



Other Viewpoints

Cutting highways won't help income

A House Republican tax plan that would divert money from Kansas highway projects to pay for a reduction in the state income tax makes about as much sense as driving a car with four flat tires.

State highway projects throughout the state, some already in the planning and design stages, would be jeopardized or at least delayed to make this plan a reality. House Speaker Mike O’Neal, R-Hutchinson, countered Feb. 11 that the tax plan doesn’t take money from the state’s T-Works program rather merely changes the schedule.

T-Works is designed to keep regular investment in Kansas highways. These roadways advance Kansas business by connecting cities and improving routes that move goods and people.

Reno County has benefited greatly from previous projects, including the expansion of K-96 to Wichita and the ongoing expansion of K-61 to I-135 in McPherson. The most recent projects include improvements at U.S. 50 and Airport Road, which will connect Siemens Wind Power to its suppliers and customers, and improvements to K-96 northwest to Rice County.

Despite the proven success of the state’s comprehensive transportation plan, some lawmakers seem willing to compromise a proven formula that creates jobs and contributes to local economies for many decades, all in the hope of achieving some pipe dream that Kansas, without a state income tax, will become the new Promised Land for industry and business.

Part of Kansas’ advantage in attracting new business is its heavy investment in infrastructure. Kansas roads are easy to travel, in good shape, safe and well-maintained. Kansans know the program employs people and boosts local economies throughout the state.

Trading that known formula for success for an untested tax plan is shortsighted, irresponsible and doesn’t serve the interests of the state or its people.

– The Hutchinson News, 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

State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7659 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor

colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Kylie Freeman - Office Manager
kfreeman@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Gary Meyer, Pressmen

Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel, Mailing

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Special interests need to be curtailed

A college friend of mine, a conservative Republican from Chicago, backs publicly funded federal elections.

When pressed a couple years ago, he explained his reasoning, “Under such a system, members of Congress would arrive in Washington beholden to the citizens who elected them instead of the special interests that currently elect our congressmen.”

This conversation came back to me last November as my civic club listened to our congressman speak over lunch. By coincidence, that same day the congressional Super-committee in Washington announced that they had been unable to reach agreement on a plan to cut the nation’s deficit. As we filed out that afternoon, another members remarked to me, “What you heard here today was a demonstration of the problem.”

The comment stayed with me, and I felt compelled to define the “problem” to which he referred. One member had asked the congressman if he could think of anything they (the two parties) might be able to agree on in the next few months.

My reflections led me to the following definition: Congress is largely dysfunctional because it is dominated by ideologues who are controlled by special interests, who as a result are unwilling or unable to compromise to solve the nation’s problems.

Campaign finance reports shed further light on this thesis.

Congressional campaign finance reports can be viewed by anyone these days on the website www.fec.gov. I naturally started by look-



Alan Jilka

• A Voice of Reason

ing at the report of my own congressman, and that of the congresswoman from the Kansas 2nd District, since the latest redistricting map floating around shows my city moving into her district.

For the fourth quarter of 2011, the congressman from the 1st District raised \$138,028. A whopping 53 percent of all the money he raised, \$72,986, came from Political Action Committee donations.

Only one of these came from an entity listing an address in his district. Twenty-three listed a Washington address, and the rest came from 11 other states. A sampling of committees that gave the congressman between \$2,500 and \$5,000 last quarter alone includes Koch Industries, Honeywell International, Alston and Bird, and the Build PAC.

The congresswoman from the 2nd District is in her second term, and has further mastered the art of raising money from these committees. In the fourth quarter of 2011, she raised \$225,522, with 58.8 percent of the haul, \$132,750, coming from PACs.

Her report shows only one such donation from an address in her district out of her total of 93. Thirty-nine donors listed a Washington

address, with the rest coming from 18 states. Donors of \$5,000 include the Prosperity PAC, American Seniors Housing Association PAC, the Freedom PAC and the Waddell and Reed PAC.

Kansas doesn’t have any Democratic members of Congress, so I checked on a Democrat from a neighboring state. Diana DeGette represents a district in the Denver area. In the fourth quarter of 2011, she raised \$141,733, with 51.7 percent (\$73,250) coming from PACs. This affection for PAC money is a bipartisan affair.

I shared these statistics with a friend and he shrugged them off. Maybe we’ve become numb to the whole process.

You can’t blame the members of Congress for devoting most of their time to chasing PAC money. That’s the system under which they operate. But the result is that we are governed by the individuals who are the most successful at raising this money. This begs the question: Are we well-served by the compromises they have to make in this process? Members will, at the end of the day, represent those who elect them (i.e. those who pay for their campaigns).

I’m not sure if my friend’s solution (publicly-financed campaigns) is the remedy. But the cause of effective governance requires a serious discussion of reforms needed to make our system work better for all of us.

Alan Jilka of Salina is vice president of Jilka Furniture, former mayor of Salina and a one-time Democratic candidate for Congress in the Kansas 1st District.

When farming starts, dress the part

If Billy Crystal’s Fernando character were to visit a Kansas farm this spring you can be sure he wouldn’t be telling too many farmers, “Darling, you look marvelous.” You can also bet not too many farmers step into the cab of their tractors wearing any of the high fashions portrayed on the pages of GQ or Esquire.

Looking good is great when you go to town, but safety and comfort are much more important when dressing for farm chores.

Let’s begin with the head, after all that’s where thinking about safety should start, says Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director.

Head injuries are common on the farm and tend to be serious, Higgins adds. When doing work that involves head hazards trade your familiar ball cap or straw hat for a hard hat.

“When you’re spraying chemicals, wear a wide-brimmed hat that is impervious to liquids,” she notes. “Make sure the brim is wide enough to keep chemical spray from drifting down on the back of the neck or face.”

Eyes have been labeled the “window to the soul” but just like all windows they can break if something is hurled, splashed or sprayed into them.

Safety goggles and sunglasses should be just as much a part of your daily garb as a good



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

pair of steel-toed shoes, Higgins says. Throw away those athletic shoes unless you’re slated for a track meet somewhere off the farm.

Sunglasses are important because they lessen eye fatigue after long hours in the bright Kansas sun. Some believe quality eyewear can also lessen the chance of cataracts in later life.

While people often consider the farm a place of quiet tranquility, many farmers experience hearing loss, the safety specialist says. As a general rule, whenever the noise level reaches 85 decibels, farmers should reach for ear protection. While farmers don’t carry testing equipment to measure decibel level, they should wear protection when in doubt.

Higgins recommends ear muffs rather than ear plugs because the latter can cause compaction of ear wax which is difficult to remove.

“Loose fitting clothes remain a definite no no,” she says. “If you plan to stay in the sun

most of the day wear long-sleeved cotton clothing. Natural fibers allow the skin to breathe and offer protection from the sun’s harmful rays.”

Avoid wearing sweats with long draw strings that hang from the waist or around the neck. These strings are made of extremely strong nylon or other artificial fibers, Higgins says. These fibers don’t rip or tear as easily as clothing like cotton. It’s easy for dangling draw strings to catch in augers, power take offs or other moving parts.

Proper fitting clothing is important for both daylong comfort and stability, she says. When spraying chemicals, wear waterproof or impervious footwear that won’t absorb chemicals.

Take off your jewelry in the field. Rings hang up on bolts, sharp corners – just about anything found around a farmstead. Don’t risk losing a finger or some other limb.

While the safely dressed farmer will not make the fashion pages of GQ or even his local newspaper or social media, you won’t find him/her on the obit pages either.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

