

OPINION/EDITORIAL

Easter frame of mind...

I need an Easter frame of mind. Maybe a little more reverence, a little more quiet and a lot more hope, with just a dash of joy. The world is a rough place where we are surrounded by stories of devastation, loss and pain. It is also a world of routine and mundane exhaustion. It can be a world of critical mass anger and frustration. And, of course selfishness and self-absorption.

That is the nature of the world we live in, a by-product of human nature. But here we are on the edge of Easter and I know that some of you need hope today. Probably a lot more than I do.

I know that some of you are dealing with burdens seemingly too great to carry. That is when the rest of us need to reach out with grace.

Hope is there if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear. It is in the bird's nest filled with three bright blue eggs. It is in the burnished colors of our East Texas sunrises and sunsets each day. It is that one word spoken that overpowers all the other harsh words that swirl around us.

Hope is in the outpouring of effort to help those who have been blasted by nature's unsparing winds. Hope is in the donations of food, blood and money to meet needs we can not begin to fathom. We receive the gift of hope by giving it to others.

And gifts should never be squandered.

So, on this Holy Week of Easter I wish for you the beauty of sunrise as you begin your busy, and for some, heartbreaking days. I wish for you the bold splash of spring blooms that remind us that winter passes. It may take awhile, but spring will return.

The thing is, we have to embrace it or we remain trapped in the

Suzanne Bardwell



cold cell of our personal winter. What can we do to extend warmth and grace, and maybe most importantly of all, hope?

Maybe grace moments could include letting someone into your lane by slowing just a little to see the stressed out beside us. Perhaps we could buy the meal of the person behind us in the fast food line just to make their day a little brighter. Maybe a generous tip to a hardworking server who is trying to make a living, pay their way through college, or take care of their grandchildren.

Maybe you have your own gentle gift list of hope occurring to you right now.

For those of you who have sent cards, messages and emails to comfort us after losing our much loved newshound Jack, please know that your gifts of grace meant a great deal to us. Small kindnesses make a world of difference. A lesson to remember when we are rushed, exhausted and on our very, last nerve.

So, dear friends and neighbors, let us commit to gifts of grace this week and every week. And when we need them from others, help us to remember to give them first, and then we will find that grace and hope will flow back to us.

I wish each of you, our readers, a most blessed Easter filled with beauty, grace, hope and the promise of the Joy to come.

THE ECONOMIST

By Dr. M. Ray Perryman

Crazy Crude

The growth in crude oil production has been simply crazy. Total production in the Permian Basin rose from levels below one million barrels per day in April 2011 to more than two million July 2016 to three in



PERRYMAN

February 2018 to four less than a year later. Production levels are projected to double yet again in the next few years. Total Texas oil production has risen about 500% since 2010. A key point is that these increases began after decades of falling production. No one saw it coming to this degree. Just a decade ago, the talk was about "peak oil" and running out of energy.

One reason for the growth is that producers are getting more oil out of every well. In 2007, each rig in the Permian Basin region led to production of about 55 barrels per day, according to data from the Energy Information Administration. Even years later in 2014, production per rig was barely over 200, but then began to change dramatically, passing 400 barrels per day in 2015, and then consistently over 600 just a couple of years later. While costs to drill are also higher given the sophisticated methods and materials used, technological advances from exploration through completion have led to nothing-short-of-amazing increases in the amount of oil being recovered. It's a similar story for natural gas, with production per rig far higher than in the past. Currently, the focus is on driving the costs down, with substantial results already and even greater expectations for the future.

One outcome of these production gains has been to reduce the needs for imports. It will be a while, if ever, before all imports are eliminated, partially because characteristics of crude vary and refineries are designed to process particular types of oil. The US refinery infrastructure still requires some crude imports to match up capacities and capabilities, but imports have decreased notably from the 2006 peak level.

Another outcome is a surplus of US crude – domestic demand for fuels and other refined products is not growing nearly as fast as production. Virtually all of the "new" petroleum will make its way to foreign markets in some crude or refined form. Exports increased from less than a half-million barrels per day three years ago to more than 2.5 million now. Export infrastructure is about maxed out, and new capacity is desperately needed. Port expansion and efficient use of resources and other terminal options will be part of the solution.

Exporting is essential to optimum development of the US energy sector. Moreover, world markets need the crude from the US to improve standards of living in emerging areas and allow for sustainable economic growth.

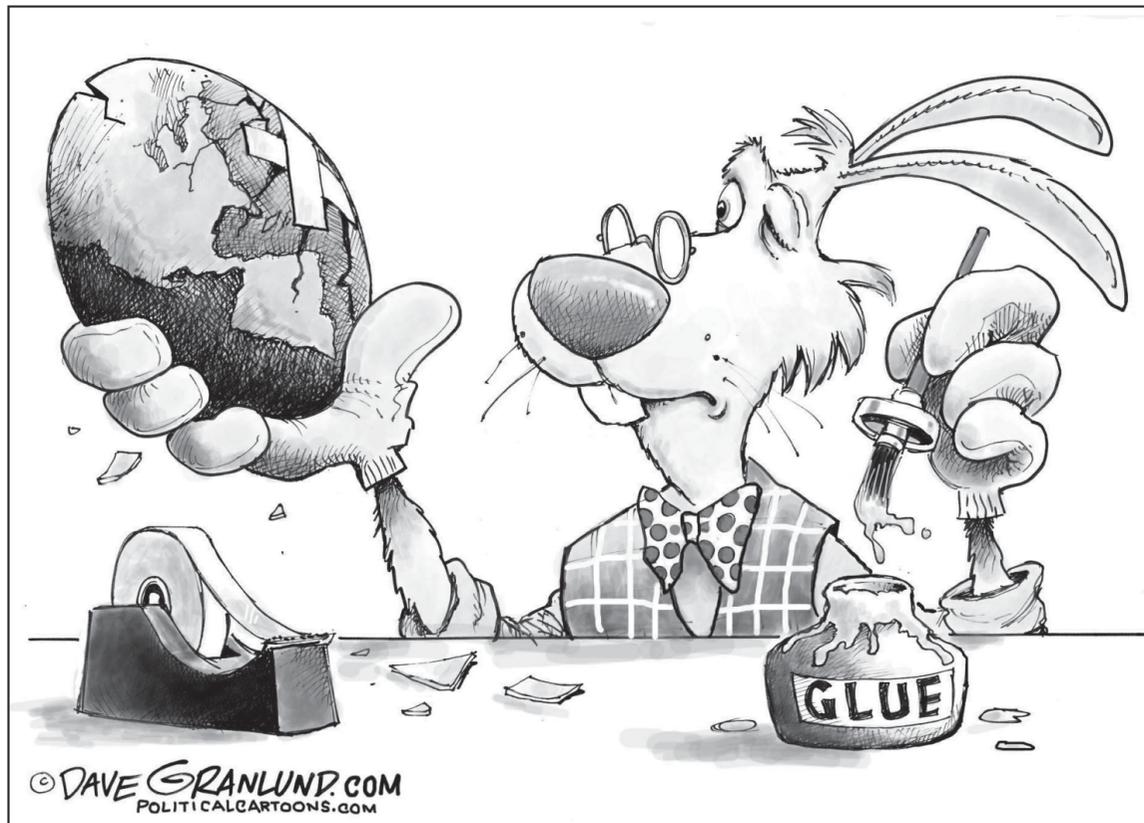


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Top officeholders join together in push for funding solution

AUSTIN — Gov. Greg Abbott, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and House Speaker Dennis Bonnen on April 10 released a joint statement promoting a twofold method for the 86th Texas Legislature to curb property tax increases across the state.

"Texans are fed up with skyrocketing property taxes. At the beginning of the legislative session, the governor, lieutenant governor and speaker laid out an agenda for property tax relief through the passage of Senate Bill 2 and House Bill 2 to limit property tax growth," the state's top officeholders said.

SB 2 and HB 2, the not-yet-approved property tax reform bills, would reduce the revenue growth increment used for determination of the rollback tax rate from 8.0 percent to 2.5 percent for taxing units other than small taxing units unless the voters in a small taxing unit election decide to opt-in to the proposed new voter-approved tax rate procedure.

The goal of both pieces of legislation is to reduce tax revenues for local taxing units and increase costs to the state through revised formulas for education funding.

Abbott, Patrick and Bonnen also pushed lawmakers to pass legislation that would allow Texans to vote to offset local property tax revenue by increasing local sales taxes by a penny.

"We are introducing a sales tax proposal to buy down property tax rates for all Texas homeowners and businesses, once Senate Bill 2 or House Bill 2 is agreed to and passed by both chambers," they said in the joint statement. "If the one-cent increase in the sales tax passes, it will result in billions of dollars in revenue to help drive down property taxes in the short and long term."

Senate and House members of both political parties have expressed reluctance to cede local control in their districts to tax revenue-generating proposals coming from Austin. Another dimension is that a club-like Senate tradition requires at least three-fifths, or 19, of the body's 31 members to agree to bring a measure to the floor for debate.

Ed Sterling
Capital Highlights



Patrick, who presides over the Senate, reportedly last week was entertaining the possibility of breaking with precedent by allowing the tax reform proposal to come to the floor with only 16 votes. There could be enough agreement among the body's Republican members to fall in line with Patrick's wishes.

As the possibility of property tax caps and a sales tax tradeoff simmers in the Senate, passage is harder to predict in the majority-Republican but not-so-collegial House. Differences in the House and Senate versions of the tax reform bill would have to be reconciled in a conference committee before returning to the full bodies for final approval.

Budget bill to conference

Lawmakers' constitutionally mandated job is to pass a state budget. As always, it's a messy process to do that.

House Bill 1, the state budget bill for fiscal years 2020 and 2021, was referred to a House-Senate conference committee on April 11

after the House refused to concur with Senate amendments to the bill.

Speaker Bonnen named as conferees House Appropriations Committee Chair John Zerwas, R-Richmond, and Reps. Greg Bonnen, R-Friendswood; Sarah Davis, R-West University Place; Oscar Longoria, D-Mission; and Armando Walle, D-Houston. Senate conferees likely will be named by Lt. Gov. Patrick this week.

Sales tax holiday is set

Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar on April 11 reminded Texans they may purchase certain items tax-free during the state's sales tax holiday for emergency preparation supplies. The sales tax holiday is scheduled for April 27-29.

"While we can't know in advance when the next flood, tornado or hurricane may strike, we can make sure our families, homes and businesses have the supplies they need to face these and other emergencies," Hegar said.

Items covered by the tax holiday include, for example:

- Household batteries, fuel containers and flashlights priced at less than \$75;
- Hurricane shutters and emergency ladders priced at less than \$300; and
- Portable generators priced at less than \$3,000.

Tax revenue is distributed

Comptroller Hegar on April 10 announced his agency would send cities, counties, transit systems and special purpose taxing districts \$705.3 million in local sales tax allocations for April.

The amount is 8.4 percent more than distributed for the month of April 2018. The allocations are based on sales made in February by businesses that report tax monthly.

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WATER SALVATION?

When we teach that baptism in water is essential to salvation, often the reply is that "water doesn't save anybody" and many will even say that we believe in "water salvation." Such is a pejorative statement, meant to belittle and disparage, and shows a misunderstanding of the Bible teaching of baptism.

In John chapter nine, is found the account of Jesus healing a blind man. We are told that he put clay on the blind man's eyes and instructed him to go wash his eyes in a certain pool of water. The blind man went and washed and came seeing (vs 6-7). These were the conditions prescribed by Jesus Himself. Had the blind man not met those conditions he would have remained blind. Although the healing was not in the water, but in the Lord, the blind man still had to wash in the water as Jesus instructed him in order to be healed of his blindness.

Similarly, Jesus requires one today to be baptized to be saved (Mk. 16: 16; Acts 2: 38; 22: 16). Does that mean the water saves people? Is that water salvation? Of course not! Jesus saves, and it is His blood that washes away one's sins (Rev. 1: 5). Thus, if we desire Jesus to save us, we must do what He requires, which includes being baptized in water.

Just as it would have been foolish for the blind man to disregard Jesus' instruction to wash in the specified pool, isn't it foolish for people today not to be properly baptized? Think on these things.

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