

## Commissioners ought to avoid any tax increase

Decatur County commissioners are faced with an unenviable task, trying to construct a budget for next year in the face of a 19.7 percent drop in the county's assessed valuation.

One thing they should avoid is increasing taxes in a year when most people, businesses and wage earners alike, are already having trouble making ends meet.

The main culprit in the big drop is the bubble in oil production the county saw last year, when the valuation for oil shot up more than \$6 million. This year, predictably, the bubble burst. Oil valuation dropped something like \$6.3 million, even more than the jump last year.

The valuations, multiplied by the tax rate, determine the county's revenue. So instead of a bonanza in tax revenue, the county faces some difficult times.

The situation might be easier to deal with, because while the commissioners last year were careful to avoid much of an increase in spending, they increased the budget by \$250,000 and gave raises to county employees.

It's a cinch that they will not want to take those back this year, even if the county no longer has the money.

What to do? The commissioners will need to look for places to cut. Other nearby counties are doing that already. In Thomas County, one commissioner warned agencies they could expect to take "a haircut" in their budgets, with cuts in the 8 percent range for some. Valuation there dropped just a little, nothing like Decatur County.

That kind of action could, and should, be in Decatur County's future.

At their meeting last week, commissioners mentioned cutting employees — usually more palatable than cutting pay, especially if someone quits and isn't replaced. They could start by simply freezing pay, something many people already face.

In a year when even schools are taking a big hit and most teachers can expect to get no raises, county and city employees should share the pain.

Most of us are lucky just to have jobs today. Some states, including California, are talking about cutting workers' pay.

There are many places to cut a budget, of course. The county might look at getting rid of some of the vehicles it's added in recent years, starting with the original "free" vehicle seized in a drug arrest — and the ones that replaced it.

Commissioners certainly will have to say no to many requests for money. They will have to turn down pleas from social service agencies cut by the state and may have to cut existing donations as well.

The county just might be able to get by with fewer people and less spending, at least this year. Maybe for the foreseeable future.

Increasing taxes, that should not be on the table. The county can get more money, after all, only if it takes it from people who earned it. And this year, few in Decatur County will earn more than they did last year.

Farmers may have a banner year, after two good years, but assessment figures show that because of the state's screwball ag-land valuation formula, farmers will be paying a smaller share of the tax burden and homeowners and businesses a bigger share.

While farm income and farm land values are at near-record levels, ag assessments are down sharply. It's almost impossible to explain the state's valuation formula, which uses an eight-year average of income to value farm land. Just say that it isn't working very well.

If commissioners do decide to raise taxes, they had better have a good set of explanations for the voters. Otherwise, they might have something resembling a tax rebellion on their hands.

Our advice is to cut the budget deep and hard before that happens. — *Steve Haynes*

## Harvest crews get rain break

This might well turn into "The Harvest That Would Not End."

Rain keeps coming nearly every night, which keeps combines out of the field and stops the cutting.

I told Jim the only good thing about rain during harvest is that it forces farmers to slow down a bit. When they are able to cut, they push, push, push, working day and night. And, that's when people get hurt.

So, we pray that everyone — farmers, their wives, their hired hands and their children — takes advantage of these little "time outs" and does what they should do: take a nap.

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Speaking of naps, I could sure use one right now. And it's only 9 in the morning.

I stayed up way too late last night watching one of my favorite movies of all time, "Hunt for Red October." My favorite line is when Sean Connery says, "One ping and one ping, only." He was so cool as the defecting captain of a Russian nuclear submarine.

I have favorite lines from other movies. "Fiddle-dee-dee. Tomor-



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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row is another day."; "Nobody puts Baby in a corner."; "Outta my way, Pilgrim."; "Martini, dry. Stirred, not shaken."; "Get off my plane."; "Well, color me happy — there's a sofa for two in here."; "Talk to me, Goose."; "Look at me, I'm Sandra Dee."; "They call us the Titans, the mighty, mighty Titans."; and on and on.

I love the movies, and have to watch myself or I would order a pay-per-view every day. It would be real easy for me to was

-ob-

Jim and the crew he's working with are in the wrap-up stages of finishing a house they have been working on for the past six months. I'm involved to the point of painting the trim and putting nail holes. And

nagging. That's my speciality.

"When are you going to be done?" I ask Jim constantly. "I want to go to Texas. I haven't seen grandkids since Thanksgiving."

I think Jim expects me to stamp my foot, pout and cry. Which might be my next tactic. If I thought it would work.

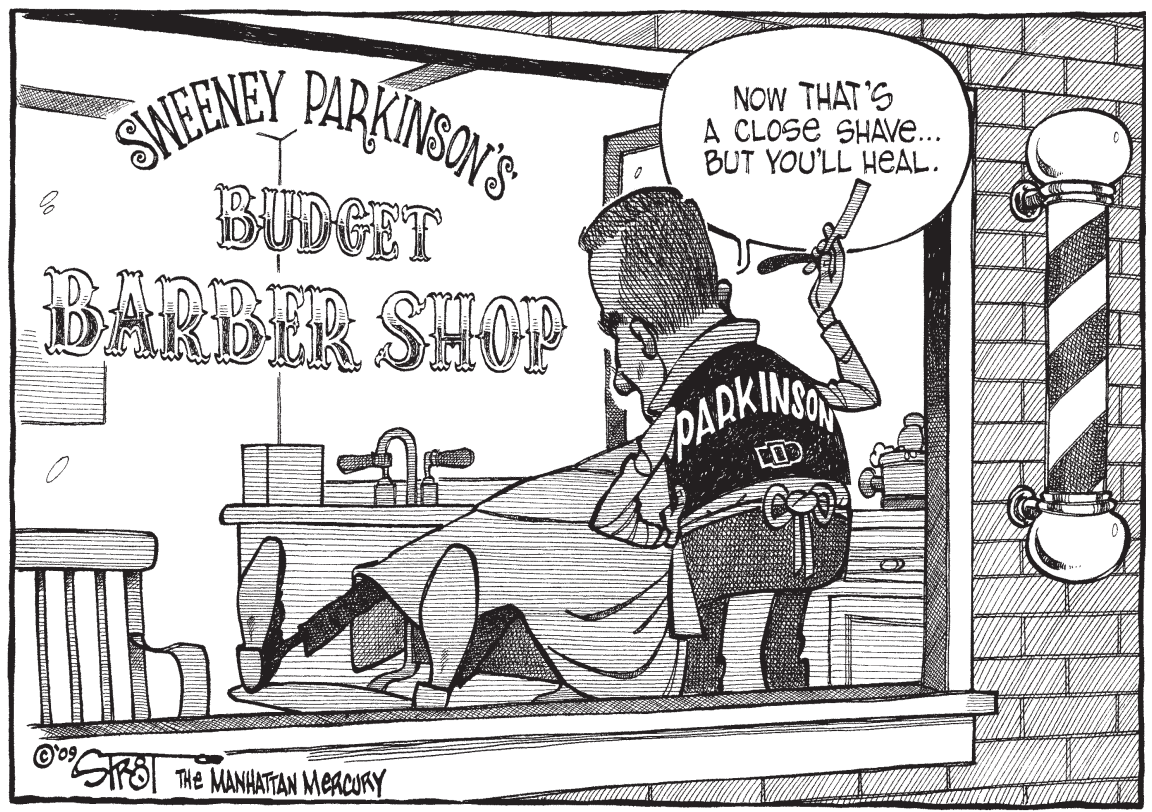
He simply says, "Carolyn, it'll be done when it's done."

Lord, give me patience. And give it to me *right now*.

### From the Bible

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5



## This year, travel in the past

A lot of friends, neighbors, relatives and virtual strangers have asked me where I'm going next.

I guess my almost two-year-long travelog has intrigued them. Or maybe they're just hoping to get rid of me for a week or two.

The answer is mostly nowhere. My biggest trips this summer will be a couple of excursions to Colorado.

We're heading for Denver to ride *The Denver Post's* train to Cheyenne Frontier Days, a huge, week-long rodeo.

The truth is, Steve and I will board the train, pulled by a steam locomotive, at Union Station at 7 a.m. and arrive in Cheyenne about noon. Then we'll board borrowed school buses for the trip to the rodeo grounds. Out there, we'll enjoy a barbecue lunch, western music and maybe even dance a little.

After that, while the hoard of traingroers heads for the rodeo, Steve will walk back downtown — it's only two or three miles — to spend his day at the depot watching the dozens of trains come and go.

I'll go and enjoy the vendors selling everything from horse tack



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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to maple syrup, and usually including Tom Ewing from Cedar Bluffs with his mountain man wares. A trip through the Indian village is always a treat to watch the dancers and listen to the story tellers.

Then I will head downtown. Cheyenne has a pretty fair bookstore, which sells excellent popcorn, and some nice Western wear places where I can look around and pretend that a calico dress is something I might accidentally want to wear sometime.

Then at 5 p.m., we're back on the train and headed back to Denver.

There will be a box supper in our seat and the trip back usually is faster than the trip out. Except for the year that a freight train derailed ahead of us and instead of getting into the station at 9 p.m., we

struggled in at 2 a.m.

That and a visit with our youngest daughter, who is flying into Denver at the end of the month, are the highlights of our summer travel.

Frankly, after spending most of two years on the road, being at home and watching my garden grow is a real treat. The green beans are coming on nicely and we've already had a mess of them for supper. The sugar peas have come and gone, along with the lettuce and spinach.

I'm hoping for a fall crop of those three, but for now I have to look to the tomatoes, green peppers, sweet corn, zucchini, yellow squash, spaghetti squash, carrots and broccoli for nourishment. We'll probably starve.

## Garden pets really bug her

Bugs ate her out of house and home in the garden last year, and Cynthia was irked.

Potato beetles ate holes in the leaves of her beloved green beans until there was more hole than leaf on most. Pretty little greenish-white moths fluttered around her broccoli, then a month later, little green worms started munching the stalks.

These were particularly tasty when cooked, causing at least one meal to be cut short. Later, all worms got a saltwater bath before dinner. Most swam off the broccoli, but those that stayed were even tastier.

Cynthia vowed that this year would be different.

This year, she said, she would get the upper hand on the critters.

She started reading in January or February. She found that nasturtiums were supposed to ward off bugs. She went out and bought nasturtium seeds, lots of nasturtium seeds.

The home-remedy-garden guide said that a little salt on the leaves would guard broccoli and other cabbage against the moths. Rather than use a salt shaker, she went out and bought a spray bottle, filled it with saline solution.

Then she waited, patiently, for planting time.

OK. Not so patiently. She is not a patient woman.



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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As soon as it was warm enough, she planted flowers all around the bean patch. All around the broccoli patch. All around the whole south garden.

She was ready.

It took time, but the nasturtium plants began to emerge, even before the first green beans poked through the bare, crusty soil of the spring garden. Soon there were dozens of little plant sentries surrounding the bean patch, more around the broccoli patch.

Then we went to the garden center and bought bedding plants, broccoli, cucumbers, tomatoes and green peppers. They went in around and between the flowers.

In fact, she was so high on broccoli, and so certain it'd be protected from the worms, that she bought another half dozen plants. She started to spray the broccoli with a little salt water each day.

Pretty soon, the beans started to come up. About that time, something started to devour her broccoli

plants, first one and then the next. Apparently, whatever it was liked broccoli with a little salt.

Cynthia called the extension agent, who told her it likely was a tobacco horn worm or something like that.

The next day, she found the culprit. He was no horn worm — those big, ugly things that can strip a tomato vine in a day — but he was big enough. She dispatched him to that big bug farm in the sky, but I could tell her confidence in home remedies was shaken.

As the bean plants emerged, though, something else began to happen. Bugs were eating her nasturtiums, leaves, stems and all. It began to look as though they'd never make it to the flowering stage, never be available to protect the green bean plants.

The look of desperation on her face was awful. She called the extension agent again, and he had a recommendation.

With her lines of defense shattered, what was she to do? It just took a quick trip to the hardware store.

She's out there right now sprinkling Sevin on the beans, on the broccoli and, yes, on the nasturtiums. I'll bet she had no idea she'd have to protect the nasturtiums.

It's not a pretty sight, all that white powder, but those flowers are going to bloom, and it's death to any worm that gets on those broccoli plants now. I wouldn't give a plugged nickel for anything that tries to eat the green-bean leaves, either.

### Photo Policy

*The Oberlin Herald* wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but we will try.

Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like.

We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.

We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work. We cannot return photos un-

less you submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with clear instructions for return.

Other photos submitted may be picked up at our office within two weeks. After that, they will be disposed of.

Laser proofs of photos which have run in *The Herald* are available, first come, first served.

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*The Oberlin Herald* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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