

## Making sense out of the mess

As the Kansas Legislature opens this week, with the first day of the session Monday and the governor's State of the State speech on Tuesday, we hope that the members get down to the business at hand and write a budget that makes some sense of the tax mess left from last year.

On the  
Prairie Dog  
Steve Haynes



As it stands, the Legislature faces a revenue gap in the fiscal year beginning July 1 now estimated at \$267 million. Somehow, it has to fill the gap or whittle down state spending. One idea is to keep the current sales tax rate, which is set to go down in July. That alone wouldn't fill the gap, but it'd take care of most of it.

The Legislature also could end some of the state's tax breaks, allowing more revenue at the lower income tax rates passed last year. We were talking about canceling the deduction on home-mortgage interest, among others, however, that's no sure thing.

We're all in favor of shrinking the size of government, but there is a lot of pressure on the budget. The Legislature already is borrowing from the highway fund, even though good roads are vital to the state.

And last week, a three-judge panel in the Shawnee County District Court ordered the state to come up with \$440 million more for schools to at least partly replace cuts made during the recession. Judges were critical of the Legislature's tax-cutting ways.

And while the conservative Republican leadership vowed to fight to keep control of spending and tax rates, it's far from certain how this battle will come out. One tactic will be to attempt a constitutional amendment giving the Legislature some say in appointment of judges.

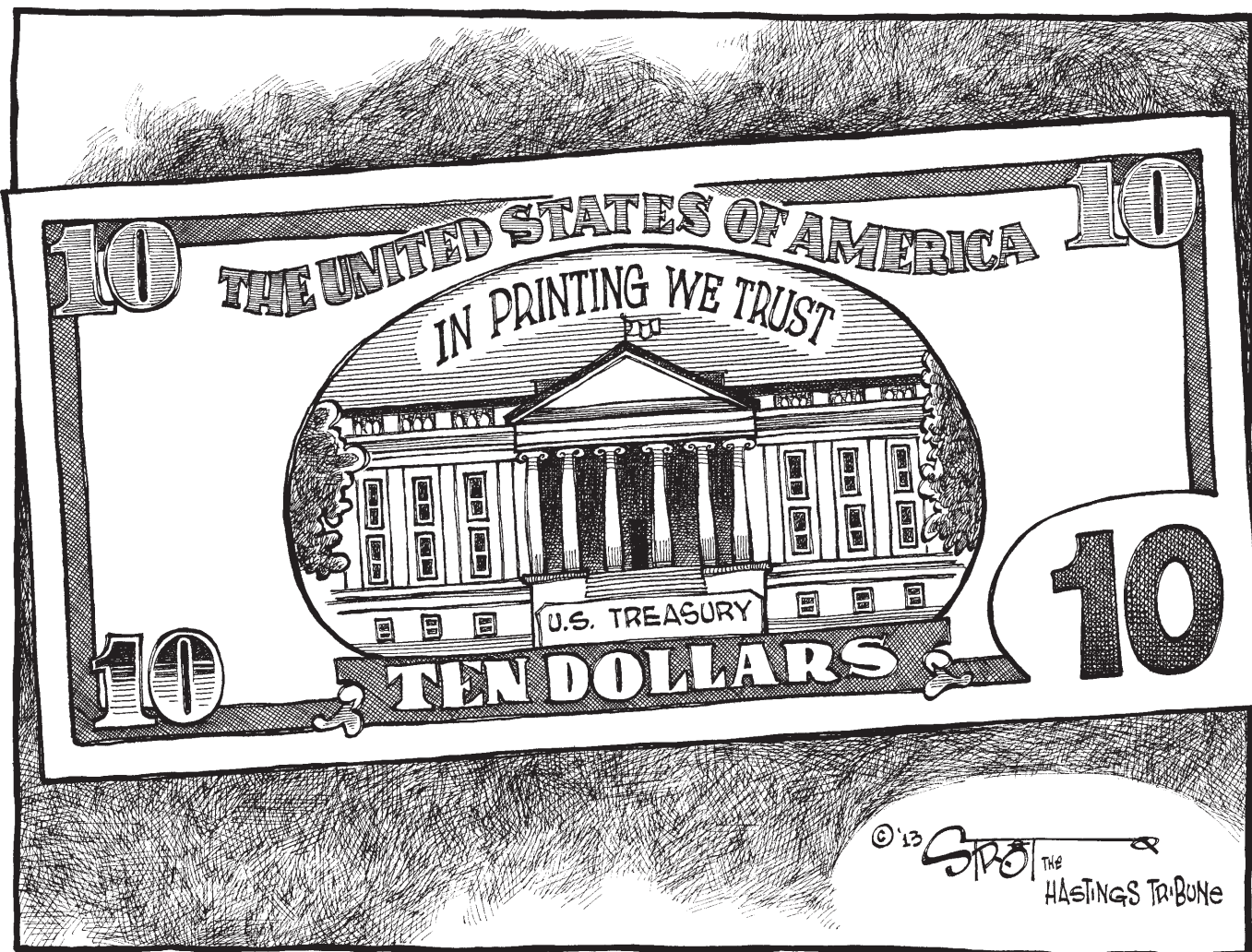
In short, the Legislature, turned upside down by reapportionment and a battle which saw more-liberal Republican leaders ousted from the Senate, will have its hands full. We're willing to bet the "solid" majority many expect will soon show signs of stress.

But if the members apply themselves to the task and try to define what the state's most important duties are, they should have little trouble adopting a budget, fixing the income-tax package and providing enough money for the state to make it through the year.

And we hope, as some leaders are predicting, they'll get all that done in well under the 90-day "limit" on Kansas, sessions. (Last year's Legislature extended itself to 99 days, however.)

One member predicted a 70-day session. We'll believe that when we see it. However, 80 to 90 days does not seem out of line if you're an optimist.

As long as the new bunch doesn't leave another mess like last year, most people will be pretty happy.



## We are at war for cookies and guns

I'm at war with my appliances..... and they're winning.

It started Christmas eve when I was baking a two-layer, homemade carrot cake. My digital timer said the cake should be done so I opened the oven door to check. The cake was not done, but the heating element was. The only thing baked inside that oven was a two-inch section of the element which was glowing and throwing off a shower of sparks like a welding torch. Shutting the door I hoped there would be enough heat to finish baking the cake.

Twenty minutes later I called the cake done. It came out of the pans in chunks, but I glued it together with cream cheese frosting and no one seemed to mind. However, that is not the rest of the story.

I'm not complaining, mind you. The oven was given to us and it has served us well. When I called the model number into the repairman he had me repeat it several times. He couldn't find the number in any parts book. The oven is so old parts are not in stock. So, here I am, three weeks later, still waiting on parts.

I have discovered a roaster can

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



be converted into a makeshift oven.

I have a small, eight-quart roaster with a wire rack, but so far I have baked biscuits, cinnamon rolls and a small batch of cookies.

-ob-

Dentures and partial plates are appliances, aren't they? A week or two before Christmas a large chunk broke off one of my teeth. Since it's an anchor tooth for my upper partial plate I knew I had to save it. Crowns were not in the budget that close to the holidays so a make-do fix held me over 'til the first of the year.

Last week I went in to begin the process. An impression was made and a temporary crown was attached to the stump of my tooth. My dentist admonished me to "take it easy" on that side, and I thought I did. The

next day, however, my tongue found it's way to the hole where my tooth had been. Nothing! The temporary crown was gone. I can only surmise it came off during the night and I (gulp) swallowed it.

Oh, dear. I'm two weeks away from having the permanent crown installed. It could be a long two weeks of chicken noodle soup and milk toast.

-ob-

This whole gun control controversy has me worried. Especially when I hear words like, "confiscation". I'm pretty "dovish", turn-the-other-cheek, and all that until I hear talk about taking away our guns. It's an old cliché but true: guns don't kill people, people kill people. When guns are taken out of the hands of decent, law-abiding citizens, the only ones left with guns are the bad guys.

Out here, we don't have to worry much about home invasion, but it does happen. I don't have a handgun nor a conceal-carry permit. But if I decide I want either one, I want the right to do so.

Bottom line - I'm all for gun control; use both hands.

## It's too early to worry about the wheat crops yet

Travel anywhere in the Sunflower State and people will tell you it's dry. It's so dry the U.S. Department of Agriculture declared last week that all but one of the 105 Kansas counties is in a drought disaster. This clears the way for farmers and ranchers to seek low-interest emergency loans.

While many areas of the state have been blessed with eight to 10 inches of snow, the winter wheat crop still needs moisture. Limited moisture in most areas of Kansas caused the winter wheat condition to decline through December.

As of the first of the year, 9 percent of the crop was rated very poor, 22 percent poor, 45 percent fair, 23 percent good and 1 percent excellent, according to Kansas Ag Statistics.

Estimates place the number of wheat acres that did not germinate between 5-10 percent. Some folks believe it may be less than 2 percent; however, those acres will almost certainly produce approximately 65 percent of a normal yield. And nearly every Kansas farmer knows of someone who has a field that didn't come up.

Many parts of the state received a quarter to half inch of rain Jan. 10. Any moisture in January is considered a bonus.

Significant rainfalls essential for the wellbeing of winter wheat in Kansas generally fall in February and March. Rain or snow before or after this two-month period does not impact wheat as much.

### Insight

John Schlageck



"We can talk about how dry it is now, but what if we receive a foot of snow the beginning of February?" asks Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau commodities director. "And let's say this snow just sits on this wheat crop across the state for the next two months. Then March is nice and we receive April showers. All this wheat that has been dry up to this point - well it could make 60, 70, 80 bushels per acre next harvest."

And those farmers whose crop didn't come up?

Their wheat harvest may make 50 bushels per acre and they'll say, "Good God. I didn't know she'd do this."

On the flip side, if it remains dry, Kansas farmers could harvest a 270 million bushel wheat crop, Nelson says. Right now, with average yields, Kansas is looking at the potential for a 355 million bushel crop.

In January most wheat growers remain lodged in a kind of limbo. They're busy planning, marketing and oftentimes worrying about the lack of moisture on their wheat crop. And rightly so. The long-range forecast is dry through February and March.

"No moisture in February and March

could add up to that 100 million bushel shortfall I was talking about," Nelson says. "There's no subsoil moisture anywhere in Kansas."

Still, it's too early to say how the 2013 wheat crop will pan out. Harvest is nearly six months in the future.

In Kansas, it's often said the wheat crop lives from hand to mouth. It's hanging in there right now. If it receives a little more rain and some snow for cover protection it could make a good crop yet.

"We can chicken scratch along, and if everybody grows a bunch of 35-40 bushel wheat and we end up with 335 million bushels across the state next harvest, this may be disappointing but it's far from a disaster," Nelson says. "If this scenario plays out, what I'm worried to death about are the row crops we plant in spring. Where will they find the moisture?"

Nelson isn't alone; more than one irrigator I've spoken to this winter is concerned with this possibility. Their biggest worry during this relatively slow time in January is the fear that February and March will not provide needed moisture.

"The Kansas wheat crop will continue to mosey along," Nelson says. "It's too early to worry too much about this crop. Barring weather disasters, the wheat crop has a relatively good shot. We're behind the 8-ball however, when we look to the future and our corn, milo and soybeans this spring if it remains dry."

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Thumbs up to the Graham, Phillips and Decatur county KDOT employees for the awesome job they did with cleaning their highways this last storm! Emailed in.

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community.

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E-mail:  
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

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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/Managing Editor  
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com  
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports  
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com  
Michael Stephens..... Reporter  
Society Editor/Area Sports  
mstephens@nwkansas.com  
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production  
Marcia Shelton..... Office Manager

Nor'West Newspapers  
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd  
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