

Sprawl Is a Tax Issue

by Al Katzenberger, St. Louis, MO,

I enjoyed reading "Managing Growth, Destroying Freedom" by Joseph L. Bast, president of The Heartland Institute. It saddens me, though, that Bast wants a flare of freedom that can not be sustained. Freedom is a balancing act requiring discipline on the part of each individual immersed in the collective nature of the state (governments.)

Urban sprawl is not a freedom issue. Urban sprawl is a privilege provided by the state. When a government relaxes its moral responsibility to the individuals in its jurisdiction, individuals will create other jurisdictions to escape. Just look at the patchwork of jurisdictions round our urban centers. We have over 100,000 local governments in the United States. If we count local entities legally authorized to collect subdivision fees, business district fees, land trust fees, beautification fees, etc., we have over 500,000 local governments and more being created every day. These taxing jurisdictions are privileges provided by the state. Why is this happening and why is the state so willing to allow the growth of all these taxing agencies? Answer: TO INCREASE TAXES!

In urban areas there is the phenomenon of urban overload. We have many taxing agencies taxing the same location and individual(s) who reside(s) at the same location. Usually we do not pay much attention to this phenomenon because the payment of those taxes are usually out of mind because we pay them through a third party such as a mortgage company. The state is smart in not requiring each of the taxes to be paid separately to each taxing agency. The state has developed a system of what is called "captured revenue." Anyone who is an employer knows the state has "captured" its revenue before the employee sees a paycheck. The mortgage company captures the state's revenue from your mortgage payments. All these government efficiency techniques keep us from paying attention to our payments to the state.

Some might call all this freedom to sprawl, but those who understand the nature of the state call it running from the tax collectors. Once these new local jurisdictions are created, they start demanding services from the state. The first demand is usually new or improved highways. The new jurisdictions usually require developers to follow strict building codes that do not encourage "mixed housing or transi-

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tional housing." So I get married and buy a house that is too big, knowing I want four children. By the time the children are ready to leave home and live in "the neighborhood," all the houses in the neighborhood are too big and too expensive.

Mr. Bast needs to continue his efforts to help us safeguard the freedoms we have. We can not be free as long as the state continues to take from us what does not belong to the state. We need site-value-charges (not taxes) to break the last vestiges of slavery to the state.

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St. Louis Teachers and School Related Personnel Union, Local 420, AFT/AFL-CIO. Three resolutions written by Katzenberger, initially submitted to the 1992 National AFT convention, were resubmitted to the 1994 National AFT convention. Supported by the Missouri Federation of Teachers, the three resolutions were entitled: "Economics Issues," "Fair Taxation: Amendment 28 to the U.S. Constitution," and "Henry George Commemorative Stamp." (See Sept.-Oct. 1994 Groundswell write-up.) For the past three years, Katzenberger has staffed a PREC/CGUSA booth at the National Conference of State Legislatures annual meetings.)