



Other Viewpoints

Should we fight the Civil War again?

Many legislators use “local control” to hammer down requirements that benefit the general population. We’re seeing that cry from Kansas lawmakers who think local officials should decide where to make their legal information available to the public.

A bill introduced this week in the Kansas Legislature would allow cities, counties and school boards to stop publishing their legal notices. Instead, these would be posted on some government-controlled website.

What a joke. Do we really think our local city council members, school board members and county commissioners will fight the battle for transparency in government? Hardly.

The problem is, this “local control” cry sounds good. But the sound of “states’ rights” reverberates in my ears when I hear it. Sometimes I think today’s conservatives want to fight the Civil War all over again.

Kansas newspapers know how to handle information in legal notices, print or post it accurately, keep good records, provide affidavits to prove that public notice took place, and we don’t care whose ox is gored in the notices we print.

Most elected officials would just as soon NOT publish budgets that show increases in levies or tax percentages. They would prefer NOT to make public bids that might include their friends or family members. They think the names of delinquent taxpayers are nobody’s business.

While a few of them might use the internet every day, they wouldn’t know up from down about how to get information gathered, formatted and posted accurately. That has always been the job of the local newspaper, and it should remain so.

– Rudy Taylor, Taylor Newspapers, southeast Kansas

Where to write, call

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We do not publish anonymous letters.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.

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EGYPTIAN ARTIFACTS



REX BABIN THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Budget work continues

Despite snowstorms that closed state government for two days last week, what some were calling the Blizzard of 2011 amounted to a little snow and wind, but nothing like what we have in western Kansas.

The House has continued to work at reducing the scope of government and ensuring responsible budget reform. This week, the full House went on General Orders to pass the first bills of the 2011 session.

Among those was a “Pay-Go” provision in the House Rules that will help ensure fiscal responsibility and reign in unsustainable state spending. We cannot continue to spend money that we do not have, and this will help keep the lid on spending. The Pay-Go Rule, HR 6004, requires any amendment to any appropriations bill which adds money to identify an equal reduction somewhere in the budget.

This is a common-sense change mirroring the way we all have to operate our family or business budgets. You have to set real priorities, and in a tough year like this, our Legislature must do the same.

I should have kept track of how many amendments were offered and voted on trying to weaken this rule. After two hours of debate, we must have voted 25 to 50 times on amendments, but at the end, the conservative representatives prevailed.

This week marked the beginning of action on the House floor. On Thursday, the House dissolved into the Committee of the Whole for debate on several bills. Once debated and recommended for passage by the Committee of the Whole, a bill goes to Final Action for a recorded vote that will send it to the other chamber.

During Final Action, legislators must be in their seats and staff, guests and interns are prohibited from being on the House floor.

We worked on three bills on “General Or-



Rick Billinger

- This week in Topeka

ders” in the Committee of the Whole, which includes all members:

• HB 2001 clarifies who pays for the operation of the Kansas Law Enforcement Training Center and moves the fund to the Kansas Commission on Peace Officers’ Standards and Training, correcting an oversight.

• HB 2033 would allow fleets of 250 vehicles or more permanent registration, streamlining the process for county treasurers’ offices across the state without changing county revenues.

• HB 2057 would add crime labs in Johnson and Sedgwick counties to the list of sources which provide forensic evidence without requiring a forensic scientist to appear in court for every hearing. Current law already makes this provision for the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, the Kansas Highway Patrol and federal agencies.

Real Debate Friday: Last year, the Legislature prohibited local governments from requiring sprinkler systems for single-family and duplex housing for one year. House Bill 2088 would make this permanent. The law does not prohibit a homeowner from adding a sprinkler system and also doesn’t affect triplexes and multifamily housing, which may be required to have one.

Integrated smoke alarms already are required by state law for all new construction. The rate of survival in a residential fire with a smoke alarm, is 96.45 percent. The sprinkler

system does improve that percentage to 96.70 percent. I believe each homeowner should have that choice.

This week’s question is: Should we vote only once a year in the fall or twice a year in election years, fall and spring? Changing this could save counties thousands of dollars and the county clerks like the option of voting in November versus April. Statistics show a higher voter turnout in the fall elections.

Upcoming Appearances: At 7:30 p.m. Friday, several representatives, including me, will be interviewed on Smokey Hills Public Television.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and I will be touring the 121st District on Saturday, Feb. 19. We will be in Colby from 1:45 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. at the Quality Inn.

Other stops include:

• Plainville from 8 to 9 a.m. at the hospital cafeteria.

• Hill City from 9:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. at the Frontier Stage.

• Hoxie from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Elks Lodge.

• Goodland from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. (Central Time) at Hank’s Restaurant.

We hope to have an opportunity to see as many people as possible.

Thank you for allowing me to represent the 121st District. If you have any input on issues which will come before the Legislature, contact me at [rick.billinger@house.ks.gov](mailto:rick.billinger@house.ks.gov) or (785) 899-4700.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Cancel the country’s credit card

As governor of California, Ronald Reagan said, “For many years now, you and I have been shushed like children and told there are no simple answers to the complex problems which are beyond our comprehension. Well the truth is, there are simple answers; they just are not easy ones.”

It is with this same mindset and outlook that we must approach our country’s financial situation.

Last Tuesday, I attended the president’s State of the Union address. This is an important annual tradition, but in many regards, the speech is more symbolic than substantive.

Disappointingly, the word “debt” only appeared in the President’s prepared remarks one time.

Our federal government is at an economic breaking point, presenting a serious threat to our nation’s financial well being. For far too long, Washington has been unwilling to make tough decisions to put the country on a path to fiscal responsibility.

The reality of our country’s debt crisis cannot be overstated. The nation’s debt amounts to a shocking \$120,000 per family. We have dug future generations into a hole from which they may not be able to climb.

In a few months, Congress will be asked to raise the country’s debt ceiling and sign on the next generation’s behalf for an even larger liability. As a result of 11 increases since 2002,



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

- Capitol Notes

the current limit is \$14.3 trillion. The most recent increase, in February 2010, was the largest in American history – a record \$1.9 trillion.

Proponents claim the increase is necessary in order to avert economic disaster. To say that we must spend more now to save later is faulty logic. It has proved false again and again – in both the failed stimulus and bailout plans. After these massive borrow-and-spend efforts, unemployment is even higher and our deficit is out of control.

There will be many proposals of “compromise” put forth ahead of the debt ceiling vote. One will be spending cuts, and some have offered \$74 billion as a starting amount.

I propose raising the spending reduction “floor” to at least twice that – add in real spending caps for next year – and then we can talk.

Alongside fiscal sanity, we must demand the elimination of excessive regulations that choke job creation. Businesses must be allowed to flourish, free of federal impediment or intervention.

When the House is asked to vote on raising the debt ceiling this spring. It is an opportunity for our new Congress to establish a clear path to fiscal responsibility. This will include addressing not just our existing debt, but finding ways to end the culture of spending money we do not have by cutting up the nation’s credit card.

In that same speech as governor, Mr. Reagan called on Californians to decide “whether collectively we can afford everything and anything we think of simply because we think of it.” Congress must embrace this mentality when deciding what expenses are worthy of the taxpayers’ dime.

As we mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Ronald Reagan, my favorite president, let us observe his wisdom and remember that while the task may be daunting, the solutions for economic prosperity are straightforward.

Tim Huelskamp is the Congressman from Kansas’ 1st District, serving his first term.



Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

