

from our viewpoint...

Christmas tree fee draws pundit's fire

The conservative pundits were quick to jump on a "Christmas Tree Tax" supposedly proposed by the Obama Administration last week, and their quick action brought the plan to a sudden halt.

The "liberal" media usually gets taken to task for jumping to conclusions and blowing small things out of proportion. This time the Heritage Foundation was the one getting taken to task for jumping on the Christmas Tree Tax.

The United States Department of Agriculture had announced in the Federal Register on Monday, Nov. 7 a fee of 15 cents for natural trees would be collected beginning on Wednesday, Nov. 9.

Within hours David S. Addington of the The Foundry a part of The Heritage Network was announcing "Obama Couldn't Wait: His New Christmas Tree Tax."

"President Obama's Agriculture Department today announced it will impose a new 15 cent charge on all fresh Christmas trees - the Christmas Tree Tax - to support a new Federal program to improve the image and marketing of Christmas trees.

"Acting Administrator Shipman had the temerity to say the 15-cent mandatory Christmas tree fee 'is not a tax nor does it yield revenue for the Federal government.' The Federal government mandates the Christmas tree sellers pay the 15-cents per tree, whether they want to or not. Mr. President, that's a new 15-cent tax to pay for a Federal program to improve the image and marketing of Christmas trees.

"Just because the Obama Administration has the legal power to impose its Christmas Tree Tax doesn't mean it should do so.

"And, by the way, the American Christmas tree has a great image that doesn't need any help from the government."

Jeremy Holden of Media Matters, however, explains this fee was in the works as far back as 2008, before Obama was elected. And it was generated by tree growers. "Far from a tax initiated by the Obama administration," Holden says, "the proposal to create an assessment on tree growers to fund a research and promotion program through the USDA was begun by the industry during the Bush administration."

The National Christmas Tree Association explained they had been trying to do a voluntary program for several years and it failed. They had requested the USDA create National Christmas Tree Board and proposed the 15 cent fee to pay for the promotion program. Across the country the 15cents was expected to raise about \$2 million to help promote natural grown Christmas trees.

Statistics from the USDA show fresh-tree sales declined from 37 million in 1991 to 31 million in 2007. Artificial tree sales, meanwhile, nearly doubled, to 17.4 million, from 2003 to 2007.

The Christmas Trees would have joined the other 19 groups who have used the USDA program to develop a promotional and informational effort. Those groups include: Beef, Blueberries, Cotton, Dairy Products, Eggs, Fluid Milk, Hass Avocados, Honey Packers and Importers, Lamb, Mangos, Mushrooms, Peanuts, Popcorn, Pork, Potatoes, Sorghum, Soybeans and Watermelons.

Remember the slogans "Got Milk," "Beef. It's What's for Dinner," and "The Incredible, Edible Egg." Those were developed through similar self-imposed fee programs that are voted on by the people of each industry and collect fees to promote each product.

Congratulations to the "conservative media" for stopping this type of home grown effort to promote small family Christmas tree farms. - Tom Betz



Those pesky highway radar signs

Whoever thought of coupling a radar gun with a road sign has an evil mind. Come the revolution, I say he's at the top of my list.

OK, it gets kinda crowded up there.

I remember when a radar gun was quite the novelty. Most cops didn't have one, just a few elite state guys. And the trooper had to stop the car, open the trunk and set up the radar on a tripod on the shoulder. A second trooper would do the stopping.

Even when they started mounting them on the dash, the cruiser had to be stopped to get a speed reading. Darned things wouldn't calculate if they were moving.

I remember, nearly 40 years ago, riding along with a Kansas Highway Patrol trooper using one of the first moving radars. It could read both its speed and the oncoming car's and figure the difference.

We were on the Turnpike, though, and the trooper had to find a place to turn around, no easy task with the deep, narrow median in the original design, and harder now with the concrete barriers in place. He'd turn the lights on, point and hope they got the message.

Anyway, the moving radar was such a novelty, the story and photos made Page 1 in the



steve haynes

• along the sappa

old *Kansas City Times*. Of course, nearly every patrol car has a radar on the dash, capable of shooting speed fore and aft, moving or still. It's part of the equipment, like a red light.

And little miniature radar units fit in an oversized traffic sign. One flashed at me the other day: "Speed limit 55," it said. "Your speed 59" "Slow down."

I thought it was kinda rude, really. I wasn't going that fast.

This "feedback radar" thing started a few years ago with trailer-mounted units that the authorities could put wherever speeding was a problem. Today, apparently, the whole thing fits on the back of a standard-size road sign equipped with a digital display.

Next, the sign will call a trooper to report any unrepentant speeders. Or just take their picture and have the computer send them a ticket, like the spotlight cameras they have in the city.

But if you ask me, the signs already are getting too bossy. I have my wife along for that.

For the last few years, Kansas drivers have had a big loophole in the technology used by Colorado toll roads. The powers that be figured out that paying live toll collectors - or even maintaining those change-eating bins - costs too much. Close-up television cameras could record the front license tag and the driver's image and just send the owner a bill.

So, they did away with toll collectors and went to computerized billing. Only in Colorado they have front license tags, and in Kansas, of course, we don't.

You could drive up and down the toll roads around Denver all day and never pay a dime. In fact, unless you mailed in a check, you couldn't find anyone to pay.

That worked for a couple of years, but it appears they've finally caught up with us. The other day, we were in Denver, and Cynthia used the toll road to get to the airport. Next week, she got a bill for \$3.

So, apparently, they have enough cameras to read your rear license tag, too.

I wonder how many Kansas toll-runners they have to catch to pay for those?

Social Security or stealing our savings?

To the Editor:

Social Security or Stealing Savings? A local (only) stamp should be cheaper! What is cost of hauling mail off (to Wichita), for jobs there and hauling it back? Then closing small post offices, devastating rural people!

It would be more efficient to build a refinery there, for Alaska, Canada and North Dakota oil, than pipe the profit to Texas.

In all of Social Security - whose money was ever saved for, and returned too - plus interest? If anybody but Congress had foisted this pyramid, Ponzi, chain letter scheme on the people of U.S.A., they would be punished for fraud. Abolish retirement (\$) for every elected official; if budget is not balanced, dock their pay, by the same percent!

"Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the way, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your soul. - Jeremiah 6:16.

Frank Sowers
Benkelman, Neb.

PS: Where doth the Constitution permit taxing everybody to benefit anyone?

There is a "Rumor" out, I am going to sue the City of Goodland. It is not true!

I have never even thought of doing that. I love Goodland and will spend the rest of my life here.

I wrote the article about what has happened to the Museum because I think it is important to keep all our history for the future generations.

I am asking all the people who have donated articles to the Museum, to please leave them in there, as they are protected and on record for every single thing. We will want these for the future.

Glenda Parks
Goodland

I just celebrated my 47th wedding anniversary. I'm the child of parents who were married for 37 years, and the only thing that broke up that union was the death of my father.

I believe children thrive in families with two married, fully participating and emotionally healthy parents. Such a family is able to withstand what life throws at it, from the trials of a bad



from our readers

• to the editor

economy to the frustrations of everyday living. But not everybody has that kind of marriage.

To argue - as the Brownback Administration appears to be doing - that marriage alone will end poverty is simplistic, at the very least, and potentially dangerous. I am particularly concerned the governor opened his child poverty town hall meetings this week with a speaker who declared encouraging marriage is the most effective tool policymakers can use to fight poverty.

Marriage can be wonderful, but it can also be horrific.

Before I ever thought about entering politics, I ran the YWCA in Topeka. A year after I started as executive director in 1977, I helped create the city's Battered Women's Task Force. I counseled hundreds of women who were facing domestic violence. I found them shelter and helped them put their lives back together.

I learned living in a family where one parent beats the other parent or beats both mother and child is far more destructive to a daughter or son than living in a single-parent household, even one that struggles to make the rent every month.

I learned about the poor or absent parenting skills, alcoholism, drug abuse and mental illness that leads some parents to neglect their children or to physically and emotionally abuse them. And I learned all of these things occurred in rich families as well as poor ones.

Children in these families were not protected by the fact their parents were married, or by the fact that their parents had money. The only way to end these children's suffering was to get them and their mothers away from their abusers.

Ending childhood poverty is a laudable objective, but we can only reach that goal by creating more jobs, improving our schools and guaranteeing high quality and affordable childcare, among other things.

I applaud the idea of encouraging marriage, but complex problems like poverty require real solutions.

Joan Wagnon retired in January as the Sec-

retary of Revenue for the state. She is the chair of the Kansas Democratic Party.

In 1990, President Gerald Ford designated the first National Adoption Week. However, the week was expanded into a month due to the number of states that wanted to participate in the events.

We are all adopted into God's Kingdom if we ask Him into our hearts. As we make the choice to make a personal relationship with the Lord, we find ourselves facing spiritual battles, which we can face in His grace with a continued peace in our hearts.

What a great choice it would be for us as Christians to open our hearts and adopt all the 900 plus children in the state of Kansas now in foster care who are adoptable. You will learn that with a close personable relationship with these children, you will find yourself in the battle. It will appear you are battling the state, community, church and school, the child and yourself.

But keeping God, with the Holy Spirit as your guide, you will go past the blame game, knowing in the end the families that come together will be overwhelmingly blessed. With God's help, presence, and leading in the situation, state, community, church and schools can all come together as one to help break the cycle, and we can make a stronger future.

It's not about you, it's about a child that will have a forever home. After adopting eight children who were between the ages of 9 and 13, we now have 30 of the blessings sitting around the table. Give one more child a forever home!

Delbert Harvey
Quinter

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