

## Other Viewpoints

### Tiahrt vindicated; let campaign begin

Just like a skilled pool player, Rep. Todd Tiahrt, R-Kan., called the shot and put it in the corner pocket.

Tiahrt predicted in late January that he would be "fully exonerated" by the U.S. House Ethics Committee on allegations of wrongdoing that involved political donations and defense appropriation earmarks. The committee recently announced it had found no evidence that Tiahrt and six other House members violated ethics rules over government contracts for companies that donated to the congressmen's political campaigns.

"This comes as no surprise because there was never anything to justify a review in the first place," Tiahrt said.

The congressman's assessment isn't quite accurate. An ethics panel doesn't conduct an investigation on a whim. There was ample reason for Tiahrt to undergo the panel's scrutiny, and the allegations were serious. An independent branch of the House — the Office of Congressional Ethics — recommended the ethics committee further investigate Tiahrt over allegations he accepted \$351,000 from a now-defunct lobby firm and its clients. Investigative efforts focused on Tiahrt's ties to Boeing, Aeroflex and Teledyne Technologies, all of which have a presence in Tiahrt's district.

But the ethics panel found no evidence that Tiahrt went above and beyond on the earmarks issue, and now it is "game on" for the congressman in his battle to gain the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Sam Brownback.

Tiahrt's exoneration prediction now has morphed into a cry of vindication. In other words, let the real campaign begin between Tiahrt and his opponent, Rep. Jerry Moran of Hays.

The ethics panel ruling doesn't just signal voters of Tiahrt's exoneration; it also should deter Moran's campaign staff from making veiled comments about the investigation. Shortly after the committee announced Tiahrt had been cleared, a Moran staffer noted that the panel's finding doesn't necessarily mean Tiahrt is guiltless.

That is bush league. Both Moran and Tiahrt should wage a true political campaign for the Senate seat instead of resorting to tired, old political games.

Tiahrt called one shot — he predicted his exoneration. Now the two political rivals need to prove they can win the game for Kansans.

— Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press

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### Proposed changes don't make sense

I'm sure many of us had mixed feelings of amusement and confusion and even some anger over the "Billion Dollar List" handed out by Rep. Jim Morrison when he and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer held a town hall meeting at the Quality Inn on Feb. 27. (See list on Page 3.)

Among of the many items on the list I found to be of special interest was No. 2, consolidating Kansas into 25 counties, 25 judicial districts and eliminating townships. This is supposed to save \$700 million a year! Makes me wonder if 20 of those counties would be east of Salina.

It just sounds strange to me that a representative from western Kansas who would like to save schools and promote economic development for his part of the state would even think about such a thing.

Idea No. 3 on the list is to privatize (sell) the University of Kansas Hospital for \$500 million, and use the proceeds to recapitalize the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. Who was watching the store when the pension fund went down the drain?

No. 14 is a great idea! "Eliminate state buffalo herds and have a giant barbecue for charity." Hmm ... let's see ... a 1,000-pound buffalo that dresses out at 50 percent leaves 500 pounds of meat. Take off 100 pounds for bone and gristle, and we're left with 400 pounds to grind into buffalo burger. So if we cook it all up into quarter pounders, that would be 1,600 burgers per buffalo. Figuring that the population of Kansas is 2.8 million, plus a few more, it would take 1,751 buffalo to make 2,801,600 burgers, or enough for every person in the state as of the 2008 estimated census.

At McDonald prices of about three bucks a burger, that would bring in a whopping \$8,400,800 to help alleviate a \$400 million budget shortfall.

Maybe if we need buffalo in state parks, we could rent a few. Must cost a pretty penny for the critters, the feed and the manpower to feed them. Shouldn't have owned 'em in the first place.

Idea No. 19, "eliminate state support for excessive salaries of top executives of foster care contractors." Hmmmm.... We know they are excessive, yet we're just now considering eliminating them. How long are we going to con-



**Vera Sloan**

#### • After Thoughts

sider it? I'm sure school districts and teachers would love to have a piece of the excess!

Idea No. 20 suggests we consider selling the Kansas Turnpike to finance the highway plan. In the same sentence the list reveals that the turnpike has surplus funds. So we're going to sell something that is actually putting money in the bank?

What's to guarantee the buyer would spend the kind of money on the road the Turnpike Authority does? Maybe the taxpayers should have a voice in saying if it should be sold. Does legislature actually have the authority to sell it or KU hospital without a vote of the people?

No new vehicle purchases (No. 21) for three years, and no purchases of full-size pickups or sedans. Yep! We probably shouldn't do that, especially when the bank account is dry. Maybe they don't sell economy cars in Topeka.

Out of the 33 items on the "Billion Dollar List" Rep. Morrison said he'd been working on for a long time, school finance ranked No. 30. The plan is to "create incentives for school districts to unify (there's that word again) and to eliminate state matching funds for school bonds and equipment. The list says: "State matching funds incentivize oversized and excessive school buildings, and when districts are required to pay the full cost of construction, they will economize." All this time, I didn't know buildings were the big problem.

This "Billion Dollar List" is quite interesting. It suggests cuts here and there, sales of this and that, eliminating this and that, but nowhere did I see the \$70 million profits from the Lottery going for its intended target of economic development, at least not to any development project in northwest Kansas.

However, I do have to give these men credit for asking for ideas. I've got a couple of ideas: No. 1 is put them on furlough (without pay of

course) long enough to take the 2010 census. The Feds pay pretty good, plus mileage, and what better chance for the legislators to get out and actually listen to their entire constituency. Works for me!

My second idea is that since every one of the 125 seats in the House of Representatives is up for grabs this year, they might even want to have a trial run at packing.

I really think I should just stay away from those town hall meetings. I come away more puzzled than when I went. Lots of talking, but not saying much.

If I sound a bit sarcastic, I apologize. But you see, the list was mailed to the *Hays Daily News* to be printed in the Sunday, Feb. 28, edition, and as far as I know, not sent to any newspaper in Rep. Morrison's own district. You can't even buy a copy in Colby.

Am I ticked? Not really ... but pretty puzzled as to why he would send it out of district, and not share it with his own people first. I, for one, believe we in Colby deserve the courtesy of having the information as soon as people in Hays. Or is Hays tapped to be our next county seat?

I do have a "for real" idea for Rep. Morrison and Sen. Ostmeyer. And it is that they take a look at a special "nonresident landowner tax." The people from out of state who buy up land in our county and state pay very little tax, reap good profits from cash rent, never contribute to our community or economy in any other way, and don't put any kids in our public schools.

This tax might even discourage sales to investors looking for a tax write off. I know that alone will not save schools, or county government, but it might be a place to start. There's quite a lot of western Kansas acreage in a nonprofit conservancy based out of state that probably should be paying some taxes into county and state coffers.

Chiseled into the wall of Nebraska's state capitol are these words, "The salvation of the state is in the watchfulness of the citizens."

Be watchful, my friends.

Vera Sloan is a society editor at the Colby Free Press. She is a native of Thomas County and a former county commissioner.

### Why does government get different rules?

To the Editor:

Several things have been in the news as of late that need to be addressed. The state of Kansas let out that they may delay state income tax refunds until the new fiscal year begins in June because of a budget shortage.

Are we, the people, allowed to delay payment of our state income taxes, due on April 15, because our family has a budget shortfall? The answer is no. We will be charged a penalty and interest. I would suggest that the legislative branch, governor and senators delay their own paychecks until that new year instead.

Also in the news was the meeting of legislators with the Kansas voters. They were asked why we are remodeling the Capitol building when we are under severe budget cuts. Their answer — the project started long ago. Did those who voted to "remodel" consider the future before voting on a luxury in such times?

They also were asked about why Kansas Lottery money was not showing up to benefit Kansas schools. We were told they were sur-



#### Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

prised the people had the idea that money from the Lottery would go to schools.

Are they kidding? We were promised that gold mine of a Lottery would pay for new prisons, schools and all kinds of good things we need. All it has bought was a new bureaucracy with hefty salaries for Lottery employees. Wasn't it only a short time ago that the Legislature was considering free college tuition for illegal immigrants? Just when was the money for such an expense to even be considered.

Our own paper had a front page article a few weeks ago about how Colby Grade School

children were chosen for their vocal abilities to travel to Wichita to sing. With budget problems, how could our schools consider transporting 20 to 30 children 300 miles to sing?

We, the people, have had our fill of politicians making stupid spending decisions then crying out there is a budget shortfall. Just recently, a U.S. senator had the audacity to ask how to pay for extending unemployment benefits to 99 weeks. Why would anyone get a job when all they have to do is get handed "compassionate" money out of our pocket, while we struggle working and paying taxes?

Unlike the great Charles Rangel, former chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, or "Tax Cheat" Tim Geitner, who as treasury secretary is over the IRS, we struggle to tighten our belts and perhaps wait for our refund because they "just don't have the money" at this time to give you back your own.

Get informed. We've got some real issues to deal with as Americans.

Beverly Lang, Colby

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

