



Other Viewpoints

Moxie needed for retirement woes

Kansas lawmakers got their first look Tuesday at a proposal to create a 401(k)-style pension program for state employees. It was put together by a committee studying the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System, which is under-funded by \$8.3 billion.

Critics say Kansas can't afford the system, which promises lifetime pensions at levels set by formula.

Given the Legislature's past performance, the critics are right. It is far too easy for the lawmakers to skimp on the annual appropriations needed to keep a defined benefit program solvent; the temptation to yield to state employee unions when they ask for increases in pension payments is too great.

General Motors and other major corporations also dug themselves into bottomless pits with their generous – and wildly underfunded – pensions.

The 401(k) plan, which ties pensions to investment returns and makes no promises, is a solution.

Making the change won't make the retirement system solvent. It will take very substantial additional appropriations for years into the future to do that. But it will keep the hole from getting deeper.

It's a bullet that needs biting.

Those already retired and those about to retire should get the pensions promised. New and recent employees should be switched to 401(k)s and perhaps have the opportunity to make additional contributions to their plans to earn richer pensions for themselves.

– The Iola Register, via the Associated Press

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774 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

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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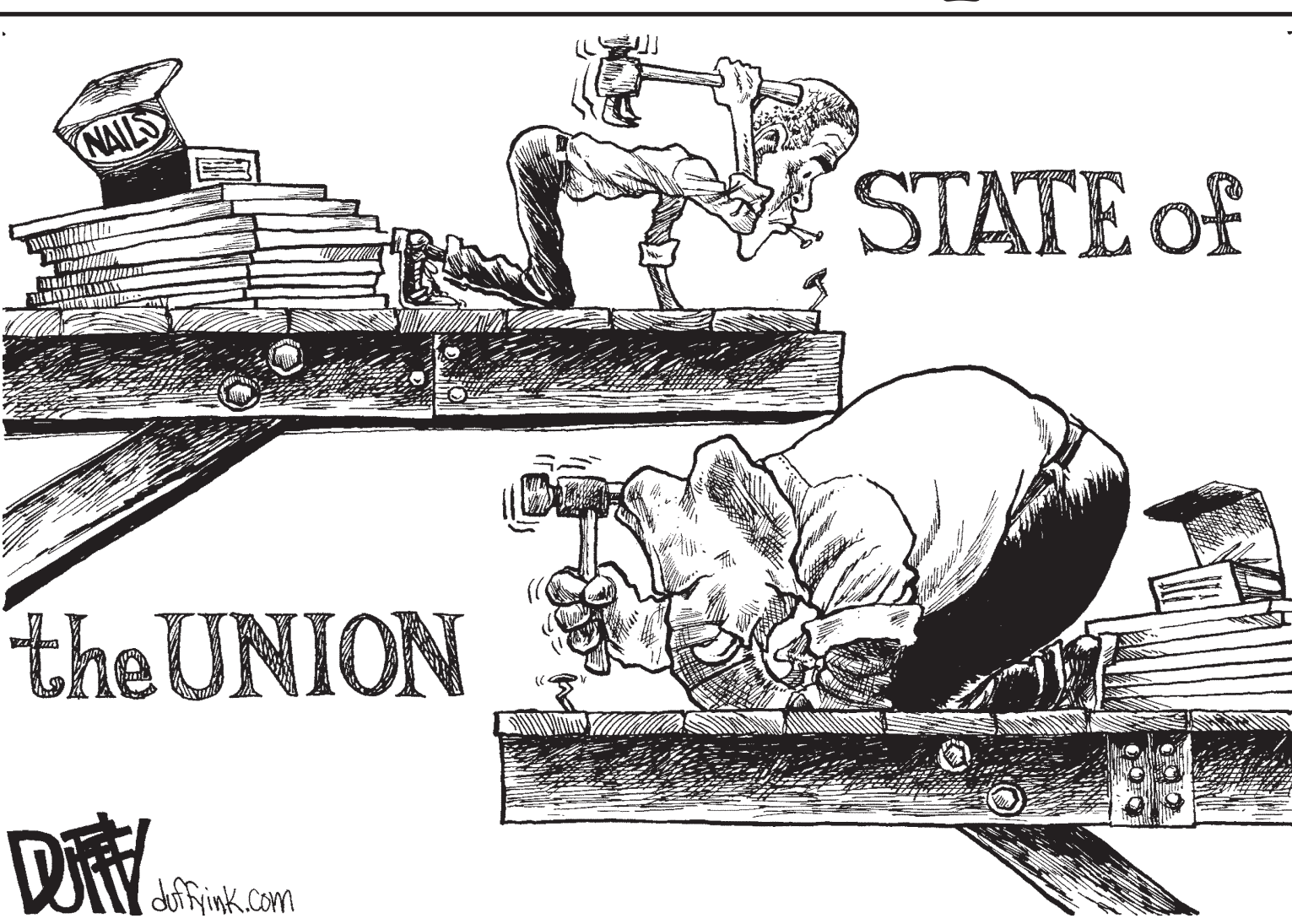
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Hound dog dreams of early wake up call

The house is dark and quiet, just like it ought to be at 3 a.m.

As I snuggle beneath my covers I hear a noise – like a herd of mice in the wall next to the bed. I slowly peek out and there upside down, feet on the wall, in all his glory is the hound!

Yep, his feet are doing a dance on the wall. This is a sound like no other. It can really be annoying when you are trying to sleep in the middle of the night.

From my warm nest I watch his feet running a race, or maybe just enjoying the run. I have now given up the idea of sleep. Until the hound wakes up, or at least turns over, my sleep is a thing of the past.

I could just wake him up myself, but he looks so comfy and like he is having a good dream. I can't bring myself to wake him knowing if I do he will begin the "its time to get up routine."

The hound has this alarm clock in his head that I haven't been able to reset for the week-ends. To say it is rude to be awakened at 5:30 a.m. is putting it mildly when it is Saturday or Sunday.

Noah thinks that by staring at you with his nose about an inch from your forehead he will get you to get up and entertain him. If he sees you open your eyes the cold nose may



Sharon Friedlander

• Musings

be joined by the doggie kiss on the forehead. He will start to chuff and bay when you swing your feet over the side of the bed.

I try to get him to quiet down since my husband is still blissfully enjoying his pillow. Try is the operative word here, since he immediately goes to the other side of the bed to see if the other playmate is also awake. If not, I go upstairs to let him out and to start coffee brewing.

Some days I just crawl under a blanket on the couch after he comes in since he seems satisfied to have his playmate upstairs where he can sleep in his recliner.

If I am lucky and go to sleep on the couch, I can count on his wake-up routine starting over with my husband if he hears him stirring or even turning over.

Of course, once his playmates are up and going he calmly climbs into his recliner and goes to sleep. Many mornings I have threat-

ened to go chuff in his ear just to show him how it feels, but he looks so comfy.

I have tried with absolutely no success to get mad and stay mad at him over the early wake-up calls, but I have never been able to pull it off. All he has to do is look at me with those big soft eyes and I am a goner. Noah knows how to work the mom!

I have said all along that I should have read the fine print of bloodhound ownership before committing to this relationship. Now it is way to late to change the course we are already on.

Coming home after being gone for any amount of time is filled with bays and chuffs sometimes accompanied by a rawhide in the mouth. The neighbors must think we are torturing him from the sounds. We have videos of these homecomings and they are a riot to watch. Once we caught him baying to one of his own greetings.

I am a firm believer in the unconditional love our four-footed friends give us, but I think that is a two-way street. Noah forgives me for trying to sleep late and I forgive him for getting me up too early. Guess that is how it is supposed to work.

Sharon Friedlander, publisher of the Colby Free Press, enjoys reading, hot rods and critters. Contact her at sfriedlander@nwkansas.com.

Topeka's focus on children's safety, taxes

Week two for the 2012 legislature was another busy week.

Caylee's Law

Some have asked me about the two bills coming out of the house. The first, HB2440, would implement Caylee's law, after Florida's 2-year-old Caylee Anthony who disappeared in 2008. Caylee's mother, Casey failed to notify authorities of Caylee's disappearance for a month. Currently, Kansas law does not impose criminal penalties for failing to notify law enforcement of the disappearance or death of a child. Kansas, along with many states, is working on the legislation.

Regents Reporting

The second bill has to do with regents' reporting requirements. Last fall Penn State University was rocked by allegations that former football coach, Jerry Sandusky, had been caught sexually assaulting or inappropriately interacting with minor boys on or near university property. This legislation will require all state postsecondary schools to develop reporting standards in case of abuse.

Kansas Tax Policy

Several different proposals must go through the committee process to ensure our end result is responsible, equitable and affordable.

In an effort to achieve these goals, the House is formulating a tax bill concept introduced this week. The proposal would maintain current tax deductions, credits and exemptions, including food sales tax refunds, historic tax credits and mortgage deductions. It would maintain the statutory sales tax sunset, passed during the 2010 session, which lowers the sales tax rate to 5.7 percent in 2013.

A two percent growth factor is built into the plan. Any increased revenues over two percent will trigger incremental reductions in individual income tax rates, with emphasis on low and moderate tax brackets. This provision balances the need to lower rates while ensuring a healthy balance to keep Kansas sound fiscally.



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

Small businesses will also be allowed to retain non-wage profits to keep and further invest in their business and create jobs. The bill would leverage the Earned Income Tax Credit with federal Medicaid funds to increase Medicaid funding from \$60 million to approximately \$113 million to protect safety nets for the most vulnerable. Finally, the House plan accelerates severance tax collections on new oil wells and expands the Rural Opportunity program.

Redistricting Kansas

Every 10 years the states redraw congressional and legislative boundaries based on census figures; each state has its own process for redrawing these boundaries. Figures show Kansas' population has grown in the eastern part of the state while western Kansas continues to struggle with declining numbers.

As a result, expectations are one Kansas Senate seat will shift from the west to the east side of state, as will approximately three Kansas House seats. The goal is to have 22,761 persons in each Kansas House district, 70,986 in each Kansas Senate District and 713,280 persons in each of the four Congressional districts.

Redrawing districts is a time-consuming process and sometimes a source of frustration as members are inevitably forced to swap territory with neighbors. In some cases, a member may have represented a certain community or region for decades. This makes it difficult to part with constituents – or perhaps meet new ones – so it's a challenging phase for some. A multitude of factors must be considered, and

the final product is still weeks away, but the house has committed to making the process as open as possible in an effort to create a fair and logical map members feel comfortable voting for, which will allow us to move on to more pressing issues that directly impact our constituents.

I serve on the Commerce and Economic Development committee. Last week, Anne Haught, workers' compensation director, reported to our committee on changes implemented last year after we overhauled work compensation. Staffing levels were reduced from 95 to 80, mostly through retirement and position consolidations, with an estimated cost savings of about \$800,000. Workers compensation operations were moved out of leased space and moved into agency-owned space between November and December. This move will show annual savings of approximately \$325,000.

The fraud and abuse sections received 573 fraud referrals, investigated and closed over 559 cases. Twenty-nine administrative cases and one criminal case were prosecuted. This section collected over \$200,000 in fines and restitution. Medical service section settled over 200 disputes between providers and payers.

Beginning in 2012, all forms, publications, schedule of medical fees and annual reports are available in digital copies and downloaded forms, no longer on paper, saving the division approximately \$110,000 per year.

It is an honor and privilege to represent the 121st District. Thank you for all your support and encouragement. If there are any issues or concerns I can help with, please contact me at (785) 899-4700 or rick.billinger@house.gov.

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

