



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Be considerate when raising taxes

We understand the pressure on public officials to spend more, especially on programs that federal and state governments push on them, including homeland security initiatives, emergency preparedness and the like.

But we're not sure taxpayers want, need or can afford everything local government wants or is told to do.

It may seem a small thing to increase taxes "just a little," but board members need to consider that many, maybe most, of those they serve cannot do the same.

People can't "raise taxes" to generate more income. In this economy, the boss would just laugh at them. For many, including teachers and most health workers, and many at small businesses, there have been no regular increases in the past few years.

Many businesses are still hurting from the recession. Unemployment remains high and this area's population continues to plummet.

A business can raise prices, of course, but that does not mean customers will pay. Many can and will go elsewhere.

Time was when our public officials were very conservative when it came to spending and tax increases. That's been less so in recent years. Often, when a city or county has had a windfall from increased assessments, it has kept tax rates high and spent much of the money. When assessments have gone the other way, board members feel they need to raise taxes to maintain spending.

Particularly in a bind are businesses and homeowners. The share of county government they pay for has increased in recent years as the state's complicated system for assessing farmland lags years behind reality. Farm-land values are through the roof even while taxes on ag land fall behind, leaving the county with less valuation.

The decision board members make goes beyond whether people can afford a "small" increase in taxes. The question is whether the cost of government - city, county, school, state, federal - should continue to increase, year after year, while the pool of taxpayers continues to shrink.

The level of local government we can afford may not match the level we are used to; we understand that.

It's not a matter of whether government employees need or deserve a raise. We know they deserve one, the same as many others do. It's not whether the county or city needs new computers or new equipment.

The question is whether taxpayers have received any kind of increase where they can afford to pay more.

What we know is that many taxpayers have no way to match any kind of tax increase in these times. And if people are not tired of higher taxes, they ought to be. - Steve Haynes

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roberts.senate.gov/public/

**U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

**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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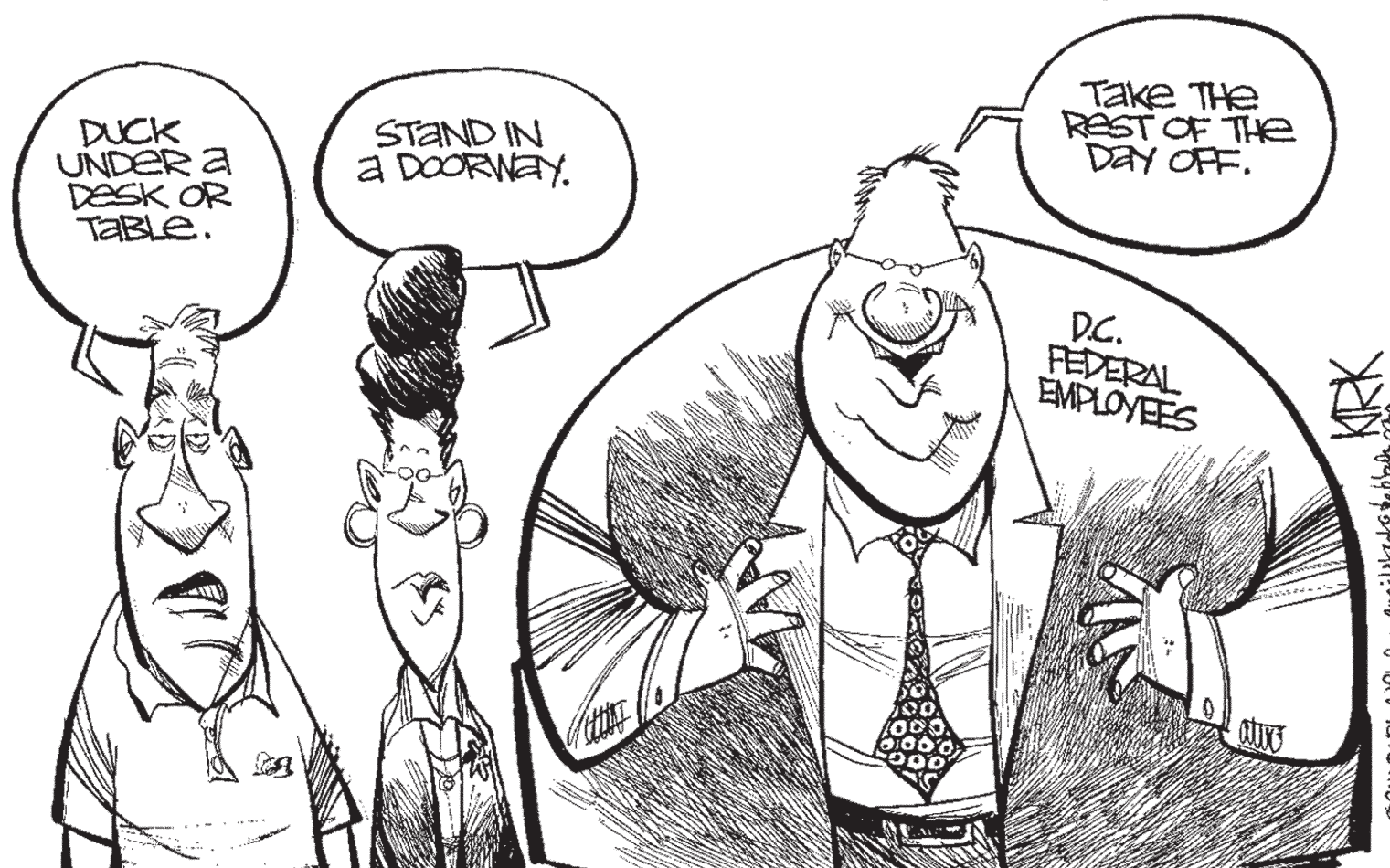
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## IN THE EVENT OF AN EARTHQUAKE...



### Superhero surge brings up memories

I can't help but notice that the people who make movies today are reaching into the past and bringing back some of the super heroes we used to admire when I was a kid, those like Superman, Wonder Woman, Spiderman, Batman, and now Captain America and The Shadow. In fact, The Shadow went as far back as being on a radio program we used to enjoy.

As for the vampires the young people are so obsessed with nowadays, I'm sure they got their start from someone who used to enjoy watching Dracula, the vampire my generation loved to watch. However, there was nothing romantic about him like the ones of today are; he scared me to death. He would change into a bat and fly in a window when someone was sleeping, usually a beautiful girl, and commence sucking the blood out of her neck. Of course, the monster Frankenstein has been re-incarnated in numerous movies in all sorts of ways.

In those early days of my childhood, on Saturday afternoons we would go to movies made for kids at the local theater. We had a lot of western heroes, too. They included Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Hopalong Cassidy and my favorite, the Lone Ranger.

That was when the heroes always wore white hats and the villains wore black hats. The Lone Ranger wore a big white cowboy hat and had a black mask over his eyes. He had a beautiful white horse named Silver and always shot silver bullets from his pistol.

This mysterious masked man would ride



**Marj Brown**

#### • Marj's Snippets

into town and solve all the problems and then ride out. As the people of the town stood in the street and watched him ride away, someone would always say, "Who was that masked man anyway?" That was when they heard the Lone Ranger shout, "Hi Ho Silver, away."

As an example of how those sayings stuck with the youth of that generation, here's an incident that happened when I was working as a licensed practical nurse in the old St. Thomas Hospital in the 1970s. That was before I received my registered nurse title and the new hospital was built in Colby.

I'll just call this patient Mr. Jolly, because this middle-aged man was always cracking jokes with the nurses.

Mr. Jolly was traveling through our area when he became ill and ended up in our emergency room one evening. He was treated in the emergency room and several tests were taken before he was finally admitted to third floor as a patient.

When I arrived at work the next morning, he was on the list of patients I was to care for that day. When I took his vital signs, he said he

was feeling much better and hoped he would be able to leave the hospital soon. I was happy to have such a good-natured patient.

The first doctor's order I received for Mr. Jolly that day was for a suppository. I'm not sure what adult suppositories look like today, but at that time, when they were removed from the carton, they were wrapped in silver aluminum foil and were shaped somewhat like a bullet. When I arrived in Mr. Jolly's room, he asked, "What do you have for me this fine morning?" I held up the suppository and replied, "A silver bullet."

After I unwrapped the suppository, inserted it, and was starting to turn around, I heard him say, "Who was that masked man anyway." As I walked out the door, I turned and said, "Hi Ho Silver, away."

As an afterthought I would like to ask, isn't it strange that in all the squabbling in Washington recently, and with the Congress so eager to cut Medicare and Medicaid and to try to mess around with Social Security, that they have never mentioned cutting their own retirement and health insurance? I'm sure they could afford the cuts a whole lot better than most of the elderly can.

*Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.*

### Asking the right questions

As the new school year begins, Kansas teachers are once again bringing their best skills and commitment to classrooms across our state.

We're ready to do everything we can to ensure each child, regardless of geography, economics, ethnicity, or language background, gets a great education. We know that the health of our communities depends on the kind of education we provide. This is not a challenge that we take lightly. We embrace it. Some power brokers, however, cannot see beyond what is profitable for their narrow interests. They continue on a course to ensure that the wealthiest Kansans contribute as little as possible to our cities and to the schools that serve them.

Kansas is blessed with possibly the most well-qualified and dedicated teaching force to be found anywhere in the nation. One thing that distinguishes great teachers is the questions they ask. They devise questions that elicit deep thought, generate curiosity, encourage problem-solving and motivate a desire to change the world. It's all about the questions.

Unfortunately, a façade of "accountability" has been constructed around useless questions that oversimplify student achievement as a list of things that are easy to ask, easy to grade, easy to quantify. These are the wrong questions. We give tests that ignore social studies, the arts, citizenship, creativity, problem solving, and collaboration. Then, "they" try to analyze the outcomes from these inadequate assessments to make high-stakes decisions that label students.

For our schools, our students and our economy to thrive, we all need to be accountable: teachers, parents, students and lawmakers. And that means asking the right questions.

#### Crucial questions reveal core values

### Other Opinions

#### • Dr. Blake West KNEA President

The Kansas Policy Institute (KPI) recently proposed holding education forums based on the premise of "Since we can't afford great schools in tight budget times, what would you be most willing to cut from public education?" The question comes directly from anti-tax groups like Americans for Prosperity, funded by the Koch brothers, and shows little respect for teachers. The most important question is: "What educational opportunities for our children do we believe are so important that we WANT to pay taxes to fund our schools?"

Past generations of Kansans revealed their core values by paying taxes in order to build great schools for our kids, good roads for transportation, and social services for the needy. A new spirit of selfishness, though, seeks to ask "Why should the rich be punished for their success by asking them to pay the same tax rates as the poor?"

#### Partisan questions?

In January 2011, these new values were the impetus of storm clouds that formed in Wisconsin, then spread to Ohio, Idaho, Indiana, Florida, and beyond. We see it as the divide within the Kansas Republican Party grows wider, as moderates who worked to support our schools in 2011 have each been targeted for defeat in 2012... targeted by the new wing of their own party... targeted by people whose

values are out of touch with Kansas' priority for public schools.

For us in education, the needs of students have never been greater; the stresses on their families have never been deeper; and the resources to provide a great learning environment have never been in such short supply. Imagine cutting funding back to the level of 1999 and expecting communities to raise property tax to make up the difference ... expecting teachers to pick up the slack out-of-pocket, too.

Then, using the wrong questions and extreme examples of dysfunctional schools far removed from Kansas, some would denigrate the commitment of teachers. And using flawed standardized tests and faulty analysis of results, many of those same critics question the quality of our work.

#### The truth about Kansas

The truth is Kansas NEA members' values are reflected in our choice of profession. We make a difference in the world. We recognize that investing in public education transforms lives. This is why KNEA has led the fight to maintain high standards for the profession and to institute rigorous teacher evaluation that helps each of us improve our practice. We are willing to ask the questions to hold all of us - teachers, students, parents and elected officials - accountable. Kansas NEA is THE organization doing something about fixing our flawed testing and accountability system, keeping KPERS solvent, and investing the resources needed so that every child has access to a great public school education.

*A high school science and technology teacher, Dr. Blake West is on leave from the Blue Valley School District to serve as president of the Kansas National Education Association.*

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

