

## Too good to be true? Probably

Many proposals have been floated on how to solve the state of Kansas's "revenue problem", some worth listening to.

First we should understand, the state has a revenue problem not because previous legislatures gave away the farm, as some say, though there is an element of truth to that.

No, Kansas is broke because we are broke. Kansas is hurting because we are hurting.

Income tax collections are down because people are out of work, others are not making as much as they once were and businesses are suffering in this, the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Sales tax collections suffer because we are not buying as much

If there's no money out there to tax, the state will be poor. In fact, Kansas was doing fine despite the tax breaks passed over the last 10 years — as long as the economy was growing.

The state had so much money, it could — and did — spend more and more every year, with expenses growing far faster than the rate of inflation.

Over the years, the state eliminated sales taxes on farm machinery and manufacturing machinery. It gave breaks to the elderly and the poor. It spent even more on higher and higher school spending and more social programs, because the dough kept rolling in.

When the economy went south, of course, this all had to stop.

Then came the cry to eliminate all the "loopholes" in the tax structure. You know, the other guy's tax breaks.

For when it comes to tax policy, everybody benefits from some part of it. And no one wants to lose their personal tax break. That represents "sound fiscal policy."

That's why when the Legislature decided to try closing some tax breaks, it started with one we all get: the exemption on home utility bills.

The idea apparently was that special interests, such as farmers and business groups, have more pull than everybody. So much for that idea.

There is something wrong with the state's tax system, however, when you realize that, according to a 2006 study, only 7 percent of Kansas property and 24 percent of Kansas sales actually are taxed.

Ed Flentje, a professor of political science at Wichita State University, proposed a "tax-break commission" similar to the base closing commissions which review military installations for closure. It would comb the state's tax structure and propose changes.

His colleague in the "Insight Kansas" column, Fort Hays State professor Chapman Rackaway, went him one further: he proposed just eliminating tax breaks and instituting a "flat tax" for the sales tax. Doing so, he estimated, would mean the rate could be reduced from 5.3 percent today to just 1.9 percent.

Applying the sales tax to services, which today are not taxed, would more than close the state's "revenue gap" expected next year.

Who could complain? Rackaway said free-market believers should be happy to see the state get out of the business of deciding which activities to favor. Everyone should benefit from the simplicity.

Of course, the same logic could apply to the income and property taxes. Just tax everyone and everything a little.

Even Girl Scout cookies, churches and hospitals, rich and poor, corporations and small businesses.

The idea has merit. Rates would be low and fair. Only accountants and tax lawyers would be out anything, and they'd find ways to make money.

—Steve Haynes



To...**Brenda and Dan Dole** for paying everyone's way Sunday to see *Save a Life*. (Called in)

To...**Norton Community High School** students who were inducted into the *National Honor Society*. (Called in)

To...**Norton Community High School and junior high school band and vocal students** who qualified for state competition. (Called in)

To...**Darlene McEwen** for her unique way of planning activities for residents of the *Andbe Home*. (Called in)

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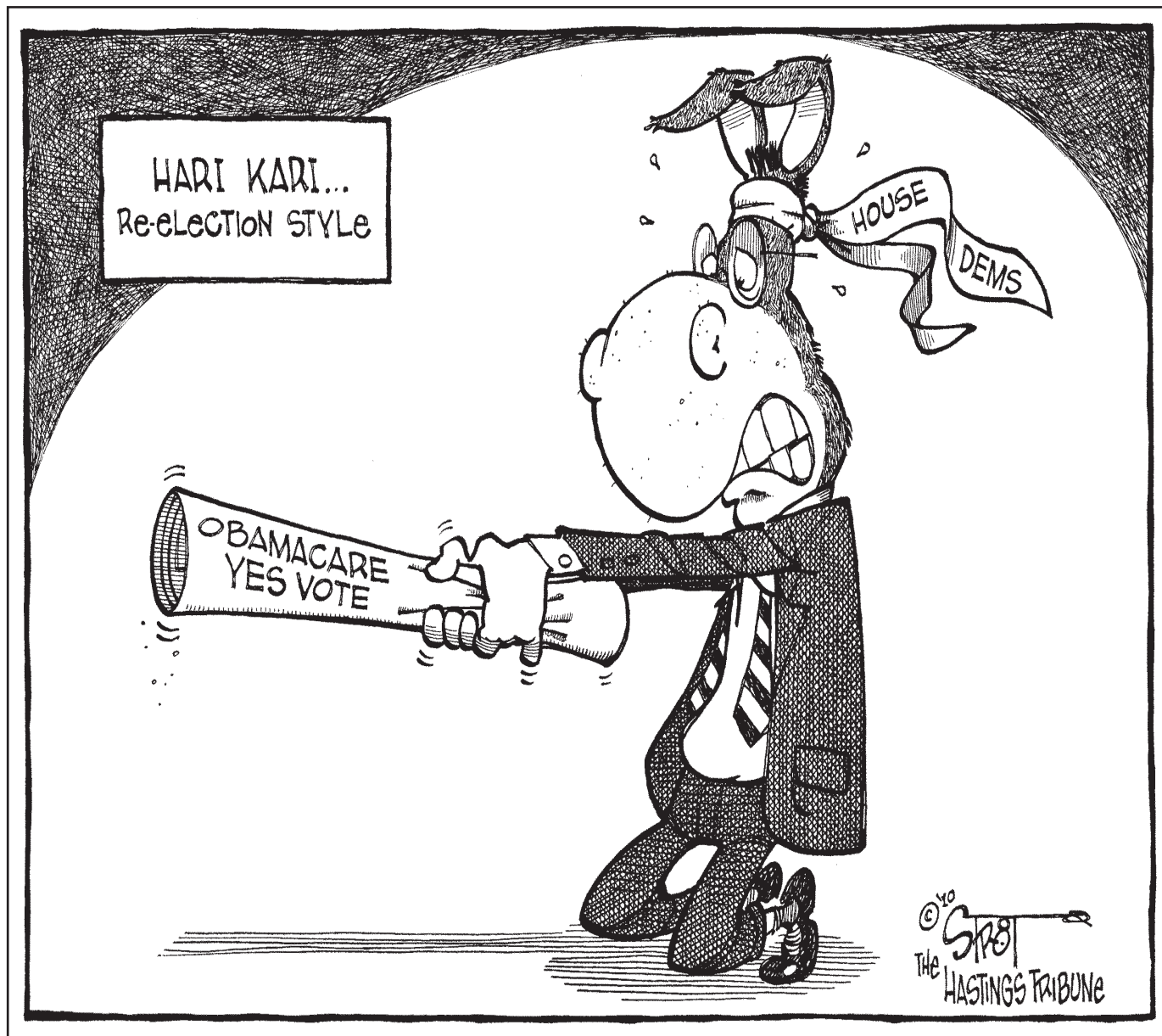
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## Problems with Grandma's Christmas gift

There was a little brouhaha over Grandma's Christmas gift to the family this year. With the best of intentions she enlisted Elizabeth to help her assemble a photo album.

There were photos from the early 1900's through maybe 1984. Oh dear: the youngest grandchild is Patricia, born in 1985. Now that's a problem!

The Hubby's sister, Susie also felt slighted! After viewing the album she complained, "there's little Junior; there's little Rod: cute little Rod and Junior: Rod, Junior and the cousins. Where's Susie?"

Elizabeth has this to say of the assembly of the album; every time they came across a photo of Susie, Grandma would say, "Susie hates that picture!" So into the reject pile it went! Susie was the youngest of her family also. There is a whole birth order syndrome I'm not about to get into. I'm a middle child, I want PEACE!

Grandma said, "I should have gotten started earlier! I kept finding more!" (Grandma never throws anything away. And this was one time I was glad as many were pictures I had never seen.)

I watch a show called "Clean Sweep" on TLC mornings at 9. There is a rumor a family member contacted the show about Grandma. (It wasn't me!!!) For whatever reason she did not meet the criteria!

We tease, but Grandma is not nearly as bad as the people on Clean Sweep. Watching the show both inspires and depresses me.

The intervention specialist of the cast always tells people they can keep the

### Back Home Nancy Hagman



memory even if the item associated with it is gone.

Sometimes, in my opinion, they go too far. I've seen them force people to purge nice antique pieces. They redo the rooms and in place of a circa 1920's buffet there is a particle board shelving unit. It gives the hunky carpenter, Eric, something to do. He is very nice too look at but come on!

Sometimes they make women get rid of their wedding dresses! (Okay I confess I cut mine up but if you want to keep yours I'll fight for you!)

I pride myself on keeping stuff from overtaking my house. However, for some things there are no good solutions. We have a rather large collection of recorded movies on tape.

Many are very poor quality and we've moved past the ages and stages of others! I made the girls take what they wanted. Now what?

Did you know you cannot recycle VCR tapes other than by recording over them? I did find a pattern to crochet a "sling bag" from the tape. It takes two video tapes to make one. It says they make a lot of noise when you carry them. How many of those would anyone need?

If we get shipwrecked we could always use them to make a raft ala Castaway! It is certain they are never going to decompose! UGH!

I have a bunch of first day of issue stamped envelopes courtesy of my mom. I checked online for an appraisal. No demand for them, the expert pronounced. But how can I throw them away?

I fear my older children have inherited their Grandma's "saving" genes! Kate, at least, has her own house and takes the stuff she wants.

Patricia will be leaving school and the Midwest soon. She came home and we sorted her stuff. She boxed up items to move, including her wedding dress.

The wastebasket was full as was a box for good will. She did very well with her sort. After she left I spent the better part of an afternoon ironing old 4-H ribbons. I'm taking them to the extension office. They can recycle or throw them away, we are keeping the memories!!!

Does Clean Sweep ever go back to the houses to see if the people maintain an organized life style? Do they have regrets about the things that are gone?

I don't regret what I get rid of in fact whenever I move something out I hear my house mumber with relief. "So glad I don't have to carry that burden anymore!"

What's left always needs organizing, it seems. There are lots of photos! Maybe Elizabeth will help me do an album. If I look hard enough, I will surely find a picture of Patricia to put in there!

## Tumbling along

### Insight

John Schlageck

Traveling to Sherman, Norton and Grant counties the last couple weeks, I became reacquainted with an old friend, nemesis, nuisance that is very much a part of the western Kansas landscape.

While being buffeted about by 40 mile-per-hour northerly breezes, countless tumbleweeds rolled across Highways 24, 36 and 160. While I missed many of them, I occasionally nailed a two-footer while bumping a few others out of my path.

Tumbleweeds first gained notoriety when the Sons of the Pioneers romanticized them in song back in the late '30s.

I remember seeing my first ones in the early '50s. In the early spring, summer and fall when winds howled across roads in my native Sheridan County, tumbleweeds raced across the flatland. Incidentally, I recall singing along with the Pioneers and I still remember the song well.

This plant is as much a symbol of the old Wild West as Wyatt Earp, cattle rustlers, the coyote and the rattlesnake. The image of the lonely rider and the ghostly shape of the tumbleweed bounding in silence across the endless plains has

inspired a certain misty-eyed nostalgia even in folks who have never journeyed west of Kansas City — except to travel through our state to ski in Colorado.

In truth, this weed is a blasted nuisance. Even its Latin name (*Salsola pestifer*) identifies it as a menace.

The tumbleweed is also known as the Russian thistle. This plant was brought to the continent in the 1870s as a contaminant in shipments of flax seed imported to western Canada. By the turn of the century, the weed had a foothold from coast to coast.

The tumbleweed can survive and grow almost anywhere. It remains one of the hardestiest plants in the United States. Unfortunately no one has found a good use for this thorny weed.

Tumbleweeds can cause problems for farmers and ranchers. This nuisance weed clogs irrigation ditches, catches and accumulates litter, disrupts traffic, causes fires, poses a health threat to some

livestock and even breaks down fences on windy days.

In Kansas and other western states, thousands of man hours are spent each year clearing tumbleweeds from irrigation ditches and railroad tracks.

In the spring the weeds are fought with herbicides and in the fall the dried plants are sometimes burned.

Fighting tumbleweeds is a constant battle. Nearly every breezy day they bound across the prairie and every spring they sprout by the millions.

Although tumbleweeds have been in this country for nearly 150 years, no one has found a reason to cultivate this plant.

One thing is certain; this nuisance weed is here to stay unless our plant scientists can find a use or method to eradicate the tumbling, tumbling tumbleweed.

So why not romanticize them?

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.