

Former Assessor Backs Chapel's Stand on Personal Property Tax

By Charles Edward Chapel
Member of the Assembly

In a previous issue of the HERALD, I reported that I have introduced Assembly Bill 390 to repeal the personal property tax on household furniture. I have received the letter set forth below from Mr. Gene Johnston, who was for 20 years a Deputy County Assessor of Los Angeles County. Mr. Johnston apparently speaks with a great deal of authority. I would like to have all of you who either agree or disagree with Mr. Johnston write to me at Assembly Chambers, State

Capitol, Sacramento 14, and give me your own personal views.

HERE IS Mr. Johnston's letter:

"Dear Assemblyman Chapel: I note with interest your proposed legislation to repeal the household personal property tax in California. As a Deputy County Assessor for 20 years, now resigned, with the Los Angeles County Assessor's office in the residential personal property division, I firmly believe the household furniture tax to be the most

inequitable form of taxation, as provided by the Revenue and Taxation Code of the State of California. We have on the statutes.

"All household furniture, goods, and furnishings actually in use by the owner thereof, in his or her dwelling place or place of abode, and not for sale or in commercial use, should be exempt from taxation. Also all wearing apparel and other personal effects held by any person for his or her exclusive use and benefit, and not for sale or commercial use, should be exempt from taxation.

"To provide a furniture assessment roll, over 700 field deputies are hired annually, going house to house searching out furniture, both new and old, to tax. This field check costs well over a million dollars yearly. With the abandonment of this expensive field check, taxpayers would be allowed to file their property statements, ask for their veterans exemptions, by use of the mails. As you know, this is being done by the state and federal taxing authorities.

"This enormous and expensive field check should be terminated at a great savings to the now over-burdened taxpayers in the County of Los Angeles, as well as other counties. Congratulations to you, Mr. Chapel, for proposing this long-needed legislation in the State of California.

"Very truly yours,
(Signed) Gene Johnston,
P. O. Box 253

Hermosa Beach, Calif."

MR. JOSEPH M. Quinn, Editorial Director, said in his Los Angeles Newsletter dated Jan. 24, 1959, the following:

"Assemblyman Charles Edward Chapel has introduced a bill in Sacramento to exempt household furniture from personal property taxation. It probably hasn't got a chance of adoption for three simple reasons. First it's too sensible. Second, it would benefit every family. And third, no highly paid lobbyist with a big expense account has the job of steering the reform through the legislative jungle.

"The Inglewood Republican, who also has a fight on his hands to renew his anti-loan shark law, sums up his position on the home furnishings tax as follows:

"Bills similar to this were introduced in previous sessions and I opposed them, but after a long period of investigation I have reached the conclusion that it costs more counties in California more money to assess household furniture and collect the tax than the revenue amounts to when it is received.

"ASSESSORS have admitted to me that when they see a television antenna, they then put this down as a major item for assessment. Also, if the homeowner does not come to the door when the deputy assessor rings the bell, he may look through the windows. If he sees a piano, especially a grand piano, he regards that as a major item for assessment. Also, any kind of an organ attracts the attention of a deputy assessor.

"This is a peculiar mental attitude but it apparently prevails and points up the validity of my argument that the assessment of household furniture is whimsical at the best.

"Obviously, the people sent out by the assessor receive salaries and expense accounts and they must have secretaries, stenographers, typists, file clerks, and bookkeepers. The whole staff represents a heavy expenditure as I have said previously; I believe it costs more to collect these taxes than they are worth."

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Ellis Heads City to City Committee

Robert H. Ellis has been elected chairman of the City-to-City committee here to succeed Sam Van Wagner, it was reported this week. Van Wagner asked to be relieved of the assignment after moving his business from Torrance to San Pedro.

An official "Salute to Konya" celebration is being planned for Feb. 28, and efforts to arrange for official visits of Turkish officials are being made. Turkish exchange students now attending Southland schools and colleges are being invited to the affair.

Vice chairman of the group now is Mrs. Kenneth McVey, and Alex Mazzia has been added to the board of directors.

The committee is supervising a cultural exchange between Torrance and the city of Konya, Turkey, under the President's "city to city" program. The project is designed as a gesture in international goodwill carried on between people, not governments.

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