

Learning the ins and outs of legislation

Recently, I voted against a House bill that would give \$45m a year, for two years, to the Local Ad Valorem Tax Reduction (LAVTR). I loved the property tax cut, but was opposed to the part of the bill that requires local units of government to publish, in their newspapers, that they plan to keep mill levies steady and only increase property tax receipts as valuations rise. There was also an amendment that the local units of government would have to budget to reduce property tax revenues by the amount of LAVTR payments. The bill passed the House, and my opposition to it was the attempt to take over our local control. We have very good elected officials who don't need any more state requirements to follow. As you recall, a bill has to be passed by the Senate and then signed by the Governor. I have been told the bill will not get out of the Senate.

News from
your
legislator
Ward Cassidy

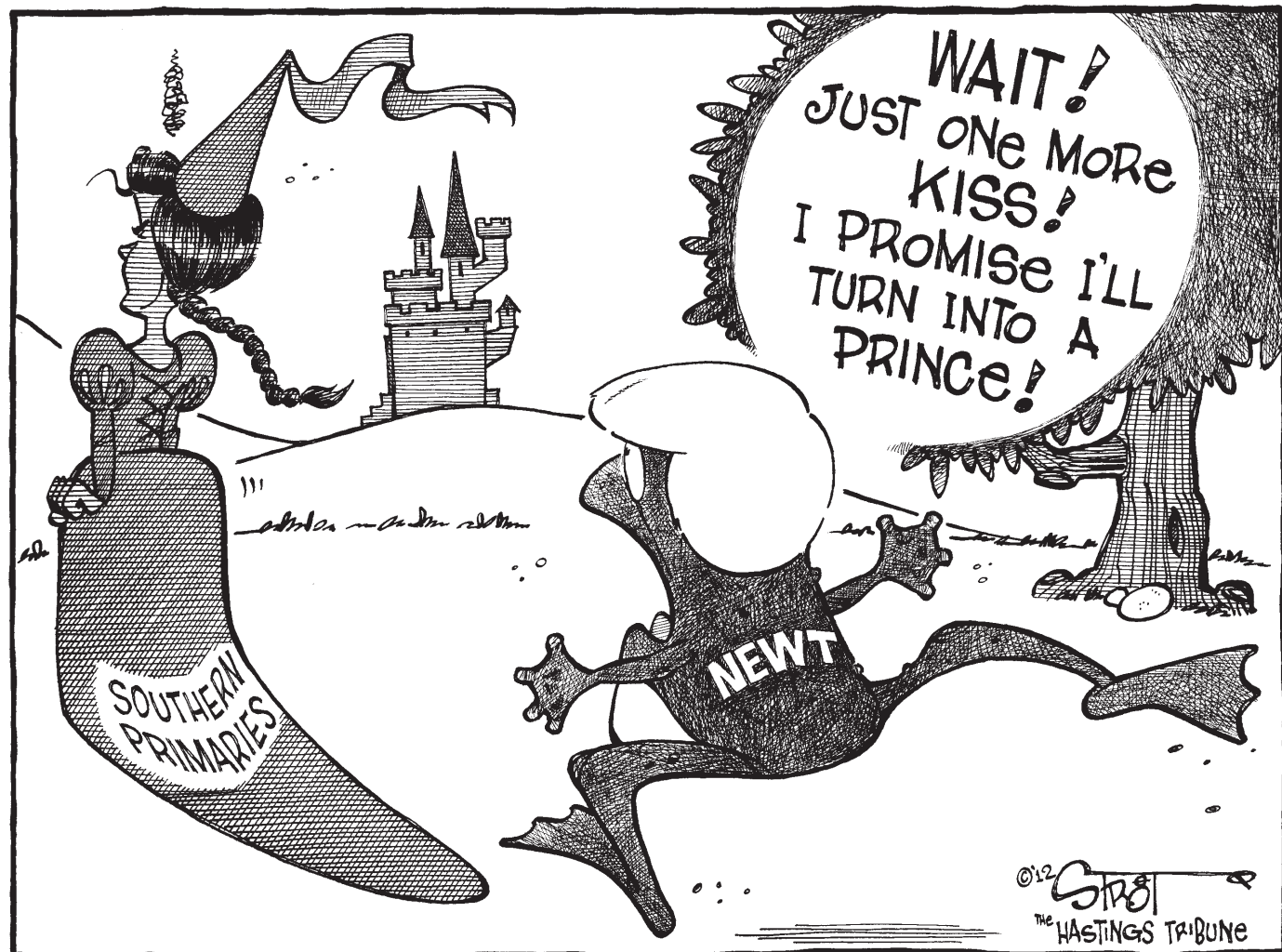


More good economic news for Kansas—there were 22,000 private sector jobs created last year. Eight of the eleven major industries in Kansas reported over-the-year job gains. Due to a decline of the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate to below 6.5 percent, the State Extended Benefits program will expire in Kansas on April 7, 2012.

Politics! I had the opportunity to visit with the Shawnee County District Attorney's office last week to discuss the Kansas Open Meetings Act. In early January, I went to the Governor's home twice for suppers. I was quizzed by the District Attorney's office, for a half-hour, as to whether strategy was discussed at these dinners. I would ask the readers of this column—where were you on January 10 and what did you discuss? I did, however, remember not discussing strategies.

Politics! I learned a procedure that can be used on the House Floor and committees that I did not know about until recently. If you vote for a bill that passes, the next day you can ask for a motion to reconsider. How is that used? When you would like a bill to fail but it looks certain to pass—you vote for it, and then work hard all night to get representatives to change their minds. You then make the motion to reconsider at the next meeting. I tried to use that strategy this past week and could not get the votes to change; therefore, the record shows I voted for a bill or action that I did not want. Confused? Lots to learn in politics.

School finance is slowly moving along with the Senate passing out an education plan that would raise the Base State Aid Per Pupil \$74 for the next two years. The House is working to have school districts spend down their unencumbered cash balances to show that the legislature is funding education. There will be a conference committee between the House and Senate and eventually have a final plan to vote on. I like the Senate plan at this time.



The making of a last will and testament

Don't think me morbid, but we have been working on our wills. Perhaps this was brought on by events of last week: Jim had a birthday and I received my Medicare card in the mail.

We have talked about doing a will, but never seemed to get "roundtuit". Our advancing age and our planned trip to Mexico seemed to be the impetus we needed to get started. Friends and family kept cautioning us to "be careful down there" and we kept saying, "We're in more danger driving on the highways than we are in Mexico." However, it did seem the prudent thing to do. You know, "get our affairs in order."

What we're doing may not be legal in the strictest sense of the word. We're just putting some thoughts and instructions on paper. At least it would give the kids a place to start.

First we told the kids where the money is. Split five ways they would each get about \$36 dollars and 27 cents. Then it occurred to Jim that we should tell them what to do with the old cars.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



Our only admonition was, "Don't call the junk man. They're the only thing we have that is actually worth something."

After that we started in on personal things. We've always told the kids what Jim brought into the marriage goes to his kids and what I had before goes to my kids. They've seen our hoard and both sets of kids are praying nothing happens to us so they don't have to deal with it. When we sweep our hand over our property and say, "Someday, my child, this will all be yours," they tremble with fear.

Thinking about a will has been good for us. It has caused us to begin to think

about what we need to do to simplify our lives. We both know we need to pare down. And, upon our return, have vowed to get started.

-ob-

Update: At this writing I am on a lobby computer at a motel in El Paso. This motel overlooks the Rio Grande and has a perfect view of Juarez. Normally, today is not a normal day. The wind and dust are blowing so badly we can't even see the city. If it doesn't stop by tomorrow we'll be building in it. We've done it before, but it's not fun. Jim just handed me a weather forecast. It's supposed to rain tonight. If it did, that would settle the dust. The team of volunteers we're meeting just pulled in so we're off to make new friends.

People ask if we have a GPS device to find our way around. Jim always answers, "Sure do. It's God's Positioning System. And He always knows where we are." Will see you on the "flip-flop."

Rain is desperately needed to help crops survive

It's becoming an all too familiar refrain among western Kansas farmers, "We need rain."

Last year's drought has continued into 2012. The wheat crop was planted late and many farmers doubled the normal planting rate and drilled 90 to 120 pounds per acre versus 50 to 60 pounds per acre in a normal year.

Because there was little to no subsoil moisture in the ground, the wheat crop started slowly once it germinated. Very little growth occurred until beneficial rains fell in November and December.

In January nearly a foot of snow blanketed a large region of wheat fields in southwestern Kansas. Since that time the crop has received scant rainfall and the crop is heading south in a hurry.

"We need rain," says veteran Gray County farmer/stockman Joe Jury. Annual rainfall averages approximately 20 inches in the sand hills he farms.

People often ask Jury how he can grow crops on that amount of moisture.

"I'd love to have an average rainfall of 18-20 inches in one year," the Gray County crop producers say. "I can grow a wheat or milo crop on that amount of moisture."

In 2011 the small farming community of Ingalls, that Jury calls home, recorded less than six inches of rainfall.

"You can't grow much of a crop with that little moisture," he says. "Last year we turned our cows on pasture in late April and started feeding them the first of June. We've been feeding them ever since and I'm afraid we'll do the same

Insight John Schlageck



this year unless we receive rain and soon."

As of mid-March the wheat crop was beginning to suffer from a lack of moisture. Eighty degree days, winds of 50 and 60 miles-per-hour and 15 percent humidity are sucking dry what little moisture remains in the soil.

In his region of southwestern Kansas some crop farmers have already stripped some of their fields to stop the wind from blowing the soil out of their fields. Feedlots west of Garden City have been cleaned out of manure that has been spread on wheat fields in an attempt to keep them from blowing.

"We're starting to get beat up already," Jury says. "Without additional moisture, we can't afford to lose the remaining soil moisture we have. It could get ugly."

That's why Jury and some producers who have heard about the Dirty '30s and remember the drought of the early '50s are looking at alternative crops this spring instead of the traditional fall crops of corn and soybeans. He'll probably park his 30-inch planter and hook up to his drills because row crops may not provide enough cover his land

will need to keep the soils in place.

Jury plans to plant pearl and German millets, sedan grass and forage sorghums. With the drought of 2011, he didn't grow any crops. He planted milo but it hardly emerged from the soil before it died so what little residue and stalks that remain on his land are from wheat and milo stubble back in 2010 — hardly enough to keep his valuable soil in place.

"This cover is degrading every day and it's pretty sparse," Jury says. "We've got to plant these alternative crops and get something to grow and cover our soil up out here."

The Gray County farmer has not tilled for many years and believes that without this practice there would already be dust piles in southwestern Kansas with conventional tillage.

Like last year, farmers in southwestern Kansas are staring the probability of another major drought straight in the face. Farmers like Jury are thankful they have crop insurance and the livestock business has buoyed up their faltering crop production. For strictly dry-land farmers it's been a real bust.

"I'll say it again, we need rain and we need continuous rains during the next few months to make this crop business happen out here," Jury says. "My dad had a saying that it always rains at the end of a drought. I'm hoping and praying this doesn't turn into several years of little moisture."

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