

Property tax-relief talk is so much political rhetoric

Disgruntled residents in Oakland County communities digest a lot of political rhetoric about property tax relief. Most, if not all of it, is bunk.

Taxpayers' reactions run the gamut from disgust and helplessness to fury and frustration. Very few persons, squeezed between a rock and a hard place with mushrooming property tax assessments in an anemic economy can believe in the political system.

Members of a group called Taxpayers of Oakland County are spinning their wheels trying to get signatures on a petition urging immediate passage of Bill 73.

This weak bit of legislation sponsored by Sen. Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, and Sen. Harry DeMaso, R-Battle Creek, proposes to freeze 1982 property taxes at the 1981 level.

The measure has two chances of passing — slim and none. The bill is in the House Taxation Committee where it could come to an end in the unfriendly hands of Rep. William A. Ryan, D-Detroit.

THE SENATE approved the bill by a 23-12 vote. But



Jackie Klein

Senate opponents to the bill see it as arbitrary and irresponsible.

"You can vote on this," Sen. Gary Corbin, D-Clio, told fellow legislators. "But you can thank God that Bill Ryan is chairman of the House Taxation Committee and will bury it."

Welborn himself admits the measure doesn't offer much relief. But, he maintains, it's a first step and the freeze would work within the current assessment system.

Then there's the problem of local units and public school districts who are against a freeze because they need revenues to protect necessary services.

The proposed freeze wouldn't cause a direct loss of

revenues to the state. But the state might have to spend more bucks supplementing the school aid fund if the freeze creates hardships to public school districts.

A petition for an amendment to the constitution is being circulated by Citizens for Property Tax Relief and Quality Education of Davisburg. Sponsors are Rep. Claude Trim, D-Davisburg, and Rep. Roy Smith, R-Ypsilanti.

THE PROPOSED amendment calls for a 1 percent sales tax hike to be earmarked for local schools. The measure exempts 100 percent of school operating taxes for residents 62 or older and 75 percent with a cap of \$1,000 for younger folks. It talks about reimbursing school districts for losses via the sales tax and proposed state income tax boost.

But, according to some doubters, there's at least one kicker in the measure. It's the phrase, "Guarantees local control by local school boards."

A former school board trustee maintains local school autonomy leads to book burning, religion in schools and bans on sex education. Sponsors of the amendment say it isn't so.

Then there's the legislation which calls for assessment by classification. — the so-called Truth-in-Taxation Act. The rub is that generally residential taxpayers are getting an increase in property assessments while commercial and industrial properties aren't being raised, so these taxpayers will get a comparatively greater reduction than residents.

One local official in Southfield calls Truth in Taxation a "homeowner ripoff" because residents will still be bearing the brunt of assessment hikes while the business community gets a free ride.

"The homeowner should be declared the loser of the year," he says. He's got a point there.

Expatriate family tries to keep a home in Israel

"If the Egyptians want to make peace with Petach Tikvah, will we have to move again?"

It wasn't a member of the Israeli Knesset or an inquisitive journalist asking the question, it was my 4-year-old grandson, Arik Cheshin, a new resident of Petach Tikvah, which is a suburb of Tel Aviv.

You really can't blame him for asking. From a child's point of view, Arik has paid a heavy price for a tenuous peace that is still far from a reality.

When he was born on June 9, 1977, my husband Jack and I were proud that our first grandchild is an eighth generation Jerusalemite through his father Alex's line. But just as Americans go where the action and opportunity is, so did Alex and our daughter, Elaine. They moved to Yamit, a small city in the northern Sinai, to start a new business and a new life about four years ago.

Yamit was the dream of a group of American immigrants and Israelis as well. They came to that spot on the edge of the desert, close to the blue Mediterranean determined to build a model city they could fashion as they chose and which they never would have to leave.

SHANGRI-LA some called it and others said it was like an Israeli Acapulco. The weather is moderate, and one



Shirlee Iden

can walk to the smooth, white beach or into the desert to observe the Bedouins, even purchase produce from them.

Elaine liked Yamit because it was small enough, new enough and seemed expressly made to raise children. Cars were restricted to the perimeter, and in the city proper were parks, playgrounds, schools and shopping facilities to which children could be trusted to run to safely.

Tennis courts and a swimming pool were just a short blocks away from the Cheshin household, and though Alex worked hours away sometime in his construction busi-

ness, he could walk to his office. Elaine taught English in schools in and near Yamit. My granddaughter, Maya, is a native of the city, born Jan. 10, 1980.

Ever since Camp David, the Israelis have known that Yamit must be relinquished to the Egyptians eventually, even the stately villa that Alex and his partner built. Surely it will be the mayor's residence.

For Arik, talk of leaving Yamit and high feelings over it are something he has heard most of his life. When he was only 3 years old, he once said to his great grandfather, "I'll never leave Yamit, they can't make me go."

DISILLUSIONED, many of the city's founders left soon after Camp David — some for other parts of Israel, others back to the states. Of those who are there today, some say they will make a stand and fight before evacuating.

Egyptian authorities long ago made it clear that neither Americans nor Israelis would be welcome to stay even if they opted for Egyptian citizenship.

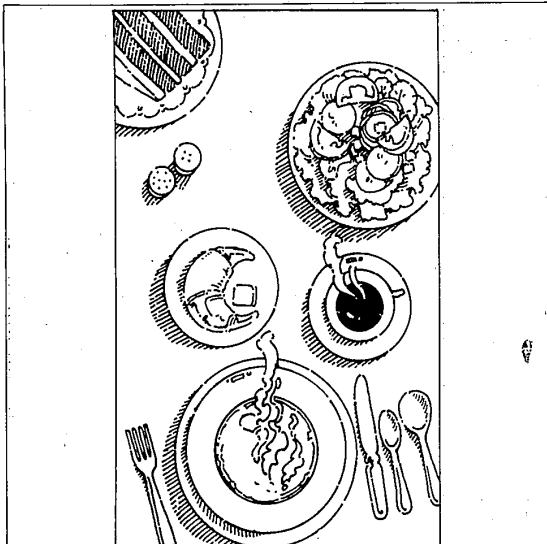
Arik has seen many of his friends and some teachers move away. Stores and restaurants closed as time passed. Alex and Elaine bought a lot in Petach Tikvah, planning to build a home, then reluctantly moved into temporary quarters before the house was complete.

On a recent trip to Israel, I hoped to see the pleasant little town once more, but Yamit was quarantined. In these last days before the April evacuation, Israeli officials are being careful to let in no one who would provoke violence or impair the turnover.

During my stay in Israel, Elaine told me what Arik had said.

"Ima, we left Yamit because we wanted peace with Egypt — right?" he asked just days after their move. And when she told him that was correct, Arik asked his poignant question:

"If the Egyptians want peace with Petach Tikvah, will we have to move again?"



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