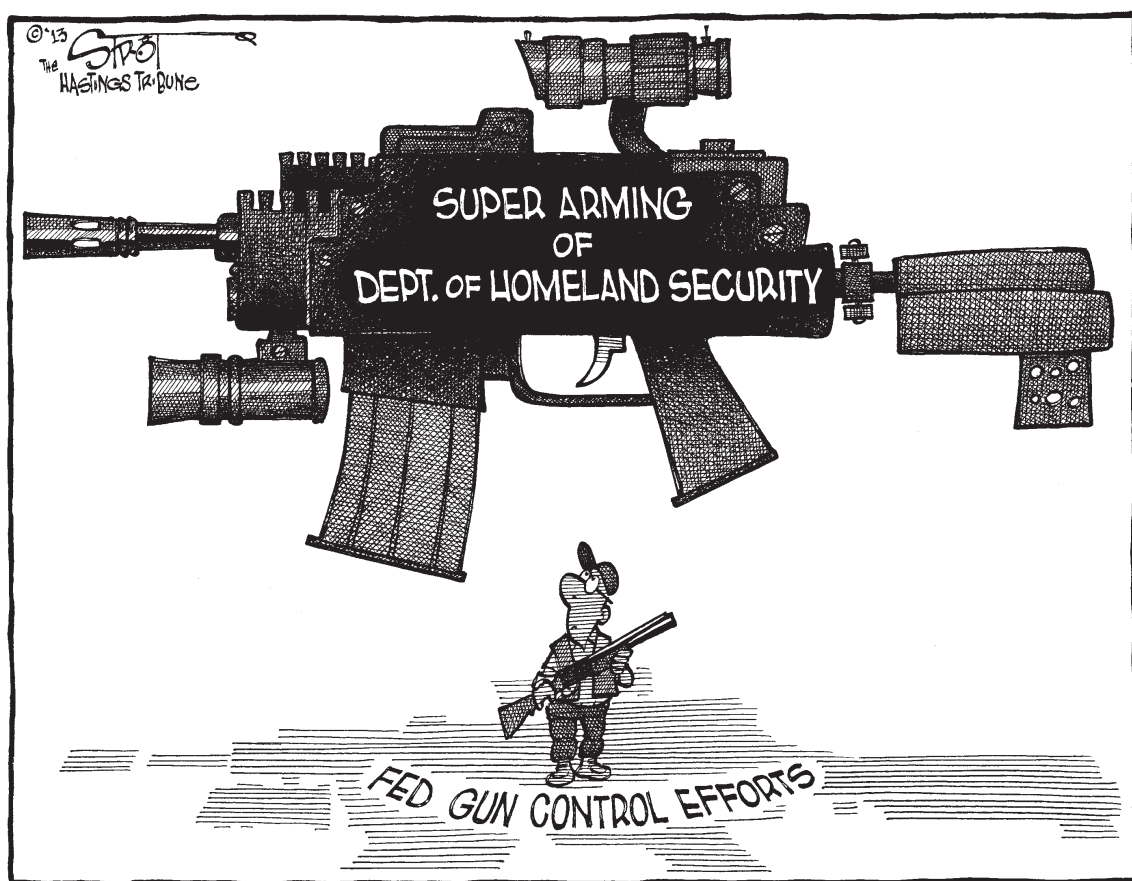
it's a windfall in name only. Even if tax rates stay the same, the farmers and ranchers who own this land will have to pay real, larger tax bills that may not make them too happy. That could lead to more assessment appeals, unpaid taxes and unhappy voters, even pressure on the Legislature to change the formula.

A safer course for counties would be to hold the line on spending and let tax rates — gasp — go down. Voters are almost sure to approve. That would give everyone, even the farmer with an increases assessment, a break.

No doubt, there are a lot of demands on county government, especially from new programs pressed on counties by the state and federal governments. But the mood of voters in this state is pretty clear: they've elected the most conservative, anti-tax governor and Legislature in anyone's memory.

Commissioners will be tempted to increase spending next year, given the situation, but it might not be wise given the times. It might even invite a return of the old tax lid or other limits on local spending which we'd be better off without.

For now, the ball is in the commissioners' court. We advise due caution, conservative spending and listening to the will and mood of the voters. — Steve Haynes



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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I don't like the looks of this. How far is this "politically correct" nonsense going to go?

David Fabrizio, a middle school principal in Ipswich, Mass., has canceled that school's awards celebration.

In a letter to parents he wrote, "The Honors Night, which can be a great sense of pride for the recipients' families, can also be devastating to a child who has worked extremely hard in a difficult class but who, despite growth, has

not been able to maintain a high grade-point average."

Well you know what Mr. Fabrizio? That's too darn bad!

We live in a tough world. Wouldn't it do more good to have our children realize that life isn't always fair? Rather than coddling kids to soften the blows of reality, might it not be more helpful for them to see early on that not everyone gets the blue ribbon?

But that would be too "devastating" to their little egos.

Perhaps by those kids seeing others recognized for achievements they might find in themselves the power to overcome adversity. Most certainly that would better prepare them for the cold and cruel world that awaits them, more so than this course of political correctness.

Hangin' With Marge

Working Outside

By Margaret Bucholtz



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I love working outside this time of year! There is nothing like having the warm sun shining down, an occasional bird chirping in the distance, the silence and freedom of the wide-open spaces.

I realize however that each year I get a little more tired than I did the year before. Being a low self-esteem person, I tend to try a little harder. I had one yard and someone out there told me it was beautiful so in my mind I decided I needed two yards and I have worked my way up until I now have four yards of flowers and grass and one vegetable garden. It finally dawned on me a couple of years ago that there is a difference in having a pretty yard and being an over achiever.

Still I enjoy all of them and just can't get rid of them. However I think maybe someone is trying to tell me that I need to cut back, because weird things are happening out there.

A couple of years ago as I was cleaning up one of my yards I ran

across these odd looking things that I thought were huge mushrooms. I thought it might be my chance to get some free mushrooms to cook but as I touched them they didn't seem right. Before I go any farther I do have to confess that I can't stand to get my hands dirty, so I wear rubber gloves covered by gardening gloves.

Now back to the mushrooms. There was a cluster of about 15 to 20 of these things under a huge plant. I pick one from the ground and it kind of has a point on the bottom side but it was soft, slimy and was white with black looking specks. I went ahead and pulled them all out and put them in my wheelbarrow along with the other things. When I dumped them in my yard waste holes I had a thought about looking up snake eggs. Sure enough that was what it was and now every time I go out to the garden I think of them, but haven't found any of them since.

This last week I went out and was clearing out my yard and was

digging all the purple mustard that we get from our ditches out here. While I was digging one out I noticed a little thing that was like a holly berry but it was brown. I thought to myself, "What kind of berry would I have growing in my yard right next to the vegetable garden?"

I stuck the dandelion digger in once more and this time there were more berries but they were dark blue, orange, white with spots and tan. About then I decided to pop one of them to see what was in there and sure enough it was another egg with something in it. As I was playing scientist I saw something move and it was a centipede. I couldn't do the drop, roll, kick things but I did do the roll, stagger to get on my feet and run. I cannot stand centipedes. I did go back and tried to stab it to death but who knows if I killed it or if it just went underground.

I moved from that spot to another one but I could feel things crawling all over me. I knew it was just my nerves crawling but I gave it up and took a long shower.

Later I looked up centipedes and they do hatch their eggs and the colors fit.

Retirement looks better all the time!

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GOD SAYS

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.

Romans 12:9, 10

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