



Free Press Viewpoint

League plans party while taxpayers struggle to keep up

Plans by the League of Kansas Municipalities to spend nearly a quarter of a million dollars to commemorate its centennial should come as a shock to Kansas taxpayers.

It's their money, after all, but they won't be invited to the party, planned for the group's annual conference this October in Overland Park.

This is just one small example of the cavalier manner in which some public officials spend your money.

On top of the \$240,000 budget, the league is asking cities to donate \$1,000 to \$5,000 to help sponsor this "gala celebration" of the anniversary. This must be some party they're planning.

With many Kansans out of work and others just scraping to feed and clothe their families, throwing a quarter-million-dollar celebration might be seen as excess, and indeed, the league says so far, no cities have signed up as "sponsors."

A report in the *Lawrence Journal-World* noted that the league provides many services, including training, lobbying and legal expertise, to member cities. It also provides a forum for city officials to gather, network and exchange ideas.

All of this is done as taxpayer expense, however, and taxpayers should demand that it be done with frugality. The legal says it already has spent \$66,000 on preparations for the gala, with \$174,000 in the budget for this year. Part of the money will go for television commercials extolling the league's history.

And this at a time when cities across Kansas have lost their state money and have to scrape to pay expenses — or raise taxes.

Any city that makes a donation to this event would seem to be risking the wrath of its taxpayers. Taxpayers ought to question officials about the dues they pay to this organization.

It's not that cities shouldn't have an association. The league performs many useful functions, helping to train city officials and guide them through legal issues.

Its lobbying function can be another matter. Sometimes, the league takes taxpayers' money and uses it for causes that many citizens might not agree with. These have included undermining the state's public notice and open government laws.

Cities have not sued the state over money as some school districts have, and that's a plus. However, we feel public officials need to be careful to take the interests of everyday citizens, and not just public officials, into account when they go to the Statehouse and spend tax money.

Sometimes those two are not identical. Officials often want to see more secrecy and more freedom to spend money than many citizens would like. That creates a duty for those spending taxpayers' money to influence public affairs to be sure they're working for the taxpayers, not just those who spend tax money.

A tax-financed gala in the middle of the Great Recession, with thousands out of work?

It's not a tasteful use of our money, frankly, not when taxpayers are outside looking in.

Send it back to the cites for tax reduction, we say, knowing full well it's just a drop in the bucket. Every tax dollar, taken from someone supposedly for the public good, should count. Every one. — *Steve Haynes*

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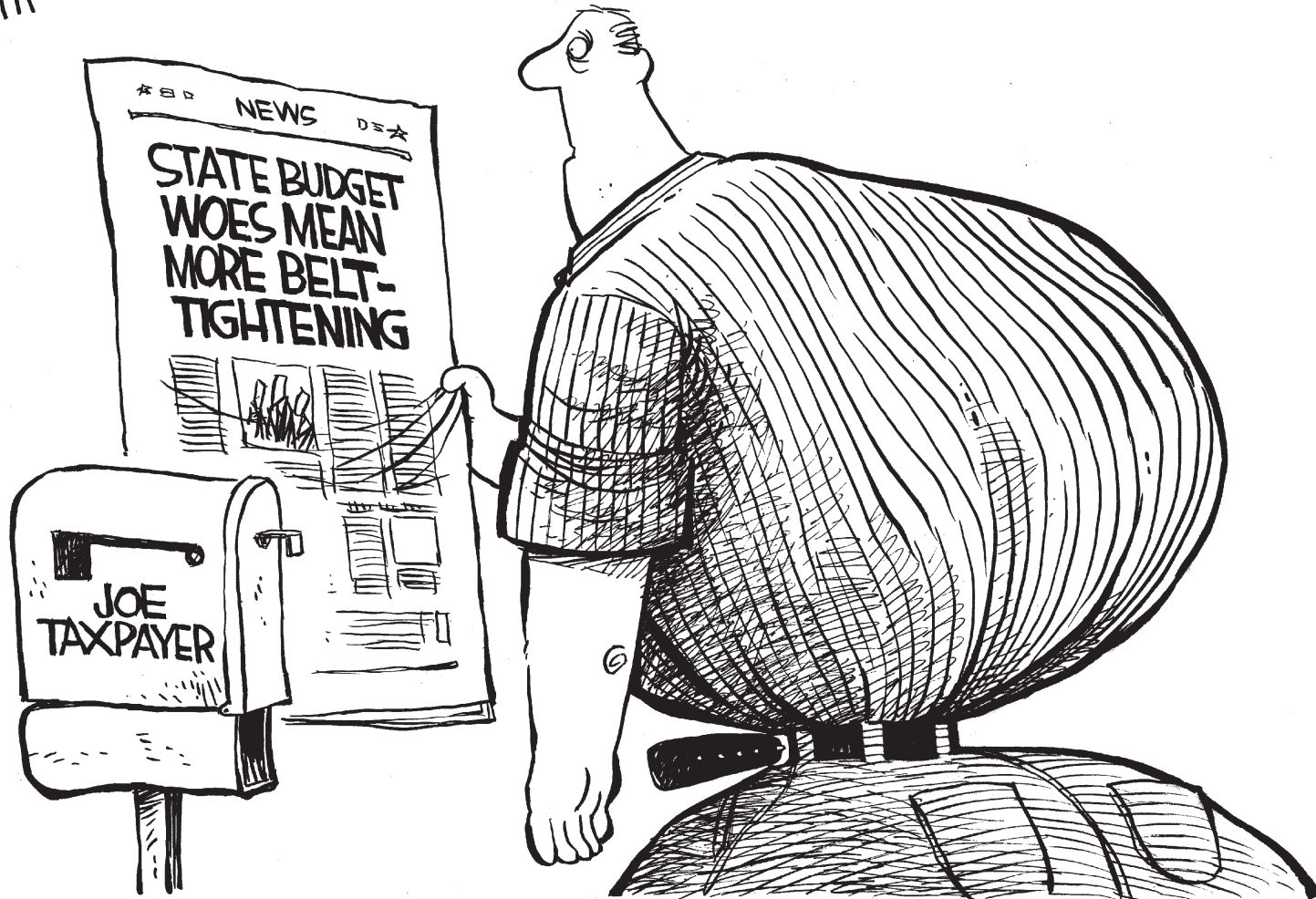
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Granddaughter takes after her mom

It was like *deja vu* all over again, as the comedian says.

We were on our way home from the radio station after working a shift as DJs for the annual Rotary Radio Day fund raiser on Sunday when we got the call.

"Daddy, my water broke. We're on our way to the hospital."

Youngest daughter, who's due date was April 1, was about to become a mother more than three weeks early.

We weren't surprised. Lindsay is just 5 foot tall, and she'd already looked like she swallowed a beach ball when we saw her in December.

After her doctor's appointment last week, she had called to say the baby weighed almost six pounds, was head down and ready to go.

Since she is a small person, I had been worried she'd have a nine- or 10-pound baby, if she indeed carried it until the first of April.

Not to worry. This kid was ready to go and had March 7 marked as her date for getting out into the world.

As we waited for word. Steve reminded me of oldest daughter's arrival almost 36 years ago.

That was a Sunday afternoon, too. Steve



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

was at work; his days off were Tuesday and Saturday. It was springtime and I was working around the house, mulching my irises and cleaning up the yard. My water broke. I wasn't sure what to do, so I called Steve.

"That's nice," he said. A pause. "What!" He rushed home and I waited for the contractions to start while he cleaned up around the house, then we headed for the hospital.

Oldest daughter wasn't as accommodating as our first grandchild. She was not head down and ready to go. But come she did, exiting into the world rear-end first.

I was happy that Lindsay didn't have that to worry about.

In fact, according to her sister, the obstetrics nurse asked her for her shoe size since women with small feet will usually also have a small pelvis.

The nurse was worried when the answer was 4 1/2. (I told you she was small.)

But a quick check of her hips proved that this mother-to-be is my daughter.

If there's one thing my French Canadian ancestors gave me, and I passed on to all three of my children, it's wide hips and an adequate butt.

With her sister and husband coaching, urging and generally doing their part, Taylor Madison Blake made her entrance into the world at 10:15 p.m. Sunday night.

The new arrival is small just like her mother — just 6 pounds, 2 ounces and 18 3/4 inches long — but has lots of dark hair and long fingers and toes, just like her dad.

Mother and daughter were doing well and oldest daughter proudly announced that neither she nor Bradley had fainted.

And me? I just can't wait to get to Georgia.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Budget gap, deadlines face Senate

February Revenue Collections: February's was the fourth monthly report based on the revised consensus revenue estimates from November. Through February, tax-only collections to the state General Fund were \$71.1 million, or 26.7 percent, below estimates. Tax only revenues for the 2010 fiscal year, to date, have totaled \$3.1 billion, a \$105 million shortfall from the estimate of \$3.2 billion. For the year, tax only receipts are \$292.8 million, or 8.6 percent, below the same period last year.

Several tax sources fell below estimates by more than \$1 million. Those include a \$33.5 million deficit in individual income taxes, a \$14 million shortfall in sales tax receipts, \$5.3 million in corporate income taxes, \$8.3 million in compensating use taxes, and a \$5.3 million in oil and gas severance tax collections.

Session Deadlines:

Friday, March 19 — All bills must be out of committee by start of session.

Wednesday, March 24 — Second House Consideration.

Friday, April 2 — No session. Good Friday.

Senate Bill 541, Court of Appeals Judges: SB 541 delays the appointment of the 14th Court of Appeals judge to Jan. 1, 2012, and saves \$389,340 from the General Fund for fiscal year 2011. Passed 40 to 0 on Wednesday.



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

House Bill 2323, Providers of Care Services: HB 2323 amends existing law regarding providers of care services by adding crimes against property to the list of offenses an applicant may be convicted of and still be employed by a care home or agency as long as at least five years has passed since the sentence terms were complied with.

In addition, the measure allows an operator of a care home or agency to request criminal history information for persons licensed or registered by the state and for volunteers who provide care home and agency professional services. Current law requires only nonlicensed staff to have background checks. Passed 39 to 1 on Wednesday.

House Bill 2500, Municipal Insurance Pools: HB 2500 amends the Kansas Municipal Group-Funded Pool Act to allow municipal insurance pool applicants to submit confirmation

that their reinsurance has been approved by the insurance commissioner and is in effect or will be effective when the pool assumes risk. The confirmation of reinsurance approval is an addition to the current requirement that municipal pools hold excess insurance provided by an insurance company holding a Kansas certificate. The bill also requires the pool to notify the commissioner, within 30 days, of any changes in reinsurance. Passed 40 to 0 on Wednesday.

House Bill 2501, Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Company Liability: HB 2501 allows the insurance commissioner to waive the minimum policy surplus requirement, up to two years, for the liability of mortgage guaranty insurance companies. Current law does not allow a mortgage guaranty insurance company to have an outstanding total liability or net of reinsurance under its aggregate mortgage guaranty insurance policies that exceed 25 times its capital, surplus and contingency reserve. Passed 40 to 0 on Wednesday.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

