



## Other Viewpoints

### Extra job taxes curb employment

A sudden spike in employers' unemployment insurance rates threatens to exacerbate the very problem the unemployment benefits program is intended to manage.

Unemployment rates for businesses have more than doubled on average since Jan 1. Some businesses have experienced hikes of 500 percent or more. It is because the state's unemployment insurance trust fund, flush with a balance of \$566 million just months ago, is expected to be depleted by the end of the month. Even though the state is going back on employers to replenish the fund, it still will have to borrow from the federal government.

Where the feds will get the money to bail out states is a whole other subject for government frustration, but that is a topic for another day. The federal government has its own issues with benefits for the unemployed, which the president and Congress twice have extended to help the country through the recession. But those extensions are a federal obligation, and none of it is coming back on businesses, at least not directly.

Naturally, businesses are recoiling at a significant cost increase at a time when they least can afford it. Some businesses report that the increase in unemployment rates will cause them to have to lay off employees. For many more, it is at least keeping them from hiring.

And that is what makes this a vicious cycle. It makes far more sense to create an environment for businesses to increase their pay-rolls, not one that discourages hiring and instead keeps jobless workers in the ranks of the unemployed.

The state apparently was ill-prepared for the increase of unemployment that came with the recession and in retrospect should not have lowered employers' rates back in 2007 when it seemed like the state's trust fund had sufficient reserves. But that is water under the proverbial bridge.

As the Legislature considers tax increases during its current session, it should remember that the state already has nicked the business sector with a big tax increase — a tax increase proving extremely unfriendly to economic growth. The solutions aren't easy, but the unemployment tax on businesses seems a smart place to consider some relief rather than more burdensome taxes.

—The Hutchinson News, The Associated Press

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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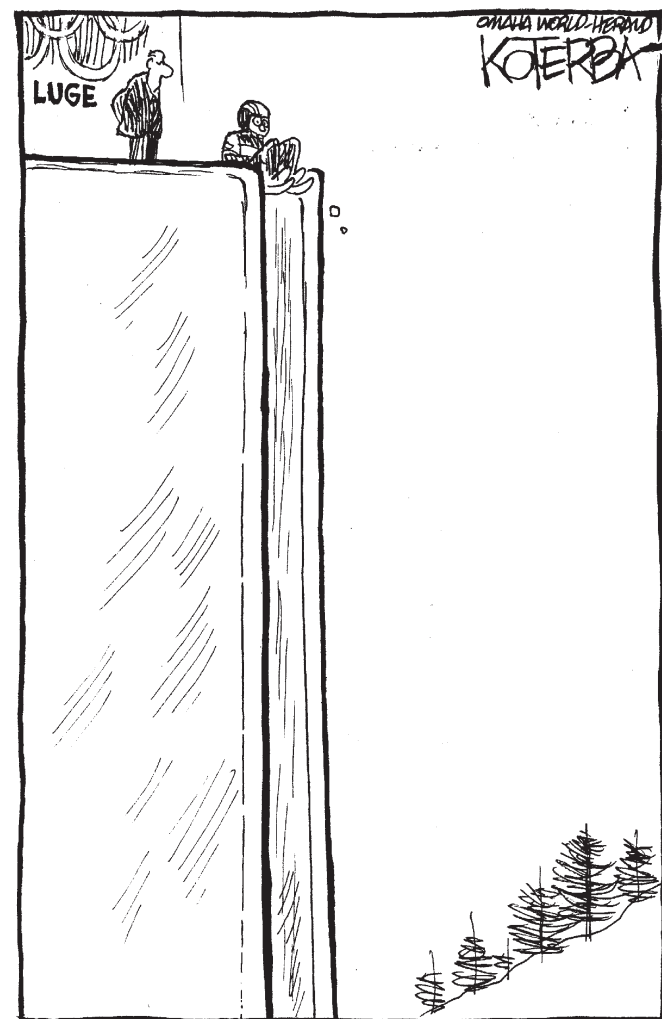
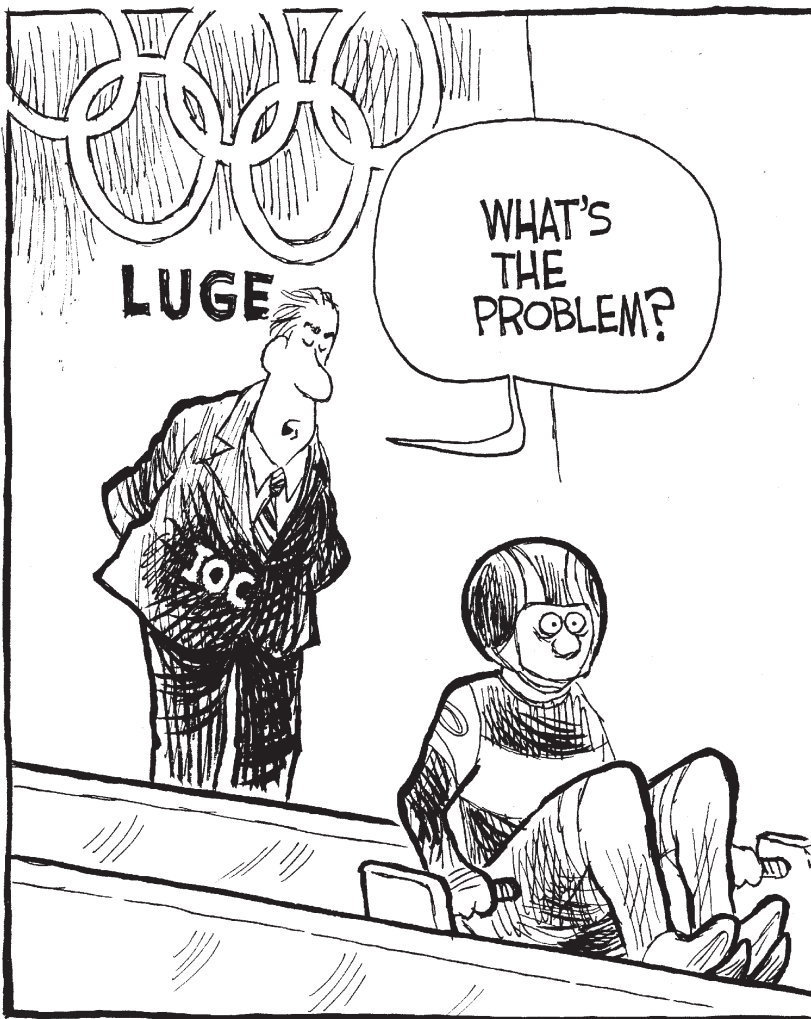
Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Kris McCool

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



### Toyota's problems leave questions

The Toyota fiasco raises plenty of questions, and doubtless there'll be no good answers.

One issue is how a driver could fail to react to a stuck accelerator. Every car I've owned has both a gearshift and a key. Using one or the other enables you to instantly control a stuck throttle, yet most stories on the recall fail to even mention these simple safety steps.

Turning off the ignition might not save you from a bump if you're facing a wall or pulling up behind another car at a light. But neither situation should produce a fatality, let alone a serious injury.

The "worst-case" often cited in "scare" stories involves a California state trooper driving a borrowed Lexus that reportedly reached speeds in excess of 110 mph as it accelerated along a mountain highway. The victims had time to call 911 and tell the dispatcher this before the car crashed and burned.

What was this guy thinking? Shift the car into neutral. Sure the engine will be racing, but the car'll stop.

Turn the key to off.

With the engine off, power steering and power brakes are lost, but the car will stop. (Be sure NOT to remove the key, or the steering column may lock up.)



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

So, while this regulatory laxity is something that shouldn't happen, especially over a period of seven years while both the manufacturer and government officials ignore the problem, it's not exactly the end of the earth.

Then, there's the issue of how a safety defect like this could be ignored for so long. Toyota built millions of vehicles with apparently faulty throttle assemblies, arrogantly ignoring consumer complaints and trying to suppress any investigation or recall.

What does that say for the company's hard-won reputation for quality?

Or corporate concern for safety?

And just where were the regulators, through two administrations, who were supposed to protect us from this kind of situation?

Then the question no one has asked yet, but someone should: Is Toyota being set up for a torpedo by the U.S. government, which just became the biggest stockholder in two American competitors?

And should we allow any bias toward one or more companies to overshadow free and open competition?

The situation does not present a pretty picture of government regulators or of the auto industry bureaucracy, any way you look at it. There seems to be a lot more concern for covering their collective behinds than for consumers, car owners and the general public.

We need Toyota — and the American car companies — to build good and dependable cars and trucks, vehicles we all want to drive, that are safe and efficient, that produce plentiful jobs.

Not more bungling like this.

That said, anybody want a good deal on a Camry?

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

### Senate turnaround pulls bills to floor

Here is a roundup of happenings in the Kansas Senate last week:

**Turnaround:** Turnaround, the day most bills must be past by their house of origin, is Monday. All nonexempt bills must be out committee by the start of session on Wednesday and read into the record.

**Senate Bill 387, Claims Against the State:** SB 387 authorizes expenditures from existing sources for payment of specific claims against the state. Agencies affected by the bill include the Department of Revenue and the Department of Corrections, including the Ellsworth, Hutchinson, El Dorado, Lansing and Topeka correctional facilities. SB 387 passed 40-0 on Thursday.

**Senate Bill 410, Electronic Payments:** SB 410 would allow state agencies to accept payments by debit card. The measure requires state agencies to be notified in writing within 14 days when a payment has been refused. The holder of the refused debit card would have 30 days after the notice is issued to make the payment, or the agency is entitled to a \$100 civil penalty. SB 410 passed 40-0 on Wednesday.

**Senate Bill 452, Purchase or Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages:** SB 452 prohibits anyone under 18 who is arrested for possessing, consuming, obtaining, purchas-



**Ralph Ostmeyer**

• State Senator

ing or attempting to purchase alcoholic beverages from being detained or placed in jail or a juvenile detention facility for more than 24 hours, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and legal holidays. Existing state law allows for youths to be placed in detention for possessing and/or consuming alcohol, which is a violation of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). SB 452 passed 40-0 on Thursday, Feb. 11.

**Senate Bill 479, Unclaimed Property, Disclosure to State Treasurer:** SB 479 would allow the secretary of revenue to provide information to the state treasurer for locating owners of unclaimed property. Current law requires the Department of Revenue to keep income-tax return information confidential with certain exceptions, and the bill includes the state treasurer as an exemption. Information that could be provided includes the current and prior addresses of taxpayers, spouses,

dependents and other associated persons who may have knowledge of the unclaimed property. SB 479 passed 40-0 on Thursday.

**Senate Concurrent Resolution 1615, Tenth Amendment Sovereignty:** SCR 1615 is a nonbinding resolution that declares the sovereignty of Kansas and serves as a notice and demand to the federal government to immediately cease and desist all mandates that are beyond the scope of the powers delegated under the Constitution. In addition, SCR 1615 objects to all federal legislation that requires states to comply under threats of penalties or sanctions or requirements that states pass laws to retain certain funding. SCR 1615 passed 33-7 on Thursday.

**Senate Concurrent Resolution 1625, NBAF Funding:** SCR 1625 urges Congress to fund the construction of the national Bio and Agro-defense Facility and the Department of Homeland Security to advance the sale of Plum Island Animal Disease Centers. SCR 1625 passed 40-0 on Wednesday.

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

