

End modern feudalism in New York

BY ALYSSA KOGON



To get a taste of medieval England, you don't need to visit a Renaissance Fair. New York State taxpayers can simply open their property tax bills for a bit of good old-fashioned feudalism. That's right; our property taxes are still based on the feudal principle of land ownership. In other words, you pay taxes on the value of the property you own. Frankly, this system didn't work well in the days of jousting knights, and it isn't working at all now.

Many solutions have been suggested to help New York State residents, whose taxes are among the highest in the country. In fact, New York residents must fork over local taxes each year that are 79% above the national average. Between 1995 and 2005, property taxes rose a whopping 60%.

An answer must be found and soon. Families, businesses and entire communities are suffering as many seek the shelter of lower-tax states. Gov. Patterson is fighting for a property tax cap. This would keep property taxes at a 4% a year growth, or 120% of the inflation rate, whichever is lower. This proposal has already passed in the state Senate but faces tough opposition in the Assembly.

A better option may be the property tax circuit breaker. This is a kinder, gentler way of taxing that allows tax relief to those who need it most. The tax is based on family income, not property value. A certain percentage of income is used to determine property tax bills. In this way, no household budget would theoretically be overwhelmed by taxes. No family should have to choose between putting dinner on the table and paying an out-of-control tax bill. Currently, 18 states use the property tax circuit breaker in

one form or another. In fact, New York State does have a circuit breaker tax, but it has not been modified since 1978 and is basically useless.

Another plus of the property tax circuit breaker is that it can be used to help our seniors remain in their homes and also help people with disabilities. It allows for stable funding of schools. Those with low or fixed incomes, like our senior community, could and should be exempt from paying property taxes completely.

One more option exists. New York State has a secret that elected officials don't like to talk about. It is the stock transfer tax. Since 1905, New York State has collected a small sum on each share of stock that is traded on Wall Street. Currently, that tax is five cents per share. At the end of the year, the money is handed back to Wall Street for its own use. This year, \$16 billion was collected and then handed back to Wall Street speculators, the same Wall Street speculators who were recently bailed out by taxpayer money. Instead of handing over the entire lump sum to Wall Street, New York State should keep just 20% of the tax revenues to help out the ailing economy. That would amount to about \$4 billion annually. Retaining this tax revenue would help pay off New York State's \$9 billion deficit, restore major cuts in spending, prevent worker layoffs and hopefully lower our taxes.

Modern feudalism is an injustice to the residents of New York State. There are so many options to fix the problem of property tax unfairness that something must be done now. By introducing a new and fair property tax structure, New York State can once again be the shining star it deserves to be.

Alyssa Kogon is a Democrat seeking election to the New York State Assembly in the 102nd District. Respond to this column at editorial@thehudsonvalleynews.com.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

BY JIM LANGAN

- The media seems determined to discredit my new hero, Jet Blue flight attendant Steve Slater. Intimations of drinking and nutty behavior are turning up in press reports, yet we hear nothing about the woman who caused the whole thing. There's someone like her on every flight, refusing to turn off their phones or getting out of their seat while the plane is still taxiing. I love Slater's tirade and dramatic exit. We should all have a microphone and emergency chute at work.
- There's been a 61% jump in fishing license applications in Louisiana since the oil spill thing. It seems all you need to get some money out of British Petroleum is to produce a valid fishing license and claim the oil spill has put you out of business. This is the same mentality that has people leaping onto buses and trains after an accident to file a medical claim.
- As if New Jersey didn't smell bad enough to begin with, tens of thousands of fish have been washing ashore in southern Jersey. No one seems to know what's causing it, but my guess is the fish saw Snooki drunk on the beach and decided to kill themselves.
- Some disturbing accusations coming out of Disney World. A woman claimed Donald Duck groped her during a recent visit to Epcot Center. A judge ruled Donald's costume made it impossible to "intentionally" grope anyone. She was suing for "emotional and physical" damages. Lady, it's some dork in a duck suit.
- Former New York Mayor David Dinkins reminded everyone what a classless, angry man he is outside a dinner for embattled tax cheat Charlie Rangel. When asked by an onlooker why he was supporting the ethically challenged Rangel, Dinkins flipped him the bird. Dinkins is still mad about getting run out of town by Rudy way back when.
- I know we're supposed to be tolerant and accepting of all religious faiths, but is it really necessary to put a mosque so near Ground Zero? It's not like there's a shortage of mosques in the metropolitan area. It just seems disrespectful of those who died at the hands of Muslim extremists.
- So, Kelsey Grammar isn't even officially divorced and he's already knocked up some girl 30 years his junior. How about taking a time out?
- We just finished taping interviews last week with the folks at Ironbound Films, a first-rate documentary filmmaker located in Garrison. Their next project is a film about Morton Downey Jr. and the TV show of the same name. I joined a couple of my fellow producers from that show and we exchanged laughs and stories for the camera. The film should be ready for the Sundance Film festival in 2011.
- How about Gary Korkuc, the Buffalo moron who had his cat, Navarro, marinating in the trunk of his car when police pulled him over for a traffic stop. Apparently, Gary thought the cat had an attitude and intended to tenderize him before eating the unfortunate feline. The cat was given a couple of baths and is up for adoption.
- Lastly, a very familiar face is missing around the Stop and Shop in Hyde Park. John VanKleek has been superbly managing the shopping carts and parking lot for ten years and in an unfortunate communication with the manager seems to be at least temporarily out of a much needed job. Here's hoping Stop and Shop reconsiders as a lot of people are calling and e-mailing us wondering where their friend John is. Tell the folks there you want John back at his post.

THE THUG O' METER IS A SERVICE OF HV NEWS INTENDED TO GAUGE THE LEVEL OF THUGGISH ACTIVITY OF THE TOWN BOARD IN ANY GIVEN WEEK.

THUG-O-METER



The thugs are playing nice these days in a transparent attempt to improve their horrific image with the public. They were actually letting folks comment during the workshop Monday, which is against the rules. It doesn't get any better than former Planning Board member Ruth Mesuda babbling about sidewalks with Martino from the audience. Doesn't anyone know how to run a meeting? Meter stays put out of sheer boredom.

HVNEWS

police blotter

BY HV NEWS STAFF

RECENT ARRESTS

The Hyde Park Police Department reports the following arrests:

- Jennifer L. Smith, 26, of 300 Pine Brook Drive in Hyde Park, was arrested on Aug. 9 for aggravated unlicensed operation in the third degree, a vehicle and traffic law (VTL) misdemeanor.
- Frank B. Barnwell, 31, of 1088 Violet Ave. in Hyde Park, was arrested for trespassing, a violation, on Aug. 10.
- On Aug. 13, Carl B. Immich, 47, of 80 Rocann Drive in Rhinebeck, was arrested for aggravated harassment, a class-A misdemeanor, and stalking in the fourth degree, a class-B misdemeanor.
- Holly C. Stanley, 37, of 44 Cream St. in Hyde Park, was arrested on Aug. 14 for aggravated unlicensed operation in the third degree, a VTL misdemeanor.
- On Aug. 15, Audrey M. Canaday, 25, of Roosevelt Road in Hyde Park, was arrested for criminal possession of a controlled substance in the seventh degree, a class-A misdemeanor, and criminal possession of a hypodermic needle, a class-A misdemeanor.

What makes **Midnight** so special? She is quiet and beyond beautiful. She has an inky black coat that will shine for you when you brush it. She is all ready to come home with you; she has her shots and knows her way around a litter box. How about it? Are you ready to make some Midnight magic?



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