

North Lake Tahoe Bonanza

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Letters to the Editor Wednesday

Washoe taxes are way too high

Imagine the consequences if you awoke surrounded by smoke and flames, you contacted the fire department for help, but got the response; "we don't believe you, your situation is just your personal opinion, we won't be sending any help but maybe we'll check in sometime to see if you're still alive and your house is still standing." We would never tolerate such nonfeasance of duty from a public agency. But that is the kind of response we get from our County and State taxation authorities.

On Friday, the Bonanza reported the reactions of Chuck Chinnock, the director of the Department of Taxation and Bob McGowan, the Washoe County Assessor, to the study results presented by Dr. Marvin Wolverton to the state's tax authority; the Nevada Tax Commission. I was dismayed at the behavior of these two public servants. They appear to have forgotten their duty. Neither apparently comprehended the study results because they made unrelated and inaccurate comments, most of which don't merit rebuttal.

Dr. Wolverton has stellar credentials. He is a respected expert in the field and is a teacher to those in the assessor profession. Neither he nor his careful work deserved the unsubstantiated attempt to

discredit his important results. One example was Chinnock's remark about sales ratio studies being inapplicable to our tax system. Yet sales ratio studies are routinely used to assess our properties. My own property assessment was raised 50 percent based on such a study. Sounds like Chinnock needs to go back to school or better acquaint himself with the duties and details of his job.

This behavior is indicative of the continued futility tax payers experience when they make pleas for help to the assessor and the department of taxation. How can we attempt to solve the serious problem of getting uniform and equal property assessment? The county and state government has many employees in service to us. Most do a good job of improving or maintaining the public's welfare and safety. And most react positively to problems. But Chinnock's and McGowan's comments tell us they are not planning to help to solve the problem, or even acknowledge one.

The County Assessor, the Department of Taxation and the Tax Commission have credible and convincing evidence before them. There is a problem and property tax payers here being treated unfairly and illegally. They've heard that from an

expert who started his report explaining he was not serving as an advocate for any cause other than establishing uniform and equal taxation. These public servants have the responsibility and the authority to act and to bring assessment practices and results in line with law.

The solution to this problem is simple. Throw out the error-ridden assessment work and begin the process of getting it right as Dr. Wolverton prescribed. We can only hope the Nevada Tax Commission (of which Chinnock is not a member but rather a subordinate) will bring his behavior in line with his responsibilities. Otherwise, this kind of behavior will again compel courts and grand juries to correct the problem of unequal taxation and misfeasance of duty.

This situation is not about a bunch of affluent people whining about too-high taxes. It is about concerned citizens detecting and reporting a problem with unequal and unfair taxation. Our sincere efforts should not be rebuffed, but embraced as a positive step toward problem resolution. We should urge our representatives in government to listen and move expeditiously to resolution.

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