



Free Press Viewpoint

Include Kansans in rural tax break

Gov. Sam Brownback's initiative to lure people to rural Kansas counties by allowing them to skip paying state income tax for five years is an interesting idea, to say the least.

We hope it works. We fear it won't do much, because the program is limited to out-of-state residents. We believe the people most likely to move to rural areas are Kansans with ties to outstate areas who might want to move "home."

The incentives in the governor's program, now passed by both the House and Senate and awaiting his signature, won't apply to those people. If they want to move to rural counties, they'll still have to pay income taxes. The state won't help pay off their student loans.

And frankly, we think the state should include them in this plan. There is little to lose, and potentially, a lot to gain.

If someone living in Wichita or suburban Kansas City, say, decides to move back here, the state could stand to lose several thousand dollars in income taxes. That might smart a little, but only for five years.

After that the state would benefit from having more taxpayers in rural counties instead of less. Plus, it'd have saved the cost of building more highways and providing more services in urban areas.

It'd be years before enough people moved out to rural counties to require more of these "infrastructure" expenditures. Even if everyone took advantage of a provision where the state and local governments would split the cost of paying down these 'settlers'" college loans, the state would hardly notice.

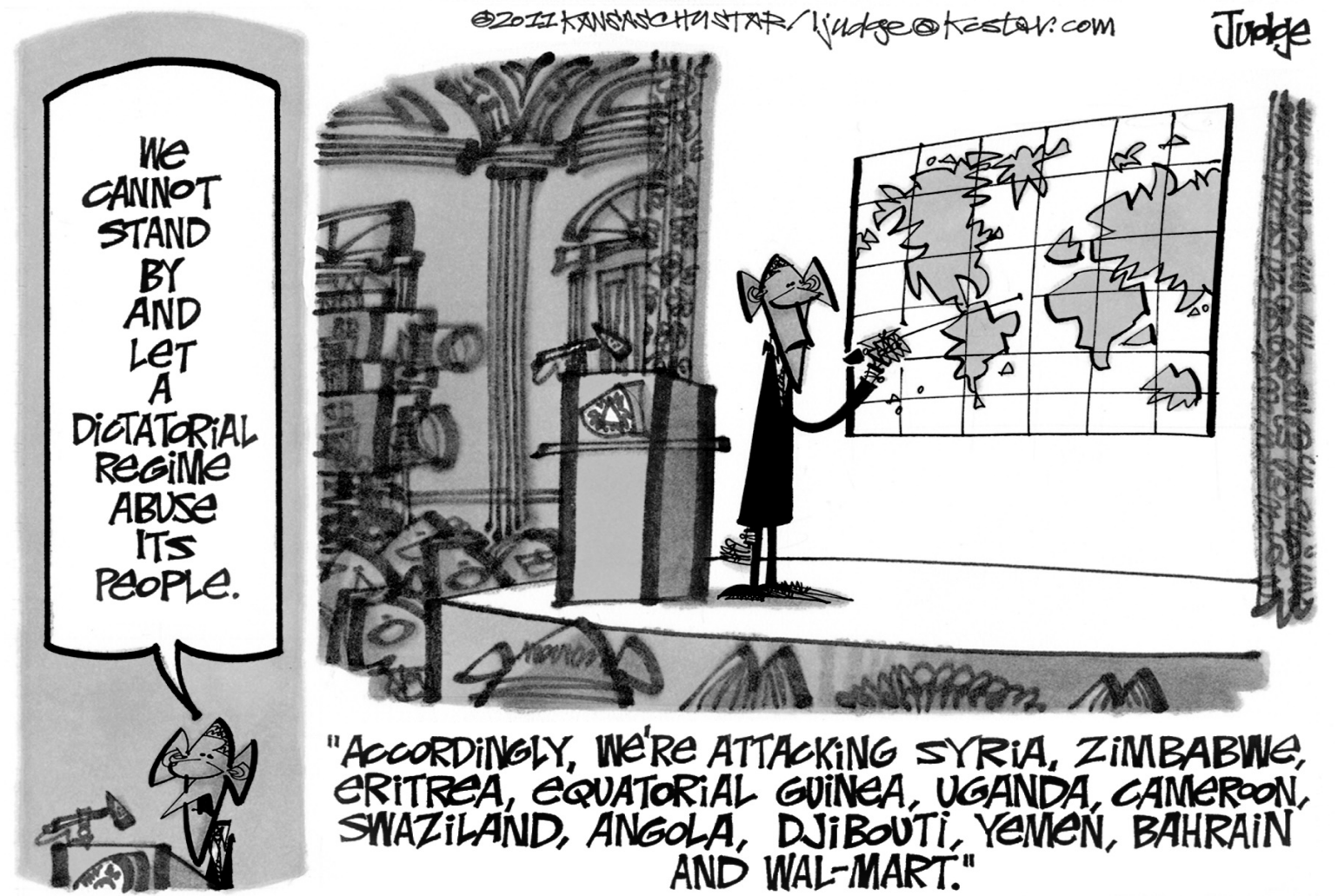
As written, the bill is expected to help rural towns recruit professionals such as doctors, dentists, lawyers and even teachers, many of whom graduate with expensive student loans to pay. That alone could be powerful, and we fully support the bill as passed by the Legislature.

But if we are talking about reversing a century of population decline in rural Kansas, we need to think big. We are going to need a lot of people. And Kansans are the most likely to move out here.

Many either grew up in rural Kansas, or their parents did. Many still have relatives, land or business interests in rural areas. Others know people who live out here, or come to rural Kansas to fish or hunt or look for antiques.

These people, the ones with ties here, are the most likely to help us reverse the population decline. And that is what everyone says needs to happen.

So let's open up this program to Kansas people, and make it work. — Steve Haynes



Spring wardrobe bites the dust

I have a work outfit that I wear almost everyday — a long-sleeved, high-necked stretch top, dark pants and comfortable shoes.

I've found this outfit will work for almost all of my work situations, whether I am attending a county commissioners' meeting, taking pictures at the grade school or filling a prescription at the local drug store.

It's comfortable, covering and convenient.

I even go so far as to lay out my week's worth of clothes on Sunday after I fold the laundry.

On the top of the dresser, I put out five different colored shirts, topped by five pairs of underwear, five bras and five pairs of socks. Clean dark pants go on Monday and Wednesday or Thursday.

I'm set for the week. When I get up, I grab a bundle of clothes and off I go to the bathroom to shower, brush my teeth and dress.

It's a workable, if dull, routine, and in the morning, I need dull — or at something that doesn't take much imagination.

So why did I decide to wear my light-colored



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

ored pants last week?

I haven't a clue.

I think maybe it was the feeling of spring in the air.

The light was coming in my window when I got up. When I got the morning paper off the steps, the birds were singing.

I got carried away and put on my tan cargo pants on Tuesday.

Not a good idea. Tuesday I had to deliver papers to the newsstands around town.

Even with soy ink, I was covered with black by the time I finished, and my tan pants were done for.

I'll note here that, even if I had worn dark

pants, they would have had to go into the laundry but they wouldn't have shown the smudges so much.

On Wednesday, I hadn't learned my lesson. I put on another pair of khaki pants.

All was well until Steve and I took an afternoon walk at Sappa Park with Annie, our Brittany spaniel.

Annie loves water. Annie got in the creek and ran past me at full speed. Not once or twice, but a couple of dozen times. Spraying water, mud and trail dust each time.

I returned home with polka-dotted pants.

Thursday was not a problem.

I was out of light colored pants and back in uniform. Back to dull.

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

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House works to reduce spending

After 10 weeks in the session, this week the House worked to reduce state spending and implement a tax structure that moves toward the elimination of personal income tax and reduced corporate income taxes. The House also passed a bill to cut \$35 million in state spending in the current fiscal year.

Thursday, March 17, was a day to honor the late Rep. Jim Morrison and his family. Jim served 18 years in the House, working on many committees, and was active in his community as well. We were pleased to have with us his wife Karen, son Jeff and his wife Rachelle their children, Jaden, Carter, Darias, Kennedy and Campbell; and his son Dr. Jeff Morrison and wife Michelle, and their children, Jarrett, Jace and Jacob and sister-in-law Laura Carr.

Rural Opportunity Zones

More great news: on a 102 to 18 vote Friday, the House passed Gov. Sam Brownback's Rural Opportunity Zone strategy to grow shrinking rural counties through income tax exemptions for certain out-of-state taxpayers who relocate to those counties.

Among the targeted counties are Thomas, Cheyenne, Decatur, Graham, Greeley, Logan, Norton, Phillips, Rawlins, Scott, Sheridan, Sherman and Wallace.

The bill also allows counties to participate in a state-matching program to repay loans up to \$15,000 for Kansas students who move to these counties. This bill was one of Gov. Brownback's legislative priorities. I think it is an excellent tool to help rural areas and look forward to seeing this program implemented.

Bill to Save \$35 Million

Last Friday, Gov. Brownback made allotments that reduced the FY 2011 budget by \$56.5 million to ensure state revenues for the year could cover expenditures. However, the governor does not have the authority to create an ending balance through the allotment process. Although allotments balanced the budget, they did not leave the state with an ending balance on July 1.

In order to provide a healthy cushion, the House Appropriations Committee drafted a bill containing provisions from the rescission bill agreed to by both the House and Senate during the conference committee process. On



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

Wednesday, the House passed this bill, which should provide a \$35 million balance at the end of the fiscal year in June.

Public Employees Retirement

The House Pensions and Benefits Committee passed HB 2333, which increases the state's contribution to the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System from .6 percent to .8 percent and adjusts benefits by changing the multiplier for future service from 1.75 to 1.4.

I have heard from many in the retirement program and all have not liked these changes, so when this bill comes to the floor I will not support it. I would like the legislature to set-up a committee with participation from teachers, department of transportation, Highway Patrol and other state employees to work on a plan all can live with.

Tax Debate

On Thursday and Friday, the House spent hours debating the best tax policy to spur economic growth.

March to Economic Growth Act: this bill would reduce the corporate and individual income tax with a trigger based on growth. If state tax receipts increase over the preceding year, a reduction in both taxes will occur.

The goal of this bill is to shift to more consumption (sales) taxes and less production (income) taxes. The House is committed to collecting Kansas tax revenue by growing the economy rather than increasing the tax rate. By providing a consistent, less complicated tax structure, this bill limits the role of state government and fosters business growth. From comparisons we know states without individual income tax experience population and revenue growth at a consistently higher rate than states with high rates. Oklahoma is one state that has seen growth with this type of program.

Growth Through Tax Credits

SB 61, which passed the House 92 to 22 on Friday, changes the High Performance Incentive Program income tax credits and expands the individual development account tax credit. The bill modifies the performance program beginning in 2013 to allow a portion of credits which have been carried forward to be claimed against the tax liability.

In addition, it expands the refundable tax credit available to individual development account contributors from 50 to 75 percent, increasing its attractiveness to businesses and its usefulness to economic development.

Food Sales Tax Refunds

SB 193 requires Social Security numbers to verify the identities of dependents for those claiming food sales tax refunds. This legislation is aimed at reducing fraud and saving state money, anywhere from \$13.6 million to \$15.6 million. This type of bill gets me excited.

Smaller Government

On Friday, Gov. Brownback announced the launch of a website that allows Kansans to submit laws and regulations they believe should be repealed. When an idea is submitted to repeal.ks.gov, the Office of the Repealer will run a cost-benefit analysis on the law.

Laws picked for repeal will be sent to the government entity with jurisdiction. Kansans who submit proposals will receive a status update within 30 days. The goal is to identify and eliminate regulations that hinder opportunities for Kansans and Kansas businesses.

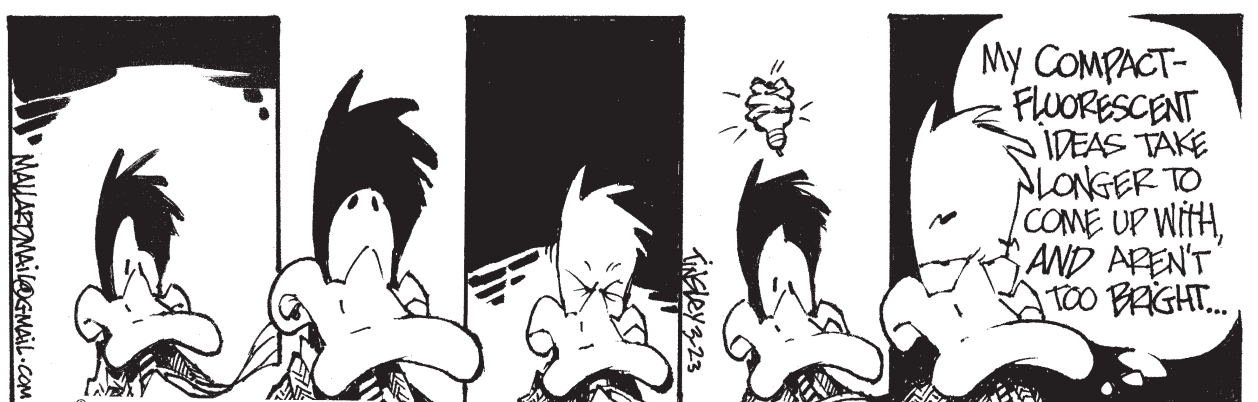
Next week, the House is in session for the majority of the day Monday through Wednesday to pass bills voted out of committee. The House will not hold session on Thursday and Friday to allow conference committees between the House and Senate versions.

It is my honor to represent the people of the 121st District. If you have input on any issues which will come before the Legislature this year, please contact me at rick.billinger@house.ks.gov or call (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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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