

Fair mortgage fees should apply to all

A bill in the Kansas Senate that would phase out the state's mortgage registration fee strikes us as an attempt to change a bad law, but it has run up against a solid wall of opposition from county officials who do not want to give up the revenue.

That's understandable, since this tax produces about \$45 million a year for Kansas counties, an amount which in many counties far exceeds the cost of running the register of deeds' office.

The fee, or tax, has in effect become a cash cow for many counties. And no county wants to lose it. County officials say ending the tax would force them to increase property taxes instead, and no one, they say, likes property taxes, let alone an increase.

The problem with that stance is that the tax as collected is not applied evenly. It can't be collected on loans made by Farm Credit cooperatives or backed by federal guarantees such as those made by the Veterans Administration. The fee is paid only by people who get a loan from a private, for-profit bank.

Kansas bankers say they have enough trouble competing with Farm Credit, which benefits from federal subsidies, without the state creating an "uneven playing field." Kansas Realtors say the tax is unfair to home buyers and may hold back home sales.

If counties are to collect such a fee, it seems to us, it needs to apply to all mortgages or to none.

When it was implemented in 1925, federal programs did not exist. The proposed bill includes increases in other fees collected by registers of deeds, but would not produce enough money to replace the cash-cow end of this law.

It seems to us that a broader-based transfer tax or registration tax would be more fair. Or if it comes down to loading this relatively small cost on all county taxpayers, rather than just on a few homebuyers, that would not be the end of the world.

It certainly would be more fair than the situation today.

But it seems to us that county commissioners do have another choice: Instead of just raising taxes again, they might want to make some judicious cuts in the budget here and there, trim some waste and just reduce the overall size of county government a little.

Voters and taxpayers might approve of that. Of course, the counties might need to look at some of their newer programs and slash away at them, even if it means giving up some federal grants. And they might need some help from the Legislature, which sometimes requires counties to do stuff the state won't pay for. They call those "unfunded mandates." We'd be fine with that, too.

Less government, lower fees, fairness. Those are not bad things. County officials might just want to get onboard. — Steve Haynes



Doctor praises civic volunteers

Dear Editor:

In addition to my clinical duties at the Bird City and St. Francis clinics, the hospital, the ER, the nursing home, county health, home health, EMS and coroner, I am also medical director in these settings as well. Clearly, I cannot do all this were it not for good systems and leadership in place.

When those systems fail, then as medical director, I have to make changes as I can't manage that on my own. We have had to peer into the future and evaluate where EMS services are going on a statewide basis, as well as what was or wasn't working in our county. To the end, I have started a systems change in our current EMS organization.

The current EMS volunteers are an impeccable group of tireless,

Letters to the Editor

very civic minded people that give of their time, both from work and family. They also invest heavily of their physical and emotional energy. They see circumstances most of us would shy away from and wouldn't sleep at nights after. These represent the best of what our community has to offer.

As I implemented the changes in EMS, I have inadvertently caused these people to feel that they are not valued. This was a grave mistake on my part and I very sincerely apologize to them. I am very excited at where we can go with the new EMS plan and I fully expect that these volunteers will be a very important part of it's success.

I also know that our commissioners, who give of their time and energy, also have been disparaged as a result of these changes. I also apologize to them for the heat they have taken. I took a problem to the commissioners and they did the work to help us get things changed. Their job is thankless and I made it even more this month. I appreciate the leadership they show when things are hard.

I know there are concerns, real and imagined. Please feel free to come speak with me about these anytime.

Sincerely,
Mary Beth Miller, M.D.

Legislative News

High court considers school funding

There was only a two day legislative session last week. The big news came from the State Supreme Court on Friday at 9:30 a.m. The high court ordered the three-judge district court panel to consider whether the Legislature, by session's end, can eliminate disparities in funding school district capital outlay and Local Option Budget (LOB) supplemental funds. The basic idea is that wherever the student is from they should have a suitable and equitable education. Those two funds together would be about a \$130 million cost to the legislature.

The issue puts the three judge panel squarely between the Legislature and school districts. Most school districts want the funding, but they are aware that if the panel

rejects the legislature efforts, they would lose lots of dollars because the panel was ordered to freeze funds if the inequities are not solved.

My belief is that if the Supreme Court would have ruled for a \$440 million settlement, which was the figure most thrown around, there would have been tremendous unrest between the Legislature and Courts. I also believe our leadership would have just said no to the courts. This week should give us a good indication on how the Governor and Legislature will deal with the additional expense.

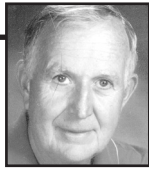
School lawsuits have gone on in Kansas since 1972 and it would be wonderful if a lasting solution could be found. I have said all along that Western Kansas educa-

tion is not a problem. Everything I have seen shows me higher graduation rates, attendance rates, and outstanding student achievement from our area. Unfortunately, there is only one school finance formula.

Issues are heating up and it will become very interesting in Topeka the next few weeks. There is no doubt that the upcoming election will play a big part in how leadership proceeds.

A good news item: Kansas exports grew by more than 6% in 2013. There was \$12.45 billion in exports which is the second highest total in Kansas history. The three biggest areas we export to: Canada, China, and Mexico.

By
Ward
Cassidy



120th State Representative

Casey's Comments

Technology dependence

I don't know about you, but technology scares the dickens out of me.

This probably needs a little clarification. It's the loss of our ability to access technology that frightens me.

Last week, my office lost Internet service. This meant that our computers instantly became nothing more than over sized paper weights.

Luckily, we still had phone service, which allowed us to identify with our provider that the problem lay either with our modem or router. The new equipment was shipped from them, and arrived a day and a half later. In the mean time, we were forced to put pen to paper, making lists of what needed to be done.

Fortunately, the family home computer helped to get much of what was missing at the office.

This got me thinking what a dou-

ble-edged-sword technology is. Yes, it brings information to our finger tips at light speed. But what happens when our dependence upon it is greater than the ability to provide?

Taking this a step further, what would happen to our government and military if their information and

communication networks became inoperable?

Sure, there are "IT" people around that have a better grasp on how this techno world is supposed to operate. Do you suppose this stuff keeps them up at night?

By
Casey
McCormick



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GOD SAYS
The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.
Proverbs 14:20, 21

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