



## Free Press Viewpoint

### No need to replace well-made car tags

Kansas has somehow survived the state's failure to make everyone switch to the new, if dull, light blue license plates. In fact, drivers with the 2002-issued "capital dome" tags are still getting along just fine. These tags, made of aluminum and covered with reflective sheeting, are nowhere near worn out. They could last another decade, maybe two.

The Department of Revenue had planned to replace all tags between 2007 and 2009, with the blue "Ad Astra" tags. The rational was that people who get by without paying for new tags would have to do so once the white tags were outlawed.

Then came the budget crunch. The state just couldn't afford to issue new tags for everyone. So it didn't.

And the world has not come to an end.

Aside from the fact that the "capital dome" tag, with its hints of yellow wheat and blue sky above, is one of the most attractive our state has ever issued, these tags really should be good for 30-40 years.

It would be an environmental sin to replace them just because some bureaucrat figures that it would make it easier for the cops to spot scofflaws.

If they wanted to do something to push enforcement, why not make those tiny expiration stickers just a tad bigger? Too easy, we guess.

Anyway, the "dome" tags soldier on. In fact, the last couple of tag designs before that could still be in service. They're pretty much indestructible unless you use them to stop a trailer hitch.

The real question is, why not just let people keep tags as long as they're legible? That might just save the state more money than it could make from improved enforcement.

California has left its tags in use for decades at a time. So have some other states. There's no magic in changing the design every couple of years, not at the cost of making all new plates.

The way the budget is today, Kansas has plenty of priorities beyond new license tags. — *Steve Haynes*

PS: Let us add a prayer to the Revenue Department to do a slight edit on the new "In God We Trust" tags designed by a Colby couple.

While attractive, these tags are simply unreadable due to the use of outline type on the state and slogan. They look great on paper, but on a car, you can't read them.

The state should be able to fill in the type without creating a whole new master for this tag.

Then, you could read the message — and sales of these tags would take off. It probably won't happen until the lettering is changed, however. No use paying extra for a slogan no one can read.

### Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
- U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002 (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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### Tree tug-of-war just getting started?

My husband and Pastor C are fighting over Christmas trees.

Well, that's not totally true. They both had their eye on a neighbor's tree, though, and when she put it out on the curb, they both planned to grab it.

Steve was faster. He ran the half block to the neighbor's house and nabbed the tree, dragging it back over to our back-porch area.

Pastor C, who lives up the alley from us, was driving by, noted the tree sitting against the back of our house and stopped by to talk about it.

She said that she hadn't put up a tree this year and really missed having one. She had noted the neighbor's tree on the curb and had planned to recycle it.

Pastor C said she wanted to put the tree up with bird food in it and use it until spring as a kind of fancy bird feeder. She said she hadn't counted on anyone else wanting a used Christmas tree.

Steve planned to take the tree out to the new



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

lake at Sappa Park and sink it for fish habitat. He had already talked to some other people with real trees who were also planning to recycle their dead Douglas firs, Scotch pines and spruce trees into the bottom of the lake for fish family apartments.

So, I checked with Steve. The fish would be fine, it seemed to me, if they didn't get a new apartment until spring. The birds, on the other hand, would be needing help long before that.

Steve agreed and within the hour, Pastor C had liberated the tree from our back yard with the promise to return it in the spring.

That's going to be one well-used Christmas

tree. This all happened a week ago. On Sunday, just before the snow started falling in earnest, Steve and I removed our lovely pinon pine, that was still in excellent shape, from our front room to the area near the back porch reserved for used Christmas trees and other large recyclable items.

I'm just wondering if it will stay there until we can get out to the lake or if it will move up the alley to serve another covey of birds. You never know around our neighborhood.

Even finished firs provide fresh forests for our feathered and finned friends. (Now say that really fast three times!)

*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@nwkansan.com*

### Mentors can make a difference

To the editor:

Each new year brings new hopes for the future for everyone. The timing is right to start something to make a difference.

The release of the film, "Waiting for Superman" last year was a slap-in-the-face wake-up call about the crisis our nation is currently facing, the depletion of already limited resources. As we search for solutions to problems such as money for schools, teacher training and parent involvement, research continues to point to something that works to solve at least part of the problem: quality mentoring.

Old studies widely quoted by mentoring advocates and programs find that children enrolled in Big Brothers Big Sisters' long-term mentoring programs are more likely than their peers to earn higher grades and less likely to



**Free Press Letter Drop**

• Our readers sound off

skip classes and school days, factors linked to high school graduation. Not surprisingly, the same studies find children in these long-term quality mentoring programs are also more likely than their peers to avoid violent and unhealthy behaviors and more likely to have positive relationships with their parents and others.

This month, we celebrate the 10th anniversary of National Mentoring Month. We also come together for a day of service in honor of the 25th anniversary of the Martin Luther King national holiday. As we mark these milestones, Big Brothers Big Sisters this month is urging adults to start something to help kids succeed in and out of school.

Big Brothers Big Sisters believes we can all start something to make our nation stronger by supporting families, schools and communities to get kids on the right track. It doesn't take much, just a simple pledge to start something.

Diane Stithem, Colby community director  
Big Brothers Big Sisters of Thomas County

### Kansas economy still catching up

Kansas' economy and the state's cash flow continued to play catch up as the first half of the fiscal year ended, according to preliminary numbers released Dec. 30.

Kansas tax revenues totaled \$488.9 million in December, topping the year-earlier total by \$25.6 million, or 5.5 percent, but falling \$22.2 million, or 4.4 percent, below projections made in early November, the state Department of Revenue reported.

The results bring total collections for the current fiscal year, which began July 1, to \$2.64 billion, or just less than half the total \$5.47 billion forecasters have projected by the end of June.

The latest results, which will become part of a more complete revenue report state officials will release after the holidays, are the ones lawmakers will be looking at when they meet this month to begin tweaking the state's current budget and mapping out a new one for fiscal 2012.

The preliminary numbers show that individual income tax collections for the year so far, which typically are Kansas' single largest state revenue source, totaled \$1.25 billion, a bit more than projected and almost 8 percent

### Other Opinions

• Gene Meyer  
Kansas Reporter

more than for the same period a year ago. Kansas will need to collect another \$1.3 billion or more in the next six months to meet fiscal 2011 projections.

Retail sales taxes, the state's second-biggest single cash source, totaled \$980 million through December, 16.2 percent more than a year ago, primarily because basic sales taxes increased by almost 18.9 percent to 6.3 percent in July. The latest total amounts to a bit less than half the \$2 billion retail sales tax collections that officials have projected for the year.

The numbers also do not reflect a significant seasonal occurrence that often influences revenues for the year. Although many individuals and businesses pay year-end income

taxes based on December results and retailers also collect a lot of sales taxes during holiday shopping, those revenues typically show up in January rather than December.

*Gene Meyer is bureau chief of The Kansas Reporter, a news service based in Topeka. Meyer spent 25 years reporting for The Kansas City Star, and worked for The Wall Street Journal in Chicago, covering agricultural futures markets. Contact him at (785) 408-2556 or gene.meyer@kansanreporter.org.*

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

