

The state budget, cuts and taxes

There is much wailing and gnashing of teeth over the state budget, centered on a flawed tax-cut plan that no one expected to actually pass.

The result could be a \$2 billion hole in state revenues down the line if something isn't done.

This is not Gov. Sam Brownback's tax-cut plan, though the basic idea came from the governor and he did sign the bill. The governor presented a carefully crafted package of tax cuts and changes that would not have created such a big hole in the budget.

The governor's plan itself was pure in theory and practice. He proposed ending several popular tax breaks, starting with the one for home mortgages, that could have caused a rebellion among voters.

This plan stayed true to the theory of a low, flat, fair income tax that many conservative economists have touted for decades, but it wasn't about to fly that way.

The Legislature stripped most of the income-raising ideas out, leaving mostly the cuts. The House and Senate passed different versions, the House bill containing the most drastic cuts.

Late in the session, the Senate passed the House bill with changes senators thought would send it to a conference committee, where the issues could be worked out in a compromise between houses. Instead, the House passed the Senate-amended version as is.

Ideas differ on whether that was a double cross of the Senate or just good parliamentary maneuvering. Whatever you call it, though, the House slam-dunk left the state with budget issues. The carefully preserved 6.5 percent ending balance this year could disappear as quickly as it was created, leaving the state facing drastic cuts.

That's not likely to happen, though, since neither the Senate nor many House members, not even the governor, wanted such big cuts without any matching changes in to stabilize revenue.

Hard-core conservatives may actually want to force more cuts in state programs and agencies, and there probably is room in some areas. For all the cutting of recent years, few agencies actually have disappeared. Programs seem to have a life of their own; witness the resurrection of state money for an arts program.

But the truth is, there's already been a lot of cutting. This governor and this Legislature have taken control of the budget and actually turned it around. State spending will go down this year for the first time in decades; most "cuts" in previous years were from proposed budgets, not from actual spending.

And that is at the root of much of the wailing. The spenders, the big-government forces, are no longer in control in Topeka. Government is shrinking, and they don't like it.

The tax law will have to be changed, yes, but it's unlikely the direction of state government will turn around any time soon. The die has been cast for a smaller budget, and most Kansans probably approve.

The forces behind higher spending – mostly those who benefit, state and school employees, patrons of state programs and "entitlements," people who believe that government can and should solve every problem – don't like that, but it's a done deal now.

The next Legislature has time to avert a budget disaster. And perhaps, though many don't believe, some of the economic growth the governor promises will come along in time to save the day.

He just might be right, you know. – Steve Haynes

On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



Cultivating chickens and traditions

The chicks have graduated from the box in the bathtub to their new home for the next couple of months.

We had to get the chicks moved out because they will be having some cousins hatch this week and they will need the box in the bathtub. The chicks have moved into the elevated coop Jim made which sits right outside our back door by the porch. It's a nice little two-room condo with a heat lamp and fresh wood chips cover the floor. The outer courtyard is enclosed by chicken wire and a secure latch provides security.

At first the three surviving chicks kept huddled in the back corner of the coop and seemed anxious about stepping outside into the open part. I'm not sure I'm qualified to access whether or not a chicken is "anxious", but they were certainly hesitant to leave their corner. It didn't look like they had drank any of their water so I moved it into their compartment.

We use the old-fashioned waterer. It has a glass base and after filling a quart jar with fresh water, you quickly invert the jar over the base. It keeps the water level constant as the chicks drink. Same thing with their feed. They both operate on gravity.

After a few days, though, the chicks seem to be comfortable in their new

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



"digs."

I'm sure our friends think we're Ma and Pa Kettle.

-ob-

Last week I hosted my ladies club. With Jim's help I was ready and it came off without a hitch. Although, I warned them not to look in the oven. One of us may have stuffed some dirty clothes in there.

My mother was a charter member of this particular club. It began in 1934 as the result of several women in two separate neighboring school districts wanting to help a young couple about to have a baby. It was during the Great Depression and nobody had any money, but this young couple had less than nothing. The women gathered monthly and each brought what they could spare: perhaps a single diaper, perhaps a blanket, maybe a little T-shirt or some diaper pins. Finally they had a layette put together to welcome the

new baby.

They all agreed it was so much fun they wanted to continue meeting. In the by-laws it is written that dues can never be raised. Dues were 50 cents a year and if a member needed to pay their dues in installments they could. In its heyday the club numbered about 20 women. Of course, their children came too. So imagine 20 women; probably that many more kids and it became a wild scene.

Another by-law stated that the club's sole purpose was to have fun. Farm wives were more isolated than they are now. Back then some didn't know how to drive and even if they did, they may not have had a car. One thing was certain: if it was club day a member's husband knew his wife would be gone for the afternoon. He better not expect a big supper that night because she would stay the entire two hours, 2 to 4 p.m., these women set aside, once a month, to dress up a little, use the good dishes and just plain catch up on the lives of their friends.

Times were different. But people stay the same. These women, some, mothers of my old school mates, are my dearest friends in the world. We would do about anything for each other and truly value each others friendship.

Seeds of hope and lessons from the land

For Kansans, the summer months are a period when some of us return to our roots and visit family in rural communities across the state. Some return home to help with wheat harvest, others go home to spend time visiting with friends they grew up with. For all, it's a time to reflect and remember.

Many of us are one or even two generations removed from the farm but we still remember fondly our early years. A friend once told me, remembering our early life on the farm is an important part of saying good-bye.

For me, summertime meant harvest. It still does.

I accompanied my dad and Uncle Bernie to the harvest fields when I was eight years old. I couldn't wait to see those monster machines chew through the golden waves of grain.

By the time I was a teenager, I was a regular member of the harvest crew. My responsibility was to level off the load in the back of one of our trucks. In between unloading, a big handful of wheat made a pretty big wad of gum. Not much flavor but one heck'ava chew.

Mom brought meals to the field in the family car and we had the chance to eat her wonderful home cooking while sitting on the tailgate of our pick-up truck. What a treat.

Other things I remember...looking down a badger's hole and seeing

Insight John Schlageck



the critter looking back up at me... learning to hunt the wily ring-neck pheasant with our Irish setter, Red, something I still enjoy today...looking to the westward sky and watching the sun paint a masterpiece at the close of day...listening to the melodious meadowlark...darting through the summer grass during hot summer nights...and catching fireflies to make a lantern in one of Mom's empty Mason jars.

Dad always watched the weather from our picture window on the west side of our house. You could easily see the Menlo elevator nine miles to the west across the pancake flat, High Plains prairie. I'd help him watch, hope, rear and pray that parched land would receive rain and crop-crushing storms would somehow skip our land.

Without question, the greatest lesson we can learn from the land is hope. Crops and a bountiful harvest are never guaranteed. Drought always threatened my dad's crops. Too much rain meant harvest delays or crop-choking weeds.

Thunderstorms – the likes seen nowhere else in the world – often

carried damaging winds and hail that could level a field of wheat in minutes.

The summer of my junior year at Hoxie High, such a storm wiped out our wheat crop. Dad rode in the cab with me as we entered one of our fields a few days later. One round later we both looked back in the bin and saw less than a fourth of it filled with wheat. It should have been full half way through the field.

After we completed the first round, Dad told me to let him off and he left the field. As he walked away, I saw him dry his eyes. He couldn't stand to see the crop he'd worked so hard to grow hailed into the ground.

Two and a half months later on September 15 – he always started wheat seeding then – we were out in our fields planting for the next year. He always had hope.

I learned at this age that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is the action of planning and planting seeds. For some, harvest may not occur every year, but the seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of a next year's harvest.

As I continue to work with farmers, I am reminded that they continue to love and learn from their land. For those of us who could not stay on the land, we cherish the time we spent there. We have benefited from this experience – the lessons learned on the land will nourish us wherever we are planted.



Dear Editor,

A tremendous thank you to Jay and Gayle Walsh and Tom and Sandy Brown for all the time spent to make Relay For Life such a success. Also a big thank you to each of you for your passionate and generous support. My challenge to Jessica began as a means to raise money to fight back and also ended with a way to honor my husband and each one that lost their hair to cancer treatments and didn't have a choice.

God Bless each of you.
Elaine Rule
Norton

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