

# KeyOpinion

## Band-Aids for Business

**Richard L. Hershatter**  
Contributing Columnist

**Businessmen should all unite;  
Their futures are at stake.  
Unless the tax bite lightens up,  
They can no money make...**

As has been noted frequently in this and other publications, Florida's commercial interests are in big trouble.

Because most municipal and county operations are financed by the property tax, and because business carries a disproportionate share of the load, many smaller enterprises are encountering difficulty making ends meet.

Over the past several years, commercial property owners have seen their valuations skyrocket, to the point where some have found their tax bills quintupled.

Although there are a multitude of reasons for the burgeoning problem, the principal difficulty is in the nature of the property tax itself.

Real estate is not a "liquid asset." Even though its value can go up in response to market demands, it cannot be taken to the store and exchanged for groceries. Like any other frozen asset, its value becomes useful as currency only once it is sold.

Taxing authorities, however, do not wait for sale, but render tax bills on a regular and routine basis, regardless of whether the property in question is producing adequate revenue, or indeed any revenue at all.

The sad result is bankruptcy, or the sale and conversion of property to a so-called "higher and best" use, such as condominiums or high rise apartments. Ultimately, the change in character of usage diminishes the availability of tourist facilities, upon which the lifeblood of Florida depends.

Last week, two separate governmental entities, the Manatee County Commission and the Town of Longboat

Key Commission took tiny first steps toward providing some form of relief, however limited.

By a unanimous vote, the County allowed any business abutting waterfront to elect to have their premises taxed on the basis of its 2002 value, plus 5% a year. The balance of the tax which would otherwise be due is deferred until such time as the property is sold, or its use is changed.

Since the county's tax amounts to 44% of a property's overall tax bill, the result is fairly substantial.

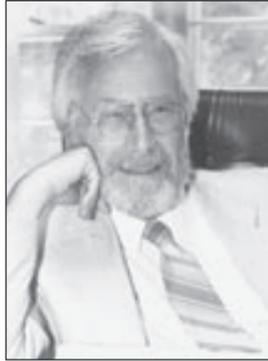
Unfortunately, to paraphrase Neil Armstrong, the action may represent "one small step for a man," it really does very little toward creating "a giant step for mankind."

For one thing, it is confined only to shorefront property, thus leaving out the vast majority of afflicted commercial interests. In addition, the remedy is stopgap only and doesn't reach the root problem of failing to treat all taxpayers equally.

Longboat Key's commissioners were faced with a similar problem in the community's principal shopping center at the Avenue of the Flowers, where a series of small shops and restaurants gave up the ghost and left an avenue of vacancies.

The owner of the premises is a company called "Dead River Properties," which could be more aptly named "Dead Landlord Walking Properties," because a combination of high taxes and restrictive zoning repelled potential tenants.

In this case, the owner did not pursue tax relief, but it did apply to the Planning & Zoning Panel and the Town Commission to change the zoning in order to broaden



the potential uses for the properties.

There followed what can only be described as a scene from "The Music Man," where residents appeared at sessions of both bodies without 76 trombones, but singing the refrain: "There's gonna be trouble, right here in River City, with tattoo parlors and pool halls and other sinful pursuits to attract the retirees here on the Key."

To its credit, the Planning & Zoning Board saw little likelihood of enough of a market amongst the population to attract the types of enterprise that would corrupt senior citizens. It unanimously passed the issue on to the Town Commission with a positive recommendation.

At a public hearing conducted by the Commission last week, the Commissioners heard objections from members of the adjacent Bay Isles Association, who indicated a last ditch willingness to agree to a zoning change, as long as they could exert a veto over individual applications.

By a vote of four to three, the Commission rejected that position and changed the zoning to permit the uses requested by Dead River, including a dance/exercise studio.

Hopefully, the actions taken by Manatee County and Longboat Key will breathe a little life into a weakening tourist industry in their respective jurisdictions, but it is evident that much more needs to be done.

The ideal solution would be action by the State Legislature in Tallahassee to impose a cap on tax valuations of all properties, similar to that existing for homeowners under the Save Our Homes Amendment to the State Constitution.

If you level the playing field, they will come.

*Richard L. Hershatter is a retired lawyer and novelist who writes a syndicated column of interest to Floridians. He can be reached at Banyan502@aol.com.*

## Longboat Key News

5370 Gulf of Mexico Drive, Suite 210  
Longboat Key, FL 34228  
Phone: 941-387-2200  
Fax: 941-387-8288  
www.lbknews.com

**Steve Reid, Editor and Publisher**  
sreid@lbknews.com

**Melissa Reid, Associate Publisher**  
Associate Editor  
Lia Martin

**Vice President Sales/Marketing**  
Christopher Berloni

**Production/Distribution Manager**  
Caron Cooper

**Office Manager**  
Mary Cohen

**Advertising Executives**  
Linda Browning • Nan Kirk

**Staff Writers**  
Melissa Reid • Jeff Berlinicke

**Contributing Columnists**  
Dick Hershatter • Tom Burgum  
Rusty Chinnis • Christine Killeen  
Peter Holliday • Al Green • Karen O'Dowd  
Glenn & Carole Swope

**Editorial Assistant**  
Gwen Keegan

**Graphic Design**  
Caron Cooper • Christine Boerner

**Newsroom**  
news@lbknews.com

**Letters to the Editor**  
letters@lbknews.com

For stop deliveries and distribution requests,  
please email [circulation@lbknews.com](mailto:circulation@lbknews.com)  
or call 941-749-0400.

## Hitler Wasn't a Bad Guy After All

**Tom Burgum**  
Contributing Columnist

A contributor to MoveOn.org recently compared President George W. Bush unfavorably to Adolph Hitler.

"Hitler was a socialist and believed in something beside money. He did not dodge real military service and he believed at least in Germany which was a real nation and not a corporation like the U.S. Moreover, Hitler did not use depleted uranium and phosphorous to burn people alive. He did not condone the torture of prisoners for fun or to relieve stress."

One is at a loss as to how to treat such pernicious nonsense but we can at least hope the author of that gibberish will not reproduce — one of him is enough. It is quoted in this column because MoveOn.org, the vessel containing that poison, has become a major player in the Democratic Party.

The Democratic Party has made a sharp turn to the left in recent years and it has been a contributing factor to the loss of Congress in 1994 and the almost unaccountable loss of the Presidency in 2000 and 2004. The ideological swing has been led by radical-leftist ideologue George Soros and MoveOn.org. Soros is the leader of a group that has built organizations that seek to control the Democratic Party agenda, finance the campaigns of politicians who embrace this agenda, and work to defeat or discourage Democrats who dare to stray from their radical platform.

Senator Joe Lieberman is their best-known victim. MoveOn.org contributed funds to his opponent, Ned Lamont, and maintained a continuing diatribe and threat against any Democratic candidate who, like Lieberman, dared stray from the Soros gang's orthodoxy. It had an insidious effect. Any Democrat hoping to run for the Presidency in 2008 dropped Lieberman like a cheap suit. The excuse was, of course, that they had no choice but



to support the party nominee. If you believe that tripe you are in that group that President Abraham Lincoln said could be fooled all the time. In truth, most of the Lamont converts moved out of fear of losing the support of the Soros gang and MoveOn.org. Like the Republicans who dropped Speaker Hastert like a bad habit after the Foley scandal broke, the Democratic motto seems to be, "When the going gets tough, the tough get the hell out of there."

The Democrats are on the verge of gaining control of the Senate and House of Representatives. Now is the time for the party to decide whether it is to be the Party of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Clinton or the party of George Soros and MoveOn.org. When making the decision the Democrats should not allow themselves to be conned into believing that impending success in the congressional elections heralds wide-spread acceptance of the agenda of George Soros and the radical left.

Bill Clinton was the last Democrat to win the White House, but there is a big difference between his campaigns and the ones we currently are witnessing. Clinton won, not just because of Republican woe, but because he exuded a sense of renewal and purpose. If the Democrats take back Congress, as expected, it won't be because their campaign message inspired any great confidence. The Democrats have, in fact, deliberately avoided any discussion of purpose or program. Instead they ask for public support simply because they are not Republicans. That this thin gruel is working must be especially galling to Republican loyalists.

If there were any Democratic proposal worth considering, it would be to "redeploy" from Iraq. While this proposal is popular with a majority of voters, it, like the rest of this election season, lacks a certain honesty. In the days of yore infantry soldiers would refer to the type of redeployment the Democrats have in mind as simply "hauling ass." What that poignant phrase lacks in civility it more than compensates for in honesty.

One of the Democratic campaign devices to attack the war in Iraq is to ask, "Do you feel any safer than you were five years ago?" The purpose of the question is to contend that the Bush foreign policy has exposed us to

**Burgum, Page 8A**