

COMMENTARY



SCOTT MAXWELL'S

TAKING NAMES

Soldier fights for military tax break

With more controversial tax proposals blooming than flowers around Tallahassee nowadays, a new one has emerged that may be as American as apple pie.

Only it's coming from Afghanistan.

The idea is to give servicemen and women a break on their property taxes under the theory that they shouldn't have to pay taxes on homes they have to abandon to serve their country.

And one of those leading the push is **Michael Waldrop**.

Waldrop has been e-mailing one legislator after another — which already displays more civic activism than most folks display nowadays.

But it's even more impressive when you realize that Waldrop has been lobbying lawmakers from Afghanistan — when he gets the chance to put down his gun and pick up a computer anyway.

"We have been battling an intense Taliban insurgency over the last nine months," the captain in the U.S. Army Infantry explained in an e-mail this week.

Waldrop, a member of the inactive ready reserves who was called to duty from his job as an executive for Orlando's McCree Inc., went on to explain that he keeps tabs on the local political scene through this column and OrlandoSentinel.com. And he decided that now, with tax-cut proposals in abundance, was a good time to make his move.

Legislators agree.

"His plan definitely has legs," says State Rep. **Andy Gardiner**. "And what's so amazing about this guy is that he's not over there be-



COURTESY OF THE WALDROP FAMILY

Michael Waldrop is lobbying from Afghanistan for property-tax breaks for troops serving overseas.

hind a desk. He's fighting."

In fact, Gardiner cited a Purple Heart that Waldrop received after he suffered shrapnel injuries last year.

Of course, no one knows Waldrop's story better than his wife, **Marnie**. She's home with the couple's two young children and watches the war from afar — usually on the morning news, since the evening images tend to keep her up at night. She described her husband as the bravest man she knows, saying, "I'm just so proud of him."

The idea has the state reimbursing those serving for the months they're gone. But there are lots of details to be worked out. In fact, one of the most extreme tax-cut proposals in Tallahassee does away with all residential property taxes. But if that doesn't happen, Gardiner is

optimistic that Waldrop's desire will become law with help from other legislators such as **Carey Baker**, a fellow veteran, in the Senate.

Waldrop certainly hopes it does — and not for his own benefit, as he expects to be home before it could take place.

In his e-mail, he described it as something for "future soldiers."

"I really believe this is an issue that can be taken nationwide with Florida as the lead," he wrote. "What a tremendous bonus or incentive to encourage these brave men and women in a time where recruiting and retention are so poor and the demand for them so high."

Scott Maxwell, who wishes more residents were half as involved in civic activism in their own backyard as this soldier is from the other side of the world, can be reached at smaxwell@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-6141.