



Free Press Viewpoint

Don't blame rep for solid principles

The last couple of weeks, Rep. Tim Huelskamp of Kansas' big 1st District has been under attack for standing by his principles.

From out here in the far northwest corner of his district, we can only shake our heads.

When did it become a sin to have principles?

It's a given that, as with any representative, not every one of us in the district will agree with our congressman, today or even most of the time. You just can't expect that, not when you choose one person to represent roughly 711,000 people with as many points of view.

But this district has elected Mr. Huelskamp to Congress twice, the first time choosing him from a field that included a wide spectrum of Republicans, and then over a Democrat opponent.

No one bothered to run against him the last time around, and you have to assume that most of the people in the district are comfortable with their representative — or they'd have backed somebody else.

We knew what we were getting when we voted for Tim Huelskamp. He's a known commodity, a doctrinaire conservative who believes in less government, lower taxes, fewer regulations, lower spending and a balanced budget. He never pretended to be anything else.

He's also a committed social conservative, a devout Roman Catholic who hews to the teachings of his church. And an advocate for adoption, as well as a loving family man.

Yeah, he's about as far to the right as an American could be, staunchly opposed to abortion and strong on social issues. So what?

The voters elected him. He believes what he believes. Wouldn't it be worse if he sold out? If he gave in to blackmail, even by the speaker of the House?

Yet there's a line of ("What's the Matter With Kansas?") thinking that goes something like this: That people in places like Kansas, who are comfortable standing on principle, often vote against their own self-interest when they stand by their beliefs.

So people here vote for Republicans who stand against abortion instead of Democrats who send us welfare and other government goodies. It's not that simple, but still, are principles that outmoded?

No, Mr. Huelskamp isn't a compromiser. He's not going to lead the House to make whoopee with the Democrats and solve the problems of the day. He's the guy who's going to stand to the side and remind the rest of them what their principles are supposed to be.

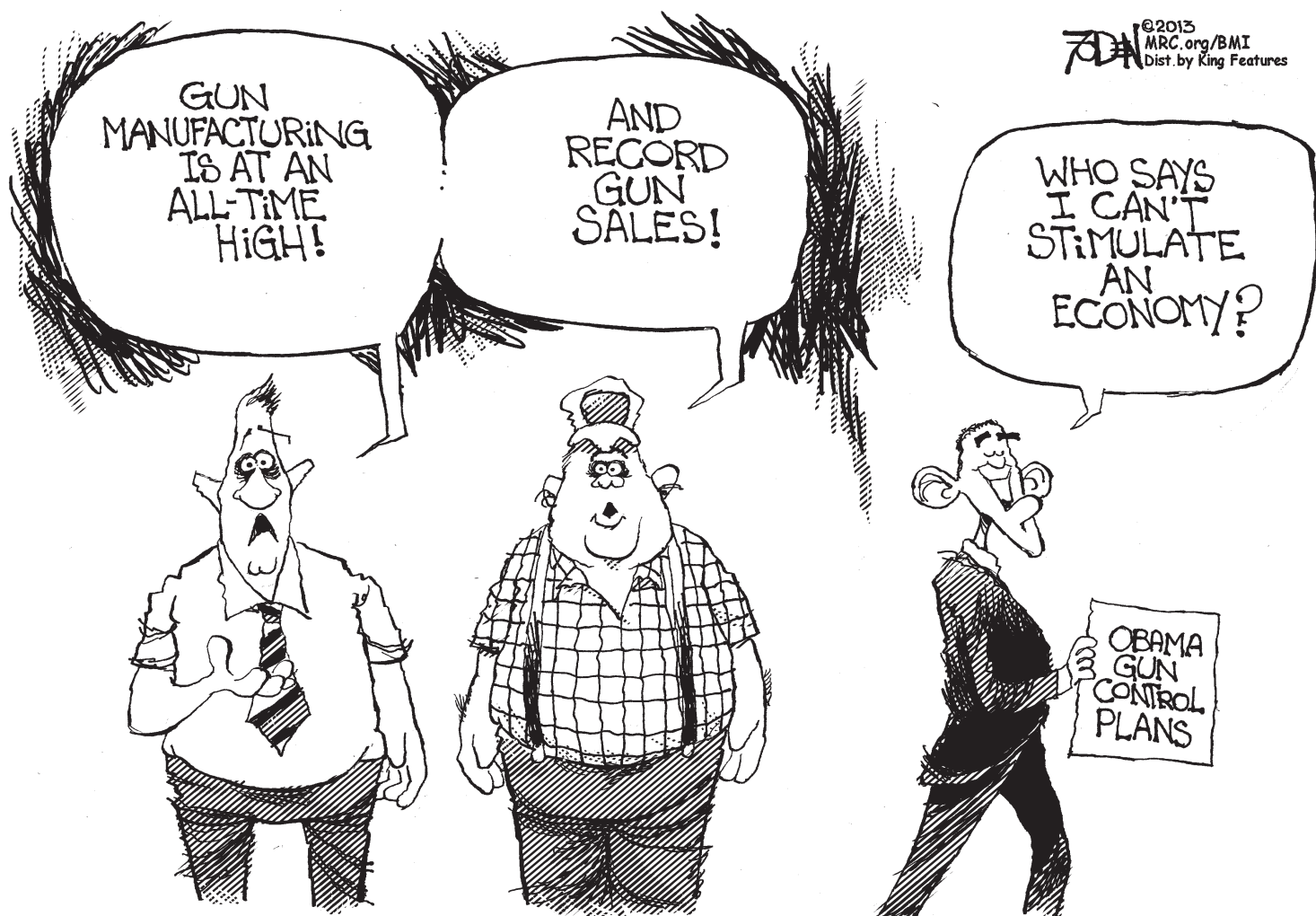
There's nothing dishonest or wrong about that, is there?

No one expects all of us to agree with Mr. Huelskamp's stands. It's perfectly OK to say he's wrong and call him out. Run against him if you feel that way.

We know Washington needs compromisers and negotiators and log rollers. That's how deals are made at the end of the day. But someone has to stand on principle. There are days when we'd be better off if more of our leaders did, on all sides of any issue.

As for Mr. Huelskamp, well, you know where he stands. The voters put him where he is, and they could, we suppose, change their minds. Meantime, deal with it. He is who he is.

— Steve Haynes



Session starts with budget 'to dislike'

I have made it through the first week of the 2013 legislative session. Being a committee chair, for education budget, has added a lot more work and responsibility to my schedule.

On Jan. 14, all of the new legislators were sworn in. It's a nice moment, but it makes me fully aware of the challenging task before me. With the political actions taking place in Washington and Kansas, there is a lot of discontent with the political process.

Tuesday evening, we listened to the governor's State of the State Address, and then last Wednesday morning, Budget Director Steve Anderson (who is from Oberlin) presented the facts and figures to the Appropriations Committee. To quote Mr. Anderson, "Every one of you on this committee will find something to dislike in this year's budget figures."

One of the concerns I have is that the governor has requested that .6 of a cent of the sales tax increase stay on the books. The Legislature



Ward Cassidy

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had promised that the tax would end. Another problem with that is several cities hope to have a local sales tax to pay for a project of their own when it expires. The money might also be needed to fund critical programs. We will just have to wait and see how it all plays out.

If you remember from my articles in the past, what happens early in the session is never what happens come May. I am very excited about a news conference I was in this week with House Speaker Ray Merrick. He made the comment that he and the President of the

Senate, Susan Wagle, have a goal of finishing the legislative work in 80 days. That would make for an aggressive session, and it would save the state money.

I will send an article each week to all of the area newspapers. I also plan to have the articles on my website, www.wardcassidy.com. If you need to contact me, I would prefer by e-mail, ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov. If you are coming to Topeka to any meeting and would like me to be there, please let me know.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering the northwest part of Thomas County (including Colby), plus Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties. This is his second term in the Legislature, and he is chair of the Education Budget Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

Further proposed cuts face Legislature

On Jan. 15, Gov. Sam Brownback gave the State of the State address, outlining his priorities for 2013, including increasing student reading proficiency, leveraging economic growth and advancing government efficiency.

Possibly the biggest news in his address was his proposal to cut income taxes further and continue on a path to a zero state income tax. Although we legislators have not yet seen the details of these proposed cuts, it will certainly be difficult to manage while we are attempting to digest the large tax cut that enacted last year.

The next day, Gov. Brownback's staff released his recommended budget for Fiscal Year 2014. It's certainly not extravagant. While some will call it responsible, others might use the term "austere." It reflects the fact that the state is facing a funding shortfall as a result of the large tax cut that was enacted last spring. Additionally, in order to make revenues and expenditures match, Gov. Brownback is proposing two new revenue sources:

- Permanent extension of the temporary sales tax increase that was enacted in 2010 and is scheduled to end on July 1.
- Elimination of the home mortgage interest deduction on Kansas tax returns.

This budget sets up choices that will be difficult. If we in the Legislature agree to extend the sales tax increase, we are making a conscious decision to abandon the "three legged stool" concept of financing government in our state by an equal reliance on sales, income and property tax. That has been lauded in the past as being a system that is broad-based and provides stability and equity. All three are frequently cited by economists as desirable characteristics for a state taxing system.

An economist with the Kansas City Federal Reserve cited Kansas a few years back as having the least volatile tax revenues of all the states in the 10th District over the past 40 years. So are we prepared to abandon the concept of fairness for Kansas citizens in hopes that the economic theory that lower income taxes will produce explosive economic growth really proves to be true? That is far from being accepted economic theory at this point, and even Gov. Brownback has termed the tax cut a "real live experiment." No one can be sure of the result.

What is the cost to both taxpayer and govern-



Don Hineman

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ment of moving to a system that is less stable and predictable? These are serious questions, but I do not hear enough discussion on these issues in Topeka.

On the other hand, eliminating the mortgage interest deduction is not as important as before the 2012 tax cut. Because tax rates have been reduced, the deduction has less value to any taxpayer. Additionally, the 2012 tax cut bill provided for expanding the standard deduction from \$4,500 to \$9,000. The result will be that more Kansas taxpayers will not have enough deductions to itemize and will end up taking the standard deduction. For those, losing the mortgage interest deduction will not matter.

Of course, the deduction will still be available on federal tax returns, and the deduction is a much more important item there. It is hard to imagine that losing the deduction on their Kansas tax returns would be an important enough matter to alter Kansans' home-buying plans. And one could argue that if that

deduction were the turning point on whether someone buys a home or not, then they were probably trying to buy a home they couldn't afford.

But here is the other part of the hard equation: if we in the Legislature cannot agree to extend the sales tax and eliminate the home mortgage interest deduction, then we will have created a \$425 million hole in the governor's budget. Without additional revenue, we will be forced to make big cuts to state budgets and we will have to push some portion of the cost back to the local level in the form of higher property taxes.

Keep in mind that over \$1 billion has already been wrung out of the state budget in recent years, and the easy cuts are long gone. If additional efficiencies can be achieved, I am confident this administration will find them. If we are forced down the road of cutting budgets further, the pain to Kansas citizens and the harm to Kansas' infrastructure will be significant.

With decisions of this magnitude facing us, it is bound to be an interesting session!

I am honored to serve the residents of the 118th District in Topeka, and I welcome your questions and suggestions. You can reach me at Rep. Don Hineman, (785) 296-7636 or dhineman@st-tel.net

Thanks, support offered

To my constituents and citizens of western Kansas:

Monday, Jan. 14, was my final day in the House as representative for the 121st District. The district, which included Graham, Sheridan, Thomas and Sherman counties, has been eliminated and this seat has been moved to the Kansas City area.

Please know that even though I am no longer your elected representative, I will never stop fighting for the people of western Kansas. I will continue to support Sen. Ralph Ostermeyer and our representatives, Ward Cassidy, Travis Couture-Lovelady, Don Hineman and Sue Boldra, along with Sen. Larry Powell and the legislators from southwest Kansas.

Again, I thank you for the honor and privi-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

lege to serve as your representative for the former 121st District. If you ever have any issues I can help with, feel free to contact me at (785) 899-4700 or rb_rick@hotmail.com.

Richard Billinger, Goodland former state representative

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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