

Opinions

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The garbage tax grows teeth

Catahoula Parish has another occasion for revolution and fire works coming up in five days. That would be at this coming Monday's 6:00 PM meeting of the Police Jury in room 104 of the Courthouse at Harrisonburg, July 12, 2021. On that date and at approximately that time the Police Jury will consider the penalty to be exacted of those who do not pay the \$12 per month sanitation "fee". (That's a "tax" everywhere in the English-speaking world other than in the imagination of politicians not wanting to anger the voters.)

When Ordinance 2975 was passed last December in 2020 to rescue the Sanitation Fund from drowning in red ink, it carried with it no mechanism of enforcement. The Police Jury appeared generously to entertain the belief that the people would on their own initiative and out of a highly developed sense of civic duty voluntarily and patriotically shell out the cash just because they were "asked" to do so. Consequently, Ordinance 2975 contained no penalty for those ignoring the monthly bills being sent to them by tax collector, JCP, Inc. So, too many people aren't paying.

(Actually, JCP, Inc. is functioning only as a billing

service. They get paid \$1.75 per invoice whether anyone pays the tax or not, making it possible in theory that the tax could actually cost the parish more money than it brings in. Think about that.) Clearly, (well, by now anyway) something must be done. The smart thing would probably have been to submit the question to the voters in a referendum in the first place so they could vote to tax themselves. However, since only four parishes in Louisiana (Rapides, Vermilion, Lafourche, and Washington) have had the good sense to require that all such taxes go to the voters for approval, the Police Jury just passed the ordinance themselves, which according to an opinion helpfully provided by District Attorney Brad Burget, they are fully within their authority to do. But the Police Jury passed the ordinance without any teeth in it to back it up. This coming Monday evening they are scheduled to correct that oversight according to action taken in the June 14th meeting of the Police Jury.

A draft of the amendment to Ordinance 2975 provided to me by Jeryl Evans reads in part: "BE IT ORDAINED by the Catahoula Parish Police Jury that the enforcement section of Ordinance

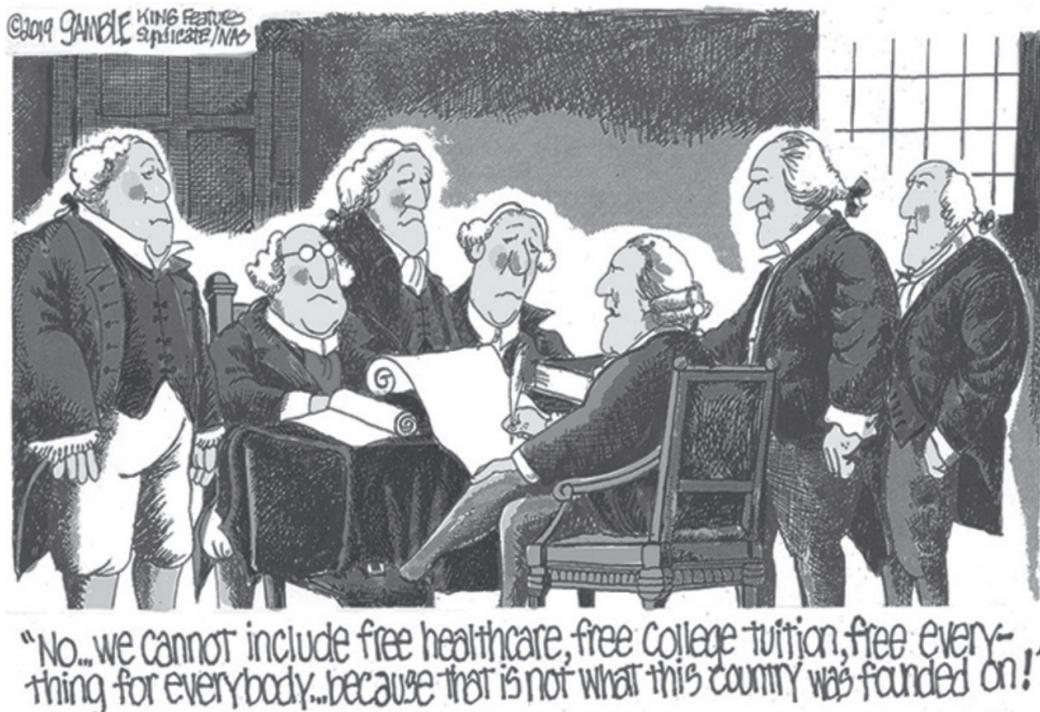
2975 be amended to read as:

"A notice of non-payment of the service charge for collection and disposal of household garbage in Catahoula Parish (exclusive of municipalities) shall be filed into public records and will constitute a privilege upon the property of such person and shall be prior in rank to mortgages, vendor's privileges, and all other privileges except tax privileges. Prior notice by certified mail shall be given to any person who fails to pay such service charge that a privilege may be filed upon such person's property upon failure to pay the cost for collection and disposal services..."

As I understand the language, it means that if you don't pay, they will have a claim on your property and when that property is sold, they will collect the unpaid taxes from the proceeds. And that's pretty much customary with unpaid taxes. And "fees".

So, the question is, "Do you want the Police Jury to have the power to tax you on their own initiative without voter approval?" You will have a chance to answer that question on July 12th in the Harrisonburg Courthouse. But just watching at home on the internet won't get it done.

By: Leo Chappelle



JEB Tales

Now Is the Time for A Bridge

Recently Alton Chapman told me, now is the time with all the federal money being passed around, to get a bridge where Louisiana Highway 559 crosses to Ouachita River at Duty/Enterprise.

Now don't get me wrong. I have always been a strong supporter of the beautiful Duty Ferry. I have even met with two different Louisiana governors in the past pointing out the need for the Duty Ferry.

However, I think it is now or never. The ridership is at an all time high. The other day when we were coming from the Columbia side of the river the ferry unloaded six vehicles. As we got on the ferry to go to the Enterprise side there were five other vehicles to ride across with us. When we got off of the ferry there were twenty-seven cars and trucks waiting to cross the river.

Just this week after both Shirley and I had doctors' appointments in Monroe when we arrived on the Columbia side of the river at 6:15 p.m. the ferry had closed at 6:00 p.m. That was not the fault of the captains or deckhands.

The problem is there are not enough boat captains available to operate the ferry. One of our captains worked fifty-seven days in a row, then only took off to take his wife to the hospital. With the ferry closing down early we had to turn around and go back to Columbia and then go through Grayson and Rosefield. That road, Louisiana Highway 124 from Rosefield to Enterprise is no doubt the worst and most dangerous road in the state of Louisiana. Also, the other night our neighbor had to go by ambulance to the hospital. The ferry had shut

down early and the ambulance went over this dangerous road to Jena instead of Columbia.

I know the log trucks have to use the road which is their privilege and right. They pay humongous taxes. However, when Louisiana Highway 124 was rebuilt a short time ago a state highway engineer told me they knew how to build a good road but there was not enough money to do it right.

Several years ago, when we had Jim Bowie's Relay Station, we fed over 30,000 visitors a year while being open only two nights a week and eleven months a year. I know that the Duty Ferry was a big part of the draw. I am happy to say that Brad Coleman is rebuilding on the old site. If we could have a bridge, he would need to be open six or seven nights a week and twelve months a year.

Lack of qualified pilots, the worst road in Louisiana from Rosefield to Enterprise and the increase in economic activities are but three of the reasons to build a bridge.

What about the present deckhands and pilots? It would be several years before the bridge could be built and I guarantee you most of the present workers would be retired.

We need a bridge now!
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Catahoula News Booster

The Catahoula News Booster is the Official Journal of the Town of Jonesville, Village of Harrisonburg, Village of Sicily Island, Catahoula Parish School Board, Catahoula Parish Police Jury, and Tensas Basin Levee Board. POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to Box 188, Jonesville, Louisiana, 71343. Periodical class postage paid at Jonesville, Louisiana. Kim Cloessner, Publisher Identification Number is SECDUSPS556-720. Published every Wednesday. Subscription rates: By mail in Catahoula Parish-\$25.00 annually, elsewhere in Louisiana-\$30.00 annually, out-of-state-\$35.00 annually Catahoula News-Booster, 103 3rd Street, P.O. BOX 188, Jonesville, LA 71343. 318-339-7242