

Other Viewpoints

Math swings wild on budget numbers

Gov. Sam Brownback backs reductions in the state income and sales taxes. A new study by the Kansas Legislature's Research Department estimates his tax cuts would cause a budget shortfall of more than \$700 million by July 2018.

The administration protested mightily. No, its spokesman said, the growth caused by tax cuts would produce a surplus of \$138 million by mid-2018.

Legislative Research acting director Raney Gilliland said his department had used the same methods to calculate the consequence of the tax cuts that it had always used.

Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan said projecting future budgets is always chancy and commented, "There's a lot of time for growth. There's a lot of time for budget adjustments," between now and 2018.

The safe, conservative approach for the lawmakers to take is to go with Legislative Research. It bases its research on past patterns – which are the only actual facts available. It assumes a certain amount of budget growth because budget growth to cover inflation, the aging population, infrastructure demands and other known factors occurs predictably. It also calculates how much revenue the new, lower tax rates will produce, using conservative economic growth numbers.

Legislative Research calculates lowering tax rates will result in lower state revenue, all other factors being equal. Isn't this a bit like saying that 2 plus 2 equals 4?

But the administration has persuaded itself that lowering tax rates will result in enough additional economic growth in the Kansas economy that the state will collect more even though it charges taxpayers less.

Now, the administration may be right. But it would not be a good idea to bet the farm on it. This approach is called betting on the come. It is a reckless throw of the dice.

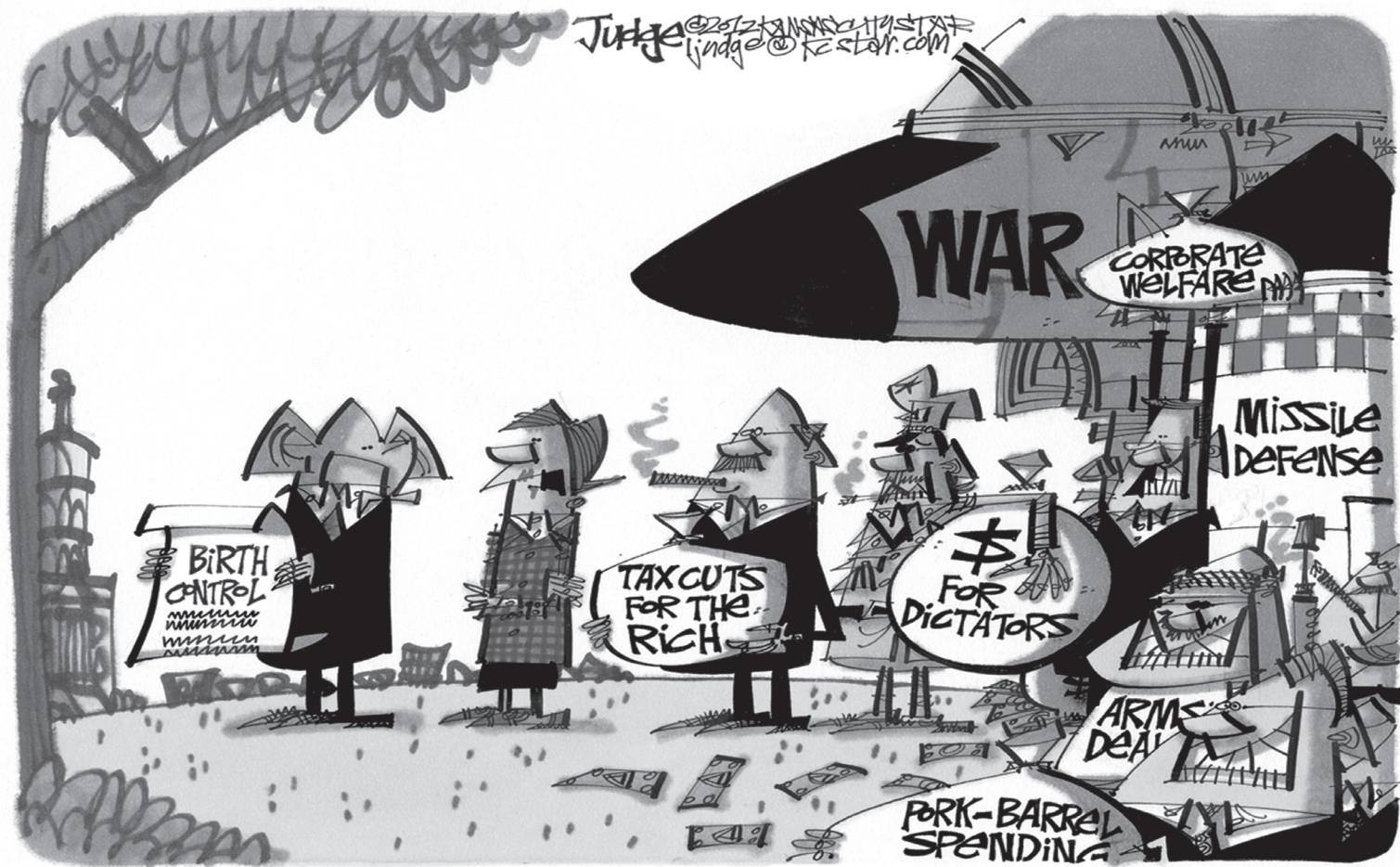
Kansas is not, and never has been, a high tax state. We sit in the middle of the 50. None of the taxes Kansas imposes is onerous. There is, in fact, nothing in Kansas history that lends credence to the theory that cutting income and sales taxes will produce a greater rate of economic growth than the slow, but steady, recovery now under way.

Kansas is, however, a low-spending state. The Legislature and the state's governor cut spending for its public schools, its universities and its highways and has a huge waiting list of disabled citizens now without critically needed services.

Those reductions were made to keep the budget balanced in the recession. That funding should be restored before tax cuts are made for reasons too obvious to require listing.

When those highest priority needs have been met, then Kansas can experiment with some short-term, limited impact tax reductions to see if supply-side, trickle-down economics truly creates a magic wand that makes more from less.

— *The Iola Register, via the Associated Press*



"I HEARD YOU BELIEVE THAT IF YOU HAVE MORAL OBJECTIONS TO SOMETHING, YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE TO PAY FOR IT."

Return to farm at harvest time to reflect

For Kansans, the summer months are a period when many return to their roots and visit family in rural communities across the state.

Some return home to help with wheat harvest, others go home to spend time visiting with friends they grew up with. For all, it's a time to reflect and remember.

Many of us are one or even two generations removed from the farm, but we still remember fondly our early years. A friend once told me, remembering our early life on the farm is an important part of saying goodbye.

For me, summertime meant harvest. It still does.

I accompanied my dad and Uncle Bernie to the harvest fields when I was 8. I couldn't wait to see those monster machines chew through the golden waves of grain.

By the time I was a teenager, I was a regular member of the harvest crew. My responsibility was to level off the load in the back of one of our trucks. In between unloading, a big handful of wheat – thoroughly chewed without swallowing – made a pretty big wad of gum. Not much flavor but one heck'uva chew.

Mom brought meals to the field in the family car and we had the chance to eat her wonderful home cooking while sitting on the tailgate of our pick-up truck. What a treat.

The summer after I finished fifth grade, I started helping dad one-way plow our summer fallow ground. It took me another couple years before I could pull this heavy cultivating tool out of the ground. This was before hydraulic cylinders.

Other things I remember ... looking down a badger's hole and seeing the critter looking



John Schlageck

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back up at me ... learning to hunt the wily ring-neck pheasant with our Irish setter, Red, something I still enjoy today ... looking to the westward sky and watching the sun paint a masterpiece at the close of day ... listening to the melodious meadowlark ... darting through the grass during hot summer nights ... and catching fireflies to make a lantern in one of Mom's empty Mason jars.

Dad always watched the weather from our picture window on the west side of our house. You could easily see the Menlo elevator nine miles to the west across the pancake-flat High Plains. I'd help him watch, hope, rear and pray that parched land would receive rain and crop-crushing storms would somehow skip our land.

Without question, the greatest lesson we can learn from the land is hope. Crops and a bountiful harvest are never guaranteed. Drought always threatened my dad's crops. Too much rain meant harvest delays or crop-choking weeds.

Thunderstorms – the likes seen nowhere else in the world – often carried vicious winds and hail that could level a field of wheat in minutes.

The summer of my junior year at Hoxie

High, such a storm wiped out our wheat crop. Dad rode in the cab with me as we entered one of our fields a few days later. One round later we both looked back in the bin and saw less than a fourth of it filled with wheat. It should have been full half way through the field.

After we completed the first round, Dad told me to let him off and he left the field. As he walked away, I saw him dry his eyes. He couldn't stand to see the crop he'd worked so hard to grow hailed into the ground.

Two and a half months later on Sept. 15 – he always started wheat seeding then – we were out in our fields planting for the next year. He always had hope.

I learned at this age that hope is not wishful thinking of harvest success. Rather, hope is the action of planning and planting seeds. For some, harvest may not occur every year, but the seeds of hope must be planted if there is even the thought of a next year's harvest.

There are many other memories I have of growing up on a farm, too numerous to mention in this column. As I continue to work with farmers, I am reminded that they continue to love and learn from their land.

For those of us who could not stay on the land, we cherish the time we spent there. We have benefited from this experience, and these lessons learned on the land will nourish us wherever we are planted.

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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Set the scrap metal record straight

To the Editor:

What started as an innocent inquiry into the disposal of the scrap metal from the Thomas County Landfill has turned into speculation due to miscommunication and inaccurate information.

It may surprise some to learn that metal, often discarded as trash, is a commodity. Landfills can generate extra income for counties by marketing the scrap metal. Bohm Farm and Ranch Inc. operates a licensed and bonded trucking, crushing and scrap metal business out of Salina and works in the Thomas County area. This company has repeatedly asked for an opportunity to bid on metal at the Thomas County Landfill, but its requests have been rejected by the landfill director.

Pete Stephens lines up area crushing jobs for Pete Bohm. He was surprised to hear the Thomas County landfill did not bid out this job and had used the same crusher for 15 years. Stephens went to the county commissioners about the landfill iron in April and pointed out that opening the job to the highest bidder could generate more income for the county.

Stephens asked for five years' worth of crushing payment records not to imply that landfill supervisor Larry Jumper was hiding anything, but simply to compare prices and show the commissioners it would be in the county's best financial interest to bid out the landfill iron job.

At the time of his inquiry, no one at the county clerk's office or the commissioners knew what the county received in the past from Rose Trucking, the crushing company the county has been using. Stephens was in-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

formed that for the county to find and disclose that information, employees would have to dig through paperwork and he would be responsible for the cost that would incur, which could be hundreds of dollars.

Really? An individual should have to pay hundreds of dollars for information the county should want to know? This raises a question: when the county is paid for the iron, don't they receive a check from the crushing company? It would cost "hundreds of dollars" to look up deposit slips?

The landfill director, Mr. Jumper, was present at a recent commissioners' meeting. The *Colby Free Press* reported that he said Rose Trucking is licensed in the state of Kansas and Bohm Farm and Ranch is not, when in fact the exact opposite is true. Additional comments by Jumper regarding Bohm's performance were also inaccurate. In response, Pete Bohm asked to be put on the next commissioners' meeting agenda and specifically requested Mr. Jumper's attendance. Mr. Bohm and his secretary drove from Salina for the commissioners' meeting, but neither Mr. Jumper nor anyone from the *Free Press* attended.

I was at the meeting. Pete Bohm, not Pete

Stephens, as was reported in the *Free Press*, said he stopped to see Mr. Jumper twice. Mr. Bohm's secretary presented a log of calls she had made over the years asking for the opportunity to bid the Thomas County job. It would have been helpful to have Mr. Jumper at the meeting to explain his comments and why he refused to let other crushing companies bid the job. The misunderstanding over who said what would have been avoided.

It is unfortunate that the *Free Press* was able to cover the first meeting and print the remarks leveled against Bohm's company, but could not attend the subsequent meeting that had the facts to prove the comments inaccurate.

Shelly Harms asked Larry Jumper if he could remember what the county had been paid per ton when they crushed metal in May and he thought around \$100. At that time, Bohm would have bid the job at over \$175. A rough estimate of the landfill iron was 130 tons. That could have been an additional \$10,000 for that one crushing alone.

It should always be the policy on any county or city surplus property to open the job for bids to receive the best price possible.

Delin Thompson, Colby

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ms. Thompson says she is an associate of Pete Stephens. The *Free Press* did not attend the meeting in question because the regular reporter took the day off and there was no one else to go. We have since hired another reporter.

— *Steve Haynes*

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

