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Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Tax hike for downtown worthwhile

Almost two months ago, upon our unqualified endorsement of the master plan for downtown Owensboro development, we asked the following question: Will this community step up and do the hard things to make this happen in terms of taxes and borrowing money? In other words, is this community willing to invest in itself to create a vibrant downtown that will spur economic development through tourism, private investment and heightened quality of life for residents?

We knew then that we would eventually have to answer that question ourselves. That day of reckoning has arrived.

On Jan. 8, Ron Payne, Owensboro's new mayor, boldly stepped out with a proposal to partially pay for the massive project by doubling the city's

insurance premium tax from 4 percent to 8 percent. Daviess Fiscal Court quickly followed suit by supporting a hike in the insurance premium tax for residents and businesses outside the city limits.

Together, the tax increases would allow the city and county to jointly borrow the \$79 million needed to pay for the public portion of the project.

Throwing our support behind the master plan wasn't difficult. We were among the first to call for a professional planning group to create a real plan to revitalize our tired downtown; to provide a vision for what downtown should be, something that would spark enthusiasm. What Gateway Planning Group provided was all that and more. It's simply breathtaking. Then we watched as a wide cross section of the

community lined up in support of the plan, seeming to understand and appreciate what it could do for Owensboro's quality of life and its ability to attract visitors and prod private investment.

In the meantime, the national economy has continued to crater, calling into question the appropriateness of increasing any tax at a time when people are justifiably fearful of the future and wondering if their next paycheck will be their last for a while. We certainly appreciate the impact of increased taxes on individuals, families and the business community. That's why we wanted to find if the city and county had the ability to finance the project with existing revenues. We are now convinced that for a project of this magnitude, doing that simply isn't possible.

So the question is, should this

community embrace this unique opportunity to move Owensboro forward, being fully aware of the cost to everyone?

We say yes.

There are many reasons that make this investment the smart choice for Owensboro-Daviess County. The greatest is the cost of doing nothing. For more than three decades, downtown Owensboro has flirted with becoming moribund. The presence of the RiverPark Center, the Mitch McConnell Plaza and other improvements have buoyed the area, but last year's closing of the Executive Inn Rivermont has taken a serious toll on downtown's fortunes. A river wall project is set to begin this spring, which promises to transform the downtown riverfront. But if the master plan is rejected, the river wall project by itself will not have the drawing power to bring the kind of

vitality to downtown that it has lacked for so long. Rejecting this opportunity now will probably exclude anything like it for generations.

When Payne proposed the increase in the insurance premium tax to pay for the downtown project, he said: "This is where we make our mark and gain our competitive advantage."

We agree. When the economy recovers, and it will, Owensboro-Daviess County will be well on its way to completing an amenity that will create jobs and foster economic development, attract tourists and be a place where new and old residents can enjoy the kind of venue previously only available in some distant city or resort. The economic timing for such a venture isn't perfect, but the door to a great opportunity stands open.

It's time to step through it.

President-elect Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle Obama, stand together Nov. 10 in Washington.

Associated Press



First lady positioned to push family issues

While I'm aware that there's no official inauguration for a first lady — no oath to take, no speech to make — we do manage to have an initiation rite. So, Michelle Obama, Princeton and Harvard Law School grad, lawyer and mother, has been subject to the usual mix of mild hazing and wild admiration on her way to the East Wing.

It all reached a crescendo last week with breathless tales of the First Fashionista appearing everywhere. The chatter ranged from complaints that "her popster look is much too short and tight" to starry-eyed views of her as a new Jackie Kennedy who will single-handedly bail out the American fashion industry.

The talk of ball gowns and decorating raised the disheartening possibility that even after Hillary Rodham Clinton and, gulp, Sarah Palin, we are going back to the first lady beat. Yes, to those wonderful yesteryears when the media focused their lonely eyes on the Four F's of first ladydom: fashion, furnishing, food and family.

But (hope alert!) there is also the possibility that the fourth F — the family — will turn into a serious agenda that cements a bond between the woman in the White House and the women in Every House.

Obama wisely listed her first priority as seeing her daughters through the transition. But as she told "60 Minutes," "Women are capable of doing more than one thing well at the same time."

Indeed, Obama presented herself as a woman who's "had to juggle being mom in chief and having a career for long time." If, as she routinely said during the campaign, it's a struggle for her — a woman with resources and a grandma in chief — imagine how much harder it must be for others.

So what will happen if this 45-year-old mom in chief, and wife of a man who "gets it," makes the personal her political issue? What would a serious work-and-family policy look like?

For most of a generation, juggling has been framed as an individual talent in the Good Mom Pageant. As Ellen Galinsky of the Families and Work Institute says, "Work and family were seen as separate worlds. We all imagined other people were doing it well and only we weren't."

The last major piece of family

legislation was the Family and Medical Leave Act passed 15 years ago. It only guarantees unpaid leave to people in workplaces with 50 or more employees. Meanwhile, just half the nation's workers get a single paid sick day for themselves and far fewer get it for a child. As for the elusive flextime? Even among those eligible, 39 percent believe they'll jeopardize their jobs if they take it.

And by the way, while we've been stalled, a tsunami of elder care has been added to the responsibilities of child care.

Just to get rolling again, we need to expand family leave to workplaces with 25 or more employees. We need to increase the number of states with paid family leave beyond California, Washington and New Jersey, and add to the handful of districts and cities with at least seven days of paid sick leave.

At the same time, we can support bills guaranteeing a paltry 24 hours a year to attend school conferences. And surely, any new jobs created with stimulus funds ought to include pro-family policies.

In this economy, many workers are afraid of asking for such "frills." When times are tough, says Debra Ness of the National Partnership for Women and Families, "we are told the sky will fall ... we can't do it now."

But the first minimum-wage bill, the first child-labor law and the law setting maximum hours were passed during the Depression. We can't get out of this mess by making it harder for families.

As for the Obamas? They've found a unique way to resolve their own work and family dichotomy. In the words of the outgoing president, "he's a 45-second commute away from a great wife and two little girls that love him dearly."

Every president's wife has a list of jobs including that of trusted adviser, the role often trivialized as pillow talk. But what a chance this is to use the spotlight on the first family to illuminate other families. What a chance Obama has to become mom in chief to a nation struggling to keep it together.

As her husband said, "I believe in the general theory that if Mom is happy, everybody's happy." That sounds like a pretty good national policy.

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Ellen Goodman
The Boston Globe



If Israel takes back Gaza, peace might have a chance in Middle East

No phrase represents more of a triumph of hope over experience than the phrase "Middle East peace process." A close second might be the once-fashionable notion that Israel should "trade land for peace."

Since everybody seems to be criticizing Israel for its military response to the rockets being fired into their country from the Gaza Strip, let me add my criticisms as well. The Israelis traded land for peace, but they have never gotten the peace, so they should take back the land.

Maybe a couple of generations of Palestinians in Gaza living in peace under Israeli occupation and a couple of generations of the occupation troops squelching the terrorists — "militants" for those of you who are squeamish — would set up conditions where the Palestinians would be free to vote on whether they would like to remain occupied or to have their own state — minus terrorists and their rockets.

Casualty totals alone should be enough to show that the Palestinian people are the biggest losers from the current situation, where the terrorists among them, firing rockets into Israel, can bring devastating retaliatory strikes.

Why don't the Palestinians vote for some representatives who would make a lasting peace with Israel? Because any such candidates would be killed by the terrorists long before election day, so nobody volunteers for that dangerous role.

We don't know what the Palestinians really want — and won't know as long as they are ruled by Hamas, Hezbollah

and the like.

Whatever the benefits of peace for the Palestinian population, what are the terrorists going to do in peacetime? Become librarians and furniture salesmen?

So-called "world opinion" has been a largely negative factor in this situation. Nothing is easier than for people living in peace and safety in Paris or Rome to call for a "cease-fire" after the Israelis retaliate against people who are firing rockets into their country.

The time to cease fire was before the rockets were fired.

What do calls for "cease-fire" and "negotiations" do? They lower the price of launching attacks. This is true not only in the Middle East but in other parts of the world as well.

During the Vietnam War, when American clergymen were crying out "Stop the bombing!" they paid little attention to the fact that bombing pauses made it easier for North Vietnam to move more ammunition into South Vietnam to kill both South Vietnamese and Americans.

After Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, if British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had heeded calls for a "cease-fire," that would have simply lowered the price to be paid by the Argentine government for their invasion.

Go back a hundred years — before there was a United Nations and before "world opinion" was taken into account.

An Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands at that time would have risked not only a British counter-attack to retake the islands but also



Thomas Sowell
Creators Syndicate

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British attacks on Argentina itself.

Anywhere in the world, attacks such as those on Israel today would not only have risked retaliation but invasion and annihilation of the government that launched those attacks.

Today, so-called "world opinion" not only limits the price to be paid for aggression or terrorism, it has even led to the self-indulgence of third parties talking pretty talk about limiting the response of those who are attacked to what is "proportionate."

By this reasoning, we should not have declared war on Japan for bombing Pearl Harbor. We should have gone over to Japan, bombed one of their harbors — and let it go at that.

Does anyone imagine that this would have led to Japan's becoming as peaceful today as it has become after Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Or is the real agenda to engage in moral preening from a safe distance and at somebody else's expense?

Those who think "negotiations" are a magic answer seem not to understand that when A wants to annihilate B, this is not an "issue" that can be resolved amicably around a conference table.

The Opinion page featured commentary lineup

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Ellen Goodman Thomas Sowell	David Broder Kathleen Parker	Leonard Pitts Jr. Larry Dale Keeling	Paul Greenberg Board of Contributors	Froma Harrop Kathleen Parker	Leonard Pitts Jr. Garrison Keillor	Robert Samuelson Cal Thomas



Coming Monday

Kathleen Parker says from now on, cynicism is out and earnestness and sincerity are in.