

### A break in the legislative schedule

This will be my last article until we go back in session April 27. It has been nice to be back in Northwest Kansas. I have been traveling throughout the district answering questions about this year's legislature and budget. I wish I could talk to everyone, but if I have not seen you, please e-mail me at ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

News from your legislator  
**Ward Cassidy**



April 2 was "Drop Dead Day." Legislation must have passed both chambers by "Drop Dead Day" in order to be sent to the governor. The exception to this is conference committee reports on bills in conference may still be considered after this date. Many important bills, including the budget, are in conference committees and when we return April 27 we will have our work cut out for us. Licensing of abortion clinics, KPERS, and voter ID are just a few conference bills we will have to work on.

A real problem, I am concerned with, is that sometimes conference committees use the practice of "bundling." The drawback to this is that when compromises are finished some legislation that had wide spread support can be "bundled" with a bill that had little support. This makes final voting a real nightmare. I have tracked every vote I have made and I know there will be a choice of having to vote for a bill that I had voted for one part and opposed the other part.

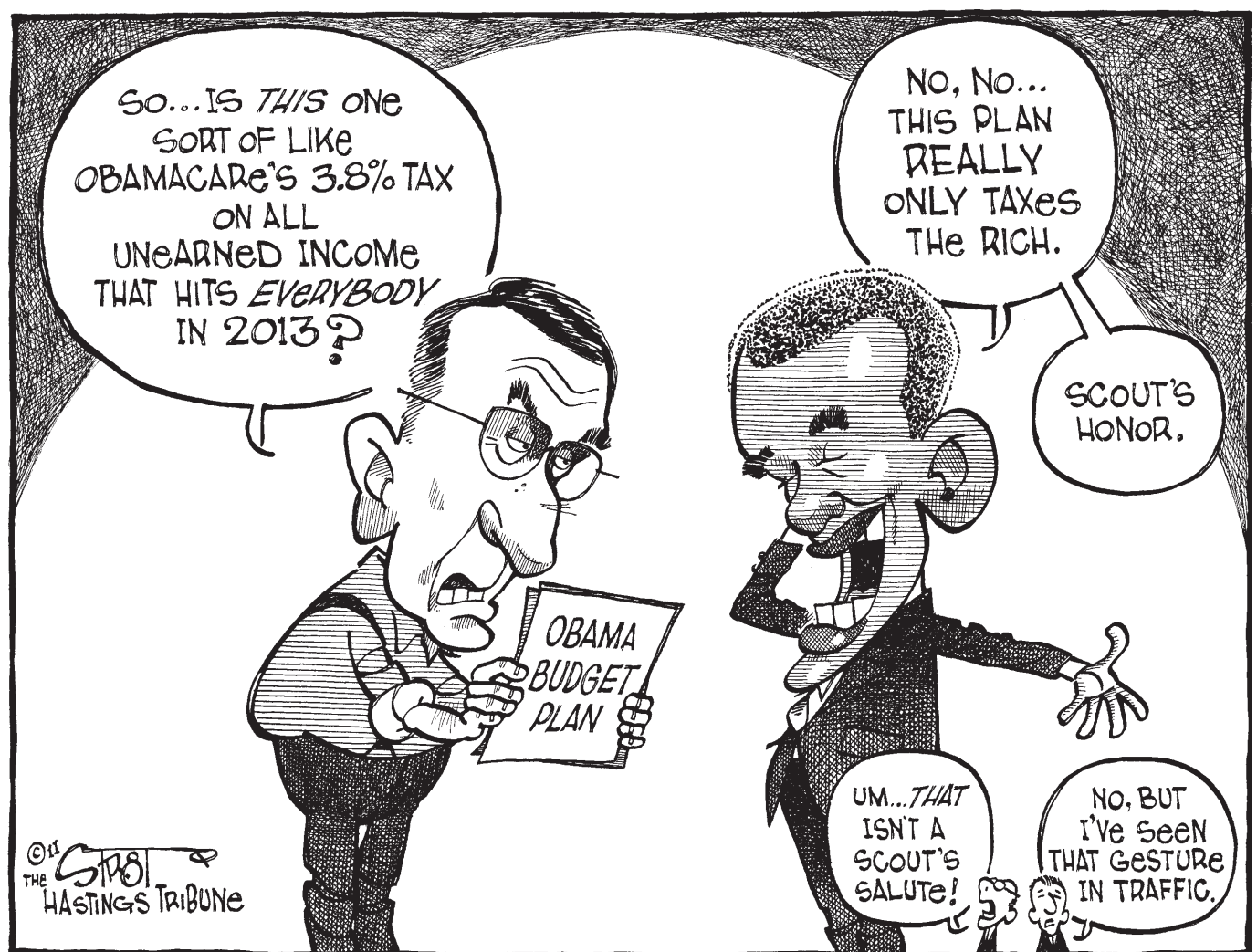
Here is an example of a bill that has been moved from many bills down to one: vehicle ID (VIN) inspection fee increase from \$10 to \$15 and then up to \$20 in 2013; signature requirements on vehicle renewal, that applicant has adequate insurance, (signature would be required on initial registration; the Dead Red rule- allow motorcycles to proceed through a red light after a reasonable amount of time because they are not heavy enough to change the light; drivers must pass a bicycle on the left no less than three feet away; increase the speed limit to 75 on selected multilane highways; and the seat belt law-no court costs are to be applied to seat belt violations. What I just finished describing is six bills moved into one. How would you vote on this one?

April 27 is the 76th day of session. The legislature will meet until the budget passes both chambers. The 90th day of the session is May 11. The last time the legislature went over the approved 90 days was 2006 when the session lasted 93 days. That was when they were trying to decide how to spend money, not cut budgets. I wish they would have been putting a "rainy day" fund in place.

In case you are wondering, the longest session ever was in 2002, when the session lasted 106 days. Legislators are not paid for more than 90 days. I have been told that it costs the taxpayers over \$60,000 a day to be in session and I am hoping we can get out with a good budget, before the May 11 deadline, and save the state money.

I have stated that I have opposed the 7.5-percent pay cut to state employees and I voted for the budget amendment proposing to cut all State General Fund agencies 1.193 percent, except for the Judiciary, kindergarten through 12, social service caseloads, and debt service. The agencies would have the flexibility to decide how the reductions are made. I am worried about the court system and hope that there will be some changes made to help them. I also know that we have to find some more money for the prison system when we return.

With the state's year-to-date sales tax revenue approximately \$25.8 million or .4-percent lower than expected, revenues would have to increase 15.6 percent in the next three months to reach the estimate that the Governor used to base his budget. The lower than expected revenues evaporated the less than \$8 million ending balance from the governor and senate's budget proposals leaving the house with the only proposed budget still in the black.



### Pearls, suggestions and resurrection

My mama always said, "You can wear pearls with anything." She probably didn't mean my nightgown.

A few nights ago, I was seated on the edge of the bed, about ready to swing my feet under the covers. I was going through my nightly ritual of checking the clock and putting my glasses on the nightstand when I discovered I hadn't removed my pearl earrings. After removing them I placed them on the nightstand, too. They aren't real pearl, just a good facsimile.

Fast forward to Monday morning and time to roll out of bed. After putting on my glasses I spotted the forgotten ear bobs, as my former mother-in-law used to call them. Knowing my hands would be full of some papers and books I wanted to carry downstairs, I just put the earrings on.

So, pearls with a nightgown might be a bit much, but another saying my mother had was, "Better to be overdressed for the occasion than not dressed up enough."

Jim has been working on my sister-in-law Donna's kitchen and I have gone along for the ride several times. I'm not much help except to do "gopher" jobs. You know, go 'fer this and go 'fer that.

### Out Back Carolyn Plotts



The other thing I'm good at is to make "helpful" suggestions. Finally, Jim took me aside and said, "Carolyn, you don't need to point out every little gap. I know it's there and I haven't adjusted the hinges yet. When you say 'uh-oh' it worries Donna."

I wasn't being critical. Really, I wasn't. I think the cabinets he's built are beautiful. But, more importantly, Donna does too. I'm almost as excited for her new kitchen as she is. Almost.

I knew I could count on my reader(s) to come through for me. A few columns ago I mentioned the early sprouting plants like my Naked Ladies. That's the only name I knew them by. My friend and fan, Ila, called to tell me a more proper name they are called is "Resurrection Lily". I

will try to remember that.

Speaking of "resurrection", Easter is Sunday. Jim is one of the preachers that serves a little congregation a few miles out in the country. It's his Sunday to preach so we are helping plan the Sunrise Service.

Ordinarily, the service is set for 7 a.m. but, I was reminded that Easter is quite a bit later this year and with Daylight Savings Time, we should bump the time up half an hour.

When I told Jim we had changed the time to 6:30 a.m. he said, "Do you realize how cold it's going to be then? You better find out when sunrise really is."

A call to the National Weather Service revealed the official time of sunrise for April 24 is 6:51 a.m. So, we split the difference and set the service time for 6:45 a.m.

I hope your church has sunrise services. And, if it does, I hope you go. Not that one day is more holy than another, but, Easter is the day we remember why we are Christians. Our God overcame the grave. Amen.

Let your opinions, praise and voice be heard.

### ELECTED OFFICIALS:

★ **Governor Sam Brownback**, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232  
★ **U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. roberts.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-4774  
★ **U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002. moran.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-6521  
★ **State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Room 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka,

Kan. 66612. ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us (785) 296-7399  
★ **U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. huelskamp.house.gov (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124  
★ **State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka, Kan. 66612 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov (785) 296-7659  
★ **State Rep. Ward Cassidy**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Topeka, Kan. 66612 ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov (785) 296-7696

OFFICE HOURS:  
8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.  
8 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Friday  
Phone: (785) 877-3361  
Fax: (785) 877-3732

### STAFF

Dana Paxton.....general manager  
advertising director/  
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com  
Dick Boyd.....Blue Jay sports  
Harriett Gill.....society editor  
email: hgill@nwkansas.com  
Vicki Henderson.....computer production

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### The monitoring of controlled burns

#### Insight

John Schlageck

The sky above the Flint Hills in Riley County was clear and blue as the sun rose April 12. It was a day cattlemen had been waiting for. After days of roaring southerly winds, conditions were calm.

Dew still glistened on the early morning grass as cattlemen everywhere hurried to begin the spring ritual of controlled burning of the tallgrass prairie. In less than two hours after daybreak, the first fires crackled and cracked as the orange flames licked at the Kansas sky sending smoke climbing to the heavens.

Burning conditions were ideal as Barb Downey and husband, Joe Carpenter, flicked his Bic starting the first fire at 8:30 a.m. The 5-10 miles-per-hour breeze out of the south was already pushing a straight head fire from the south toward the north where they were setting the back fires. Back fires or back burning provide a natural fire break that a head fire cannot cross because there is no fuel (grass).

Joe notified Riley County officials in advance of his intention to burn. He knows doing so is key in preventing prescribed fires from turning into accidental wildfires and ensuring burning is allowed under existing conditions.

"There's still always nervous anticipation when you light that first fire of the day," Carpenter says. "Even with perfect conditions like today, there's always that chance something will sneak around the hill, or leaves will burn through where you didn't think they would and the worst thing you want to see is a fire out of control."

With that in mind, Carpenter and Downey have carefully orchestrated this 2,000-acre burn with four other neighboring land owners and several additional helping ranch hands. More feet on the ground means more people to monitor and control burning conditions.

They've been in constant contact during the last month in an attempt to select this day based on weather conditions and wind velocity to ensure a safe, controlled burn. Minutes before the first match was struck, all members of the burn team visited by cell phone.

For Carpenter and Downey, burning their pasture remains part of an ancient phenomenon that began long before humans ever walked these hills. At that time, fires were ignited by lightning storms and the prairie was charred to restore the health of the native grasses.

This artificially ignited controlled burning of the tall-grass prairie in east-central Kansas is an annual event designed to mimic nature's match. It has become a tradition, part of the culture of the communities and the people who inhabit this region of our state.

"It's about neighbors helping neighbors," Barb says. "We do together what would be difficult to do alone."

Fire is an essential element of the ecosystem. Burning these pastures is one of the best management tools for maintain-

ing the native prairie.

This annual pasture burning only occurs for a few days each year. It is not a procedure that is drawn out and lasts for weeks. However, weather conditions dictate the length of the burning seasons most years.

"A properly set head fire has a nice, solid line of flames that will carry a lot of heat out ahead of it," Barb says. "Such a fire will singe the growing nodes of any brush and then flash over the grass itself—not burning the grass crowns—but hitting the brush and woody plants hard and doing exactly what a prairie fire is designed to do."

The fire burns so rapidly and passes over so quickly, the ground temperature cools quickly and the grass plants remain undisturbed. The new grass is ready to come out in two or three days

"There's a decent amount of moisture in the ground," Barb says. "There's plenty of moisture to get the shoots going. Those healthy roots go down six or eight feet in the ground."

With each day of sunshine bearing down on the now blackened soil, the grass soaks up this radiant heat and soon pops out beautiful and green ready for cattle grazing.

Landowners and cattle producers are proud to do their part keeping the native prairie the way it is intended to be—covered with grass. Without the spring burns this, unique grassland would soon disappear and become covered with shrubs, woody plants and trees.



Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:  
e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com,  
or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654

