

Between the Lines

County clerk wants motorists' help in fight to keep renewals local

Ronald L. Caravan



There is an interesting argument taking place these days between the administration of Governor George Pataki and county clerks around the state. It's an uncommon argument, and in a way almost refreshing, in that there appears to be no trace of partisan politics involved. But it does involve a very practical, everyday issue that affects every resident of Oswego County who owns or drives a motor vehicle (which means, of course, that it affects nearly every adult local citizen).

The contention is over the administration's plan to process all mail renewals of licenses and vehicle registrations in Albany, rather than having them sent to local county clerks' offices for processing. Because the state shares a portion of the renewal fees with the local offices that process them, the plan to centralize mail renewals in Albany would turn out to be quite costly to Oswego County, as well as other counties whose county clerks' offices routinely provide this service.

For many years, the arrangement was that the county could keep \$2.85 for every registration processed locally (at DMV offices in Oswego, Fulton, and Pulaski). When the state adopted the two-year renewal cycle, the county's "retention fee" went from \$2.85 per year to \$3.85 for the two-year registration.

Not every county in the state provides licensing and registration services through their county clerk's office (Onondaga County, for example, does not), and many that have provided this service over the years have operated at a loss. Apparently in an effort to address this, the revenue-sharing formula was changed last year for 1997 so that the local offices now retain 8.1% of gross revenues rather than a dollar amount per item processed. The Oswego County Clerk's office is quite proud of the fact that it has been self-sufficient, operating in the black, all along. It has actually experienced no particular benefit or disadvantage in the new formula.

But the proposal to do all mail renewals through Albany is another matter. Local Motor Vehicle Supervisor Colleen Bacon at the Oswego County Clerk's office tells us that fully 80 percent of the motor vehicle activity at the Oswego office is mail-in processing. Clearly, if this is shifted to Albany, the impact on the viability of that local office will be substantial.

Oswego County Clerk George Williams has stated that the county would lose approximately \$168,000 annual revenues. With such a loss, his office would have to cut about six employees and the county would very likely have to close one of the local motor vehicle offices (perhaps the one in Fulton on Rte. 481 north).

County clerks such as Mr. Williams who are arguing against the state's plan point to more than the economics and potential loss of local jobs. They also claim that local motorists will be waiting longer for their renewals, perhaps risking having their licenses or registrations expire before their renewals are processed. As of right now, Ms. Bacon claims, Albany is about four weeks behind in their processing. "And they intend to take on the whole state with 30 more employees," she adds.

On the other side of the argument, representatives for the governor maintain that the state will save over three-and-a-half million dollars by processing all motor-vehicle renewals in Albany. Taken in isolation, it might be difficult to argue against a workable strategy that would save taxpayers such sums, but in the context of the entire state budget and all the state government's functions, it is fair and reasonable to ask whether the proposed strategy really is workable, and, if so, if the loss of local service and local jobs is really how we want the state to

find savings in the budget.

One troubling tidbit in the whole mix is the news that the state Commissioner of Motor Vehicles (that phantom figure you always make your checks out to!) is not waiting for the budget to be settled before acting on the proposal. Apparently the commissioner, Richard Jackson Jr., has ordered that renewal forms sent to motorists after May will have an Albany address for their return rather than the local county clerk's office (46 E. Bridge St., Oswego in this county). If the proposal to centralize renewals is a facet of the current budget deliberations (for the fiscal year April 1997 to April 1998), and those deliberations are as yet unsettled, Mr. Jackson's directive would appear to be jumping the gun. The difficulties presented to the commissioner by necessities of lead time and printing notwithstanding, this would appear to be a highly questionable use of the authority of his office, and may be entirely inappropriate.

Locally, the county clerk's office is asking residents to contact Governor Pataki (Executive Chamber, Albany, N.Y. 12221) to ask that this facet of the proposed budget be reconsidered and to request that motor-vehicle mail-in renewals remain with the county clerk. If this is indeed the most viable side of the argument, it is one Senator James Wright and Assemblywoman Frances Sullivan should be making, as well.

Life Goes On

Banking on the Swiss

Fred Wilber



Is the world coming to its end? The Swiss banking industry is accused of malfeasance.

They are accused of misuse of WW II refugee accounts.

Guilty or innocent, to accuse the Swiss of a malfeasance is near blasphemy. People who yodel, tend cows, and make cheese and chocolate wouldn't misuse anything, would they? Besides, if the banking thing is true what will we Americans do for a backup escape route?

Sure we all figure we'll go to Canada if America becomes unlivable. That's been our plan for years, but if Canada should beat us to unlivability, there was always Switzerland—the place where most of us around here have always done our banking. I was talking with a couple of East Overcasters about that last week. They like confidential banking and the famous Swiss security.

'Switzerland has a battalion of our first-line tanks, planes, and other armaments, plus a standing herd of six million cows ready to stampede on demand.'

Charles Keating, or sons of former American presidents couldn't get a floor polishing job in a Swiss bank. A country that holds on deposit half the wealth of every country in the world is fairly safe from invasion, too. Banking is the secret weapon of Swiss neutrality, and if that isn't enough to secure our bank accounts every Swiss male up to age fifty is part of the ready militia. All six hundred and forty of them report to Garmisch every year for two weeks of snowball fighting.

In truth, Switzerland has a battalion of our first-line tanks, planes, and other armaments, plus a standing herd of six million cows ready to stampede on demand. Although for over a century there hasn't been a call for Swiss demonstrations of bravery, they do have that reputation. For a number of decades they kicked the devil out of the much larger Austrian forces until the Austrians left them alone. With no one left to fight, the Swiss hired out as mercenaries

until the late nineteenth century, generally as private security forces.

You're beginning to see why we Overcasters like to keep our money there. In fact, King Louis and Marie hired a Swiss palace guard dedicated to fight to the death, which they did during the French Revolution. They were boiled and eaten by revolutionaries (a little-in-depth historical re-

porting not likely to be found in our tastefully abridged American public school history books).

I'm sure the Swiss will come through this incident, and if they have to make reparations of more than a billion francs, America has already given them New York City and Long Island to hold as collateral. If further endorsement of Swiss monetary stability is needed, the Vatican, which used to have its own Swiss guard, financially blessed all the Swiss banks long ago.

So don't go withdrawing your Christmas Club Account from the Bern Banken Haus. All accounts up to the value of Saudi Arabia are insured in full.

From the County Building

Oswego County's Traffic Safety Board has received a \$27,475 grant from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration through Governor Pataki's Traffic Safety Council.

The funding will help our local traffic safety board collect and analyze traffic data, provide car seats and bicycle safety helmets to low income families, and conduct education programs about traffic safety issues.

The traffic safety board will collect data from local law enforcement agencies, including the numbers and locations of accidents involving cars, bicycles, and pedestrians. This information will help the board identify areas with a high frequency of accidents and determine how best to improve safety in those areas, as well as throughout the county.

The data collection project will create a single source of traffic data about Oswego County. This information can be used to help bring more funding to the county for traffic related projects.

Last year, the County Traffic Safety Board provided free car seats and bicycle helmets to low income families. The car seats were provided by General Motors and the helmets were donated by Jerry Stanard Insurance.

The board will continue this program using some of the monies from the traffic safety grant. The board will be able to purchase approximately 300 bicycle helmets and 75 car seats for families who meet income requirements.

One of the traffic safety board's main activities is conducting public education programs about safety. The traffic safety grant will help the board expand its current programs and begin others which traffic studies may indicate are needed.

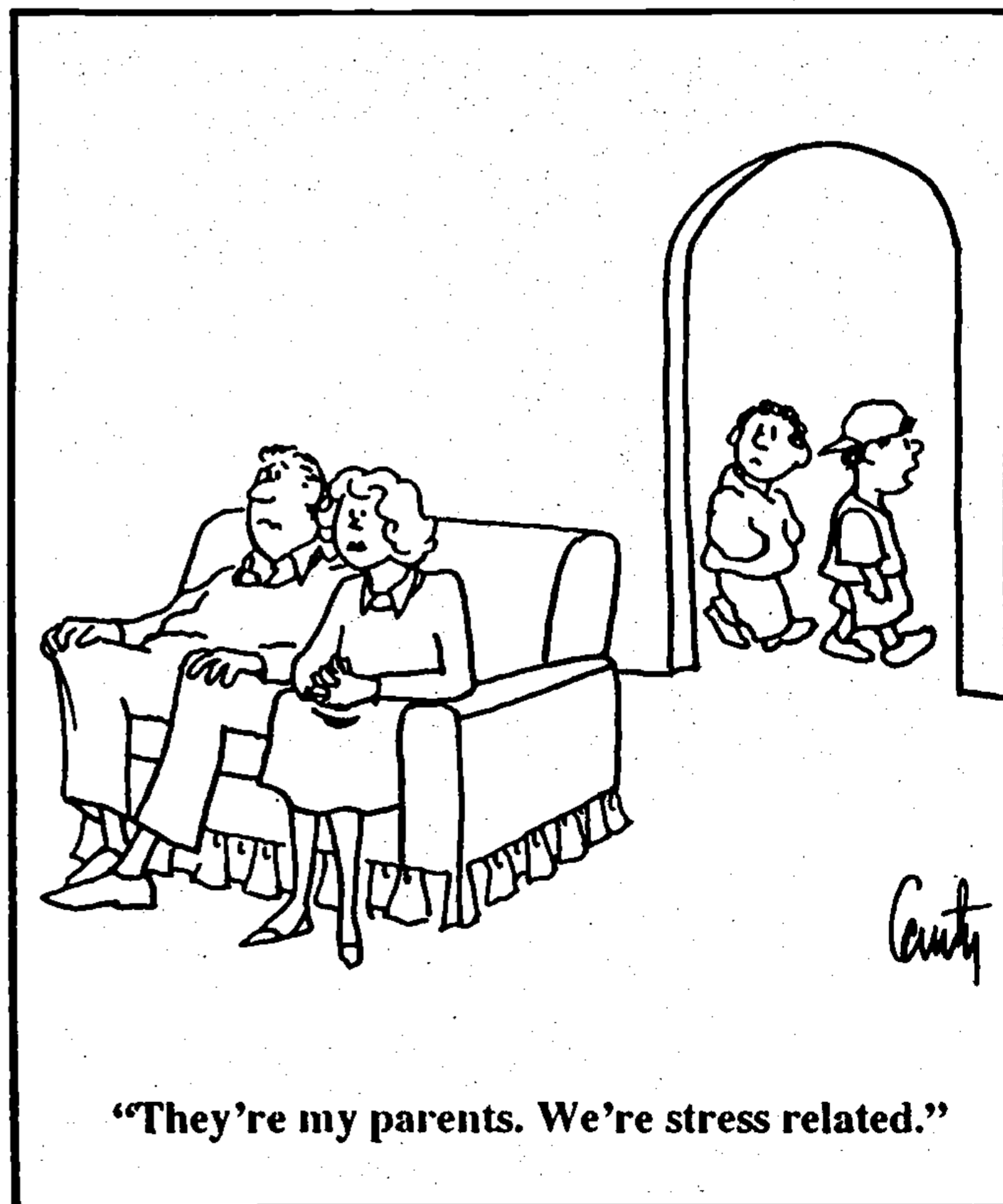
The board is working with the Oswego Hospital to distribute brochures to the public about the dangers of air bags and child safety seats. Many children in car seats have been seriously injured or killed in accidents when a front-seat air bag deployed and hit them. Children in car safety seats should always be placed in the back seat of a vehicle.

The traffic safety board also has information and pamphlets about how to use seat belts and bicycle helmets properly.

For more information, contact Jane Murphy, executive secretary to the traffic safety board, weekdays, phone 349-8235, or 1-800-596-3200, extension 8235.

—Jack J. Tierney
County Administrator

ALL ABOUT TOWN



"They're my parents. We're stress related."

