

Greetings:

1955

A visitor to Monticello in 1809 described this scene - after dinner, it was the custom for the children to play games with Grandfather Jefferson on the lawn. Races were among the favorite sports. Jefferson always organized the contestants carefully according to size. He gave the word for starting and away they flew. When they returned to the point from which they started, panting and out of breath, they threw themselves into their grandfather's arms, which were open to receive them. He was sitting on the grass and they sat down by him until they were rested. They now called on him to run with them. In spite of his 67 years, Jefferson joined them in a sprint. - Most grandparents will appreciate this little anecdote.

The joy he derived from his grandchildren was a great comfort to Jefferson. It offset personal tragedies, bitter political struggles and the heavy financial problems that pressed on him. I find the same joy in my grandchildren. On a bulletin board behind my desk are pictures of Sarah, Gabe, Elia and now the newest arrival, my sister's granddaughter Caryn. I gaze at this and they bring much pleasure after the dismal daily newspaper and the tawdry tripe of TV.

Most disturbing is the increasing ineptitude of govt - federal, state, local. Not for myself - my course is almost run - but for our younger people, for grandchildren we hold dear. Despite the prodigious budgets, the multiplying bureaucracy, the constant cranking out of new legislation, the future for them seems quite bleak.

Observe the constant output of new laws, new bills, a legislative diarrhea. Enough. Time to grind out less bills and give thought to what is presently on the statute books. How much is not being enforced - ignored, flouted. Laws adopted in their day after controversy and effort, now gather dust contrary to our duty and the sworn oath of those in high office. Why not enforce these as was intended?

For example: the Constitution of the State of Arizona, adopted in 1912, has a statute that says "all property shall be assessed at full cash value... and full cash value is defined as the price set by a willing buyer and a willing seller"... Clear, concise, meaningful. The vote to adopt this was not easy to achieve. Yet it has been on the statute books all these years and never enforced. It is violated on every side. The County Assessors, in their oath, swear these very words when being inducted. Every official swears to uphold the State Constitution which includes this statute. Yet it has never been done.

A recent news story relates that Ariz Atty General Bruce Babbitt asked for meetings with Phoenix city employees in the investigation of sales tax irregularities. So much zeal on this, yet silence on the property tax. Perhaps there would be need for less sales taxes, that bear heavily on the poor, the aged, the unemployed, if the property tax were effectively administered.

If this statute were enforced as required by the State Constitution, shameful tax inequities might be ended. Outrageous underassessment exists on countless properties. Holders escape paying their fair share of taxes. Revenue is lost. Added tax burdens are imposed on the rest of the taxpaying public. Enforcing this statute would bring funds to pay for needed services. It would discourage land speculation which mulcts unwary investors, besmirching the name of Arizona. It would lessen withholding of land from higher and better use and encourage activity, employment and demand for products, services and financing - from which all would benefit.

At this holiday season, we send greetings - peace on earth, good will to men. We can help to speed this with good laws and good administration - a Jeffersonian hope.

--- Joseph Zashin