

Other Viewpoints

Shining the light on state tax breaks could bring reform

Government spending is under the microscope these days, but this session of the Kansas Legislature new scrutiny is being given to what is called indirect spending.

That is a backside way of characterizing lost revenue that results from the various exemptions and credits in the state tax code. Calling that indirect spending is a novel characterization, but a fair one.

As the state's budget crisis intensified in the past year, the magnitude of tax breaks the Legislature has passed over the years has received more attention, and rightfully so. The state forgoes considerable revenue – with some estimates as high as \$6 billion a year, which is more than the direct spending in the state general fund – much of it tax breaks to special interests or longtime tax incentives that might not even make sense anymore.

Interest groups concerned about state budget cuts, such as the Kansas Action for Children and the Kansas National Education Association, have focused on the tax exemptions and credits as a reasonable consideration for raising state revenue.

Elimination of tax breaks might not happen this year, but at least legislators ought to support more transparency for the tax code. Legislation providing for that, called the Kansas Taxpayer Transparency Act, unanimously passed the Senate last month and is pending in a House committee.

The bill would add a new category of information to the state's useful KanView Web site (www.kansas.gov/KanView). Along with the detailed data about state revenue, spending and state government salaries would be this so-called indirect spending – the taxes exempted for various categories, special interests and individual organizations. Doing so at least would make the information more readily available for public inspection.

If the Legislature does nothing more, it ought to do this. It would be a first step toward a closer examination of the individual tax exemptions and credits.

Senators deserve credit for their unanimous support. House members likewise should pass the bill when they return from recess later this month.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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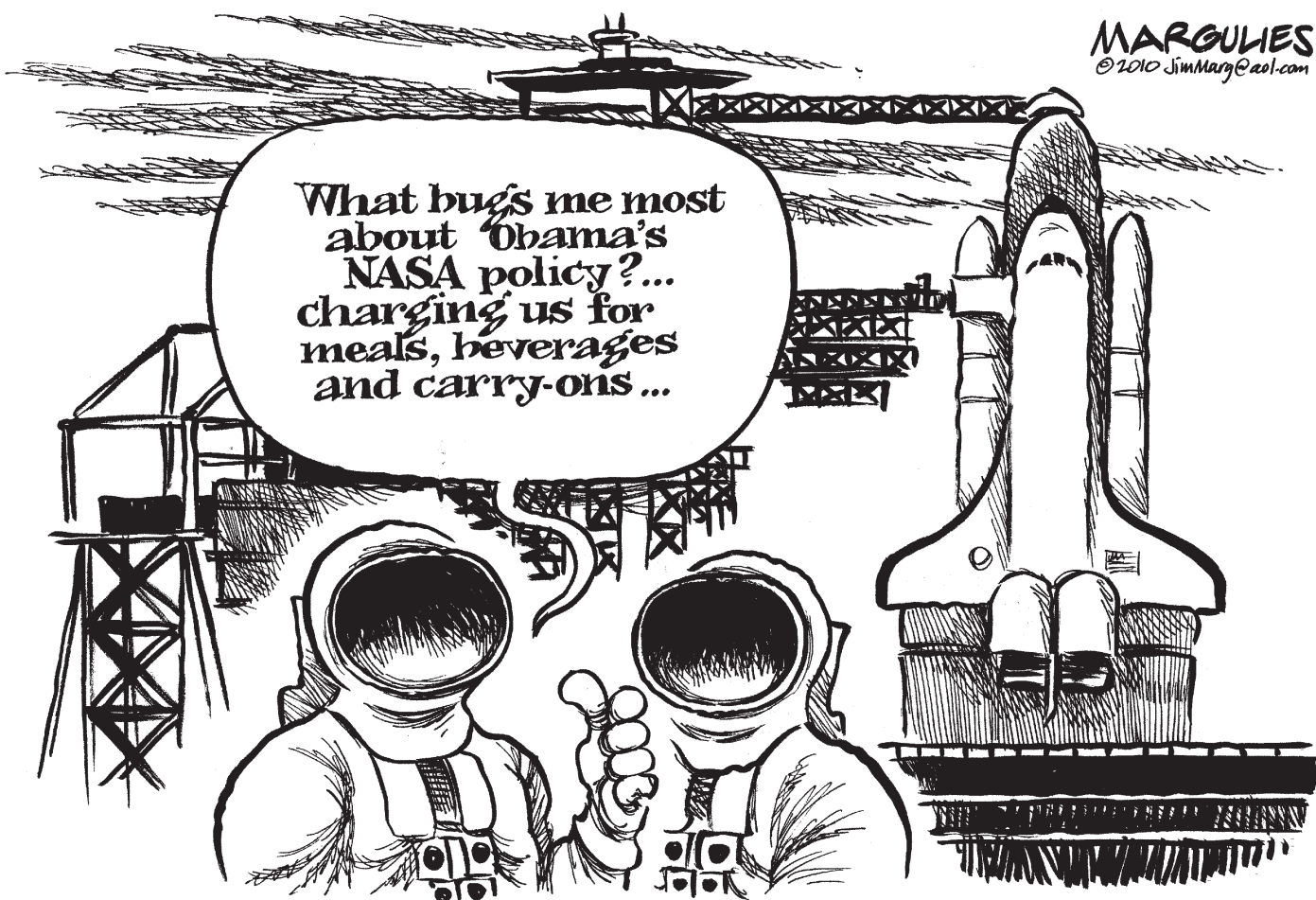
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Generation gaps hurt young and old

Colby and Thomas County are not one community but many.

Several events over the last few days served to remind me of this. My mother, had she lived, would have been 98 last Sunday. My son, who is going strong, turned 30 last Monday.

They represent two entirely different communities, based on age alone. Neither ever particularly understood the other. The values of a woman born during one Dust Bowl and coming to adulthood during another were a total mystery to a child whose early life was shaped by the Reagan years.

She had trouble programming a television remote and was timid about owning a microwave; he might have starved without a microwave and is devoted to Facebook.

Differences between generations are not unusual. In fact, I grew up with the rallying cry, "Don't trust anyone over 30." Not that it ever made a lot of sense to say that, since even the most vocal of the anti-war generation expected to reach 30 eventually.

Yet I suspect the gulf between the young and the old has never been wider. The sheer volume of technological advance in the last 10 years alone is sufficient to create a monumental barrier built of cell phones and wireless Internet and microcomputers with capabilities undreamed not so very long ago – not to mention digital televisions and cars it takes an electronics degree to repair.

Sunday, I listened with bemusement to an account of tractor-driving in the old days. While



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

it's amazing that the storytellers survived their exploits, it's even more amazing to consider how different the simple act of driving a tractor is today.

Yet technology is only one of the issues that divide generations. It's even fairly minor, as some young people don't really understand the machines they use, and some older ones are quite savvy.

The biggest separation is that the generations are, in fact, separated. They enjoy different things. They eat, play and even shop at different places or times. Often, if they happen to come face to face, they meet as strangers with a polite nod and little else.

By contrast, those within a generation meet with cries of welcome, slaps on the back, and exchanges of news about others in their common social network. Young adults who are not personally acquainted in a small community like Colby often can talk for just a few minutes and find an acquaintance or interest in common.

Older adults have an even richer well to draw on. With longer histories and fuller memories,

they can find connections between families (our kids used to play together), businesses (I always shopped there for ...), friends (do you know ...), or neighborhoods (I drove past your house for 20 years).

Curiously, the techniques that are so successful within a generation often fall flat between them. Sometimes these gaps can be bridged. Often they cannot, due simply to lack of interest.

Which brings us back to that big technology gap, symbolic of a larger cultural shift than any experienced before. There's a paradox to be found here.

The younger generation, which sees itself as progressive, is actually pretty traditional – within its own traditions, of course.

The older generation might have lived through the War to End All Wars, granting women the right to vote, Prohibition (a well-intentioned if misguided effort at social reform), the Great Depression, World War II, the Civil Rights Movement – well, you get the picture. The real agents of change have been the parents, grandparents and great-grandparents of today's young adults.

Can we get them together?

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Farmers to respond to 'Food Inc.'

Every story has two sides. Sometimes more.

Next Monday, Kansans will have an opportunity to see and hear about the care, dedication and passion family farmers and ranchers have for producing safe, affordable food.

At 9 p.m., public television stations in Kansas will air a panel discussion, "Taking Stock: Perspectives on Food Production in Kansas." Panelists include leaders on the subject, including Kansas Farm Bureau President Steve Baccus, a grain farmer from Ottawa County.

This panel is a response to the April 21 airing by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) of the controversial documentary, "Food Inc." The film, which is critical of the American food production system, garnered new attention when it was nominated for the Academy Award for best documentary.

The general theme is, the food industry doesn't want you to know the truth about what you are eating because if you knew, you wouldn't eat it.

The documentary paints what many think is an unfair and incomplete picture of the American food system, including farmers and ranchers. It provides one filmmaker's point of view, one that does not represent most farmers, ranchers and the folks who live in rural areas across Kansas.

As part of the upcoming "Taking Stock" program, Baccus will represent mainstream agriculture and several generations of farmers and ranchers across Kansas. Saying he's glad to have this opportunity, Baccus commended KTWU in Topeka for assembling a diverse group.

"At the end of the day, consumers across Kansas and this country should have piece of



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

mind regarding the food they eat each day," Baccus says. "We have a food processing industry in the United States that has given us the safest, most affordable food in the entire world."

The farmer's creed has always been to nurture the land, improving it while coaxing forth a bountiful harvest of food for all of us. Farmers hold enduring respect for the land that sustains them.

Because of the farmer's ingenuity and stewardship ethic, the United States and Kansas lead the world in food quality, variety and affordability. Advances in crop production enhance the farmer's natural commitment to stewardship. These allow farmers to harvest larger yields from fewer acres, in harmony with their environment.

At the same time, farmers and ranchers adhere to sound principles of animal husbandry and provide the best care for their livestock. They look after their animals first thing in the morning and the last thing at night.

Today's animal husbandry is no accident. Farmers and ranchers go beyond their role of humane guardians; they show devoted concern for their animals. They work hard, long hours to care for and nurture their livestock.

Farmers and ranchers are neither cruel nor naive. They want to produce healthy animals

that will one day feed others. In fact, many feed their own families from the livestock and crops they produce.

Today, many consumers are unaware of a farmer and rancher's relationship with the crops they grow and the animals they care for. They don't know how meat, milk, eggs, wheat, vegetables and other food wind up on their dinner table. Few know all that goes into caring, feeding and nurturing of livestock and crops across Kansas.

Farmers and ranchers continue to adapt and change to meet the needs of consumers. Crop and livestock producers, including Baccus, will tell you consumers drive this whole food picture today.

"On my farm, I change what I plant based on what consumers want," he says. "It's all about giving the people what they want. Our entire food industry has changed to meet consumer demand."

That said, today's consumers should continue to regard the profession of farming and ranching highly, and embrace a quality, abundant food source that's second to none.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

