



## Other Viewpoints

# Online licensing good for everyone

At least something good has come from the state’s disastrous software switch at county auto tag offices, which has led to long lines and delays for taxpayers: the decision to waive for a year the convenience fees to pay tags with a credit card.

Previously, the state’s tag offices charged \$3 to process an electronic check or 2.5 percent of the transaction to process a credit card online or at the tag office. The fees are excessive and have served as a deterrent to those who would prefer to pay their tags online but aren’t eager to pay for the privilege.

Maybe the state will realize in the coming year that eliminating the online transaction fee will result in more people paying their tags online, which will reduce the number of people who physically travel to the tag office to have their tags and taxes processed. That, in turn, might reveal that county tag departments could operate more efficiently, maybe even with a reduced staff and a reduced cost to Kansas counties.

In an age when people can buy just about everything online with the click of a button, it is beyond understanding that state government can’t find a way to offer that same convenience to consumers at a cost that mirrors the private sector.

More than 400 companies provide credit card processing, and likely one of them offers a lower rate than the 2.5 percent the state currently charges. Furthermore, private-sector merchants for the most part absorb the cost of credit card processing as part of doing business and in an effort to meet the demands of a largely cashless society.

The state should follow the business world’s lead in this respect. It would make it easier to pay a required tax, and the state might even find that absorbing the cost of credit card processing is less than the money spent on staff, time and paperwork needed to handle the long lines of grumbling taxpayers.

— *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

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# Senate the last bastion of moderates

Now we know: the conservatives won the fight to control the state Senate.

The results will determine a lot about the future course of state government, though the battle has been waged largely out of sight.

The Senate was the last bastion of the “moderate” wing of the Republican party, a group that by and large has run things in this state for many years. Moderates like to trace their heritage back to Gov. Bill Graves, President Dwight Eisenhower and Gov. Alf Landon.

Until recently, the faction controlled the leadership in both houses of the Legislature, the governor’s office (except when a Democrat happened to get elected) and the party.

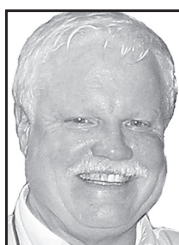
Over the last decade, the party’s conservative wing has been ascending, however. First the conservatives took over the House of Representatives, then with the election of former U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback as governor, the executive suite.

After this conservative surge, the forces that be on the right set their sights on the moderate leadership of the Senate, which stood in the way of conservative goals.

Even so, the conservatives seemed to have their way, passing massive tax cuts and a budget that not only balanced, but included the required reserves to tide the state over any revenue shortages.

To understand all this, first you have to understand the “one/two/three party” system in Kansas politics.

In our state, in reality, there’s only one party, the Republicans. They’ve been in charge so



**Steve Haynes**

• Along the Sappa

long, dating back to statehood, that no one remembers why we have so few Democrats.

Second, while we have, officially, two major political parties, the Democrats seldom win a statewide office and almost never control the Legislature. A lot of people who would be Democrats in most states register and run as Republicans here. But the Republican party is split between conservative and “moderate” or liberal factions.

With the Democrats on the outside looking in, the two Republican “parties” slug it out for control of our government. It’s like having three parties, only one doesn’t count. And the dominant party is split into conservative and liberal wings, the “moderates” backing bigger government and more spending, the conservatives wanting to put a stop to all that after years of moderate control.

A few exceptional Democratic candidates win statewide races, including the conservative Dockings, father and son, and the liberal Kathleen Sebelius, a superb political creature who grew up in the governor’s office in Ohio.

But the main lesson of history is, if you want to hold office in Kansas, be a Republican.

# How should the winners govern?

When I first went to Washington in the 1960s as a novice congressman, the Democratic Party was clearly in control. It held the White House and enjoyed big majorities in both houses of Congress.

So big, in fact, that a sizable group of Democratic politicians argued that when it came to crafting legislation, the most important value was to attain large majorities and push through an ideologically pure agenda without even consulting the minority. Compromising in order to get Republican votes would mean surrendering core principles.

This might sound familiar to you. Although today, of course, the positions are reversed: it’s the Republicans in Congress and on the stump who argue that sticking to core principles ought to be their highest priority.

Political campaigns are not just about who will govern, but also about the candidates’ vision and how they plan to achieve it. This is not the first time in our history that two very different approaches to wielding power were on offer.

The first has characterized most of our nation’s history: a willingness to engage in robust debate over competing ideas, work across ideological divides, negotiate differences, seek consensus, and above all, find a way to strike a deal and move forward. Its emphasis is on problem-solving and finding workable solutions to the problems that confront our nation.

Its motivating philosophy is that politicians’ ultimate responsibility is to make the country work – not merely to satisfy their own partisan beliefs. It is what has made possible most of the great pieces of legislation that have shaped this nation – everything from rural electrification to federal highways.

## Other Opinions

• Lee H. Hamilton

In recent months, the U.S. Senate has moved toward this approach, voting to overhaul the U.S. Postal Service, find ways to pay for transportation programs, confirm judges and in other ways try to make government work.

The other approach has been on view more often than not in the House, and was prominent in the Indiana Republican primary that recently ended in the defeat of Sen. Richard Lugar. It holds that in order to achieve policy goals, it’s crucial to purify the party, purge it of moderates and work hard to reach overwhelming, possibly even permanent, political victory.

It rests on a belief that the political philosophies at large in the country right now are irreconcilable and that reaching a compromise in the interest of moving legislation is impossible without betraying core principles.

In this view, Washington does not need more collegiality, but less. It does not need cooperation, but confrontation. It needs purists who will stick to their fundamental beliefs, do their best to keep winning elections and ultimately control the White House, the House and a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate.

This is not an irrational or illegitimate approach to governing. There are plenty of politicians of both major parties who have, at one time or another, advocated this approach.

But there’s a practical problem with it: It is hard to make it work. The kinds of majorities that make ideologically pure legislating possible don’t come along very often – and when they do, they don’t tend to last long. The old catch phrase that “nothing is ever really settled in Washington” is true – because the political agenda is always changing.

Moreover, our system is designed to make it difficult for majorities to have their way. That’s what the separation of powers is about, and the pivotal notion of “checks and balances.”

Indeed, legislation that has bipartisan support tends not just to be more durable and of a higher quality, it is also easier to implement. As a governing tactic, ideological purity has enormous practical difficulties.

Nonetheless, in the upcoming election these two approaches – negotiation and flexibility vs. unyielding dedication to an ideology – will both be part of the package of issues that voters must weigh. Which makes it crucial that candidates talk not only about policy, but also about process – not only about where they want the country to go, but also about how they expect it to get there. Which approach do they favor? If they get into office, how will they govern?

Their answers will make a difference in how we as a nation tackle the challenges that confront us. So as the campaign season gets under way and the candidates who would represent you start showing up to ask for your vote, don’t let them off the hook: Ask them not just what they want to accomplish, but how they’ll go about it.

*Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.*

## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

