

SUMMIT HERALD

Thursday, October 17, 1963

Those Six Public Questions

The final public question opens the way for legislation that would permit the assessment of farm land on the basis of farm use. The reason for this is that under the existing arrangement, if a farm is in a potentially valuable residential or commercial location it can be assessed for taxes at its potential value. In many instances high taxes on farms in this way have forced farmers to sell and go out of the farming business.

Question No. 6 assures that land actively used for farming will be taxed only for that use and not for its future development value. A "Yes" vote on this question, in effect, retains the countryside and slows up the relentless process of urbanizing.

THE SUMMIT HERALD,
Thursday, Oct. 24, 1963

Can Have It Both Ways
Editor, Summit Herald:

In your editorial of October 17, you assert that a "Yes" vote on Public Question No. 6 (the farm-land assessment question) will: (1) "retain the countryside," and (2) "slow up the process of urbanizing."

While much has been said about the desirability of "retaining the countryside," which is presumably the main objective of this proposal, little has been said about the implications of the "process of urbanizing," and the consequences of slowing up this process. Furthermore, it has been accepted without question that such slowing up is unavoidable, if the countryside is to be retained, even though no evidence has been offered to support this notion.

The high market value of certain farm lands implies that people want to use these lands for making or selling goods that other people want to buy, or for building homes that other people want to live in. To impede such activities is to hamper "economic growth" and to restrain people's efforts to improve their standard of living.

Are these consequences a reasonable price to pay for the preservation of "open space" and "green acres?" This is the question we would have to answer, if farm land not needed for producing food were the only land available for expansion of other activities.

F. George Rumph
Paul Nix

Fortunately, for the time being at least, we can have it both ways if we play our cards right. There is plenty of non-farm land that is not only available for non-farm uses, but is better suited for such uses, by virtue of being located in or near the centers of population. The problem is to pry it loose.

One way is for the government to appropriate the land, as in "urban renewal." Under this procedure, the forestallers are bought off with taxes levied on the industrious and thrifty.

Another alternative is to tax the land loose, by shifting taxes from buildings, improvements, and personal property, to land values. As you pointed out in your editorial, high taxes on farms have forced farmers to go out of the farming business. By the same token, high taxes on vacant lots would force vacant-lot owners to go out of the vacant-lot business. As an added dividend, high taxes on slums would force slum owners to go out of the slum business.

Why sacrifice one goal for another, when by applying a little common sense, we can have both?

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