

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Good government

The Topeka Capital-Journal
 People frequently say government should be run more like business. And business people say you have to spend money to make money. Kansas Secretary of Revenue Joan Wagnon seems to have gotten the message. She obtained permission from the Legislature to beef up her enforcement staff, with the result that collection of delinquent taxes increased 29 percent in one year. So, you see, it is possible for the Legislature and the administration to work together to get something done. The state collected a record \$108.8 million in delinquent taxes during the 2006 fiscal year, which just ended on June 30. That's \$24.4 million more than was collected during the previous fiscal year. And that's \$24.4 million the rest of us won't have to pay next year. Wagnon said most of the credit goes to the increased enforcement staff. Thanks to the Legislature, she was able to add six auditors and 18 field agents to the existing 37 auditor and 36 field agent positions. The approach to going after the delinquent taxes was changed, too. "We've started collecting first on current and reasonably new debt, rather than worrying about stuff that's been hanging around since '89," she said. "The goal is to try to keep people from getting in so much trouble that they can't get out of it." This year the increased collections didn't come from an amnesty program that in the past had created a period for people to pay their back taxes without penalty fees or interest. That's also good news, because waiving the penalties and interest meant that the state collected less money from those who were behind in their tax payments. The aggressive enforcement also is expected to reduce the number of people who ignore their tax bills in the future. As Wagnon explained, "As far as individuals go, the first time you miss sending your taxes in and nobody says anything about it, you think, 'Well, maybe next year I don't need to send anything in.'" It sounds like good business — and good government.

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Colby Free Press
 155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
 Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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 THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.
 PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

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Food for thought

Summer is one of my favorite times of year when it comes to food, especially fruit. It brings all the usual favorites — melons, apples, etc. But a recent trip to the grocery store revealed a few things I have never even heard of: green plums and Saturn peaches. The green plum was self explanatory — a green plum. But the Saturn peach well, looks very different. It has normal peach skin, but the fruit itself is squished in the middle, which is why one of its other names is the "doughnut" peach. Aside from its external appearance, it also has a white flesh instead of yellow and has a firmer texture and mild, sweet taste. This I learned after looking up my new purchase on the Internet before eating. The last time that happened, it was a couple of years ago and involved an Asian pear. That has become another favorite. The variety I've eaten before has a tannish skin with faint white spots. It also has another name — the apple pear, and has a faintly apple taste and flesh. It's fun to experience something from the other side of the world, and we're lucky to be able to get such produce from the other side of the planet. Which lead me to find out more about other interesting fruit. One I've heard of, but I doubt Colby will ever get (and fortunately so) is the Durian. Another Asian fruit, it grows to six- to 10-



Tisha Cox
 ● Off The Beaten Path

inches long, weighs up to 10 pounds. Incredibly popular in its native land, it's also controversial. The part of the fruit that is eaten is the pulp surrounding the seeds and it allegedly tastes something like custard. However, its size and taste aren't the problem. The stench is "a mixture of pungent, penetrating smell of garlic, sulfur, rotten onions and strongly-flavored cheese" according to *Orient Magazine*. The scent is so potent the fruit is banned from hotels, taxis, restaurants and most public places where large gatherings of people may take place. The fruit is also one of those things most people who try it develop either a very strong love or hate relationship with it. And if one delves deep enough, even everyday fruits have an interesting past. Some go back to ancient times and Greek mythology, such as the picking up of a thrown apple or quince, which was considered com-

parable to accepting a proposal. I've known about that one for a long time because it was one I read in grade school, but more recently, was used in "Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl." (Captain Barbosa trying to get Elizabeth Swan to take the apple while she's eating dinner in his quarters.) There are many, many other interesting fruit facts. For example, the peach is in the rose family, were once called "Persian apples" and in China, are a symbol of good luck and longevity. And of course, most everyone has heard the argument on whether or not a tomato is a fruit or vegetable. Looking at its family, potato, pepper, egg-plant, and petunia, I think it's a vegetable. Anyway, the French once called the tomato "the apple of love." Other interesting tomato facts are it was cultivated as early as 700 A.D. by the Incas and Aztecs, and now Florida is the top producer of fresh tomatoes for market. The bottom line is it's fun to remember the interesting facts about everyday things I might take for granted, and to take a chance every now and then and try something new. No matter how it might look.

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Fair time



Jay Kelley
 ● Speaking MyMind

and run around to get back in line again and again. There is a lot of work by a lot of local people in everything the county fair does, from the midway to the races to the exhibits. I told a friend in Wichita, only half-joking, everyone in Thomas County would be at the fair each night, half watching and half working. County fairs are traditionally a time for locals to show off what they have produced over the past year and I'm sure this year's yield will be as good as ever. Of course, there will be some who probably won't go for whatever reason. There are those who can't go because of disability or infirmity, but there are also those who just don't go and it is their loss. In our society of privacy fences, central air-conditioning and the Internet, we are quickly

losing the ability to interact personally in a natural setting. You say it is too hot at the fair? Welcome to Kansas in August! Some complain about the dirt. Folks, the fair takes place outdoors and most of us have running water in our homes. I understand many houses even have a choice between hot and cold! (That was irony.) Go home and take a shower after you leave. Then there is the noise and it is loud on race night. Quit whining, put in your earplugs and come to the fair. You will see people you probably haven't seen all summer, you might get the opportunity to see a youngster's face light up when his or her project wins a ribbon, and you will get to eat funnel cakes. OK, funnel cakes are an acquired taste, but I have acquired the taste along with the physique to accompany it. County fairs have a little something for everyone. There are exhibits to interest just about any adult, there is a midway to keep the kids busy and there is a sense of community. There is also a great parade. So, come to the fair. *Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.*

About those letters . . .

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