

Colorado voters suspend government spending limits

Colorado voters lifted state spending limits for the next five years to give the state more money to beef up its programs. When the vote was announced, Republican Gov. Bill Owens joined the mayor of Denver and the Democratic legislative leadership to celebrate. It was a large bipartisan group, which had spent time convincing Colorado citizens to vote in favor of the statewide question.

The vote was close, but a majority of 52 percent of those voting agreed the message of the Colorado leaders was worth listening to. They voted to give up tax refunds for the next five years to give the state money for schools, highways and health care.

Every time the Taxpayer Bill of Rights is proposed in a state, including Kansas, the fact that Colorado is the only state that has passed such a bill is mentioned. The vote in Colorado, and the large bipartisan effort to convince the voters, is a demonstration of the problems that come from putting tax policy in a state constitution.

Colorado has been living with the Taxpayer Bill of Rights for over 13 years, and in that time the state has faced financial problems because of the spending limits under the constitutional amendment.

When an economic recession stagnates wages and higher living costs squeeze people, it make ideas of limiting government spending sound right. There are good reasons to consider ways to limit expansive government spending when there is truly evidence of wasteful excesses.

However, those simple-sounding formulas have unintended consequences, such as the financial problems that have plagued Colorado for the past five years.

Those supporting a Taxpayers Bill of Right for Kansas have said they will make sure it does not include the provisions that caused Colorado problems. Fixing the glitch is what the Colorado voters were asked to do in the election last Tuesday. State leaders made the case that a fix was needed, and the voters agreed.

Some supporters of the limits on government say it is the only way to control legislators because there is no control at the ballot box. The quest to control spending is easier than finding good candidates from either party who are willing to truthfully approach the need to balance government spending.

If there truly is no way to make changes through the ballot box, it is because the party leaders on both sides feel they do not have to listen, and because of finely engineered boundaries, legislative districts are no longer competitive.

Proponents of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights were upset with the outcome of the vote in Colorado. The important message from the Colorado election is that voters are more intelligent than some political pundits believe.

Congratulations to the people of Colorado.

— Tom Betz



Sad times can bring enjoyment

I've been on the road again and the reason I write this account is to stimulate your memory of good times with your children and to encourage others to take the opportunity to have fun with your family now.

I left Norton on Friday, a few weeks ago, to meet three grandchildren at the Denver airport.

Wow, I had previously been at the airport, but my son was driving and knew where he was going and I did not pay enough attention.

Michael and Claudia and three of their children had flown in earlier in the day. We were all on our way to Canon City, Colo., to attend a memorial service for Claudia's mother on Saturday.

Getting off I-70 the signs even though not clear began a ways out from the terminal. I don't know who figures out those signs, I think it's a committee because no one person could make them that confusing.

You drive away from the airport then make a turn that at least heads you in the correct direction. Then there is the decision of what airline you are to meet, but I kept trolling and finally arrived at the level for departures.

I asked the security guard how to get to arrivals and his explanation of "stay to your left" seemed simple until I saw the sign that said "left lane closed, merge right," which I did. Then I kept on the left again and thought I was in the correct place before I realized I had overshot the first parking garage and was in the "valet

Memories

Sonya Montgomery



parking "area."

The attendants looked at me as if I had lost my mind when I asked if I could simply drive back a few feet and get into the other garage.

Nope, I had to make the complete circle again. However, this time I "knew" where I was going.

It was less than an hour before arrival time, so I sat in the van and waited since I could see the gate they should be at from the van and my cell phone was on.

They called saying their flight was early. I thought I told them where I was and they said they would be coming down the escalator soon.

I knew there was an escalator just inside this door and so, silly me, I went inside to wait for them.

They did not show up. I went back outside just as my phone rang. They saw the van but wondered where I was.

We were ready to leave, but I had been at the garage sixty-five minutes, so had to pay for two hours.

With the grandchildren acting as navigators we were on our way to Canon City.

I am not fond of mountain driving, but it was dark and I didn't realize the curves and hills were as mountainous as it appeared when we came back to Denver on Sunday.

It is such a joy to hear what the grandchildren are doing in their jobs and college and what a better way to visit than during a two-hour drive.

After the service on Saturday, some of the family wanted to go to the Royal Gorge, just outside of Canon City.

I did not do the tram ride but it was a beautiful day and I walked part way across the bridge. It was a joy just to be with the family.

As I said, I'm not fond of mountains. I think they are beautiful, but I don't like the "fall off ledges" feel.

I was riding with Mike, Claudia and some of their family and Claudia, who grew up in Canon City, wanted to take the Skyline Drive back into town.

She said prisoners built the road years ago and I maintain they made it for a single horse. She said when she was a Girl Scout her troop sold lemonade, candy etc., at the top; many people, especially Texans, would ask how much further it was to the end.

It is a one way drive and there is no turning back.

As families we often attend memorial services to support each other and they are sad events. However, we can also enjoy our families at this time.

Enjoy your family and friends while you can.

Congressman against plan to close offices

After spending time last week visiting with farmers across Kansas, Congressman Jerry Moran is calling on U.S. Department of Agriculture officials to reconsider their plans of closing or relocating a large number of Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices. These closures are a part of department's recent "FSA Tomorrow" proposal to close 30 percent of the more than 2,300 FSA local or county offices nationwide.

"Local and county FSA offices provide an important service to our farmers and ranchers," Mr. Moran said. "Any proposals to restructure this program must be carefully considered to ensure the availability and quality of service is not sacrificed."

Kansas has 103 county offices to serve producers in 105 counties. The "FSA Tomorrow" plan would close 29 Kansas offices. Determinations are to be made on the state level with proposals submitted to the USDA by Tuesday.

Mr. Moran recently joined other members in encouraging House Appropriation Committee leaders to prohibit 2006 federal funds from being used in closing or relocating the offices. This allows officials to more carefully consider the needs of agricultural producers.

"Until we have a better understanding of the difficulties these changes would pose for farmers and local economies, as well as the actual cost effectiveness, we should hold off on this plan," Mr. Moran said.

Washington trip keeps her running

I love visiting Washington, the city of monuments and important people. It was a flying trip.

We left Denver on Wednesday morning and were home in our beds Friday night — well, more like Saturday morning, but home, never-the-less.

While Steve was at his National Newspaper Association meeting, the reason we were in the capital, I worked on my computer, editing copy and writing stories. Then I set off for the National Press Club for a press conference and lunch with the new secretary of health and human services, Mike Leavitt.

Mr. Leavitt talked about the problem of some type of bird flu coming out of Southeast Asia. Since then, everywhere I look — magazines, newspapers and television — there's some story about bird flu.

It's a real danger. History shows that every 10 years or so, the flu gets mean. Now and then it gets lethal enough to close schools and public buildings and fill up both hospitals and morgues.

It's happened before. It can and probably will happen again.

On that sober note, we headed for the Hill to visit with Sen. Pat Roberts' staff and Rep. Jerry Moran.

At Sen. Roberts' office, we were asking that the bids and contracts being awarded in the hurricane relief operations be published in the newspapers in the counties affected.

There's a lot of distrust of the govern-

Open Season

Cynthia Haynes



ment over this whole relief effort. Letting people know about and be able to bid on contracts and then telling them who, what and where the money is going will help to alleviate some of it. It will cost the government a few thousand dollars to tell people where and how it is spending millions. It will also help those newspapers that, like all other businesses in the area, have been hit hard by the storms and their aftermath.

We had nothing special to talk to Jerry Moran about, but we wanted to say hi.

The congressman told us that he decided not to run for governor for family reasons. His daughters are a sophomore and a senior at Hays High School. In fact, he said, he was leaving early that Friday to fly home since his oldest was running in the state cross country meet in Wamego.

Working in Washington is hard enough, he said. Campaigning for governor and moving to Topeka, if he won, would have been tough on his teenagers. Mr. Moran asked us what people were

saying out our way and seemed to be informed about most of our problems and concerns.

The next day, Friday, we walked over to the World War II and Korean War monuments. They are breathtaking. We saw lots of older couples walking around taking pictures. I'm sure many of those men were remembering those wars because they were there.

On the way back to the hotel to pick up our suitcases, we cut across the area around the Washington Monument near the White House. Suddenly a helicopter soared over us.

Steve looked up and said, "That's the president."

Sure enough, the helicopter landed on the South Lawn and there were about 200 people standing around waiting for him. On the roofs, we could see riflemen checking the area for danger.

It was a short trip to the nation's capital, but we saw a lot, learned a lot and enjoyed getting home to northwest Kansas, where there's little traffic, less crime and broader vistas to enjoy.

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