

Other Viewpoints

Protect the Kansas property tax break

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback's surprises just keep on coming.

Even Republican lawmakers were caught off guard last week by a proposal to do away with an income tax deduction that many Kansans use to offset property taxes they pay on their homes.

It's another bad idea aimed at burdening low- and middle-income Kansans so Brownback can pursue his unfounded and dubious theory that low income taxes are the key to the state's prosperity – not to mention Brownback's status in the national Republican Party.

We think the governor can make a case for eliminating the state's home mortgage income tax deduction, which primarily benefits higher-income taxpayers and arguably distorts the housing market. But residential property taxes are onerous in many parts of Kansas. The income tax deduction – \$125 a year for the average taxpayer – provides a small measure of relief.

If the Legislature were to approve eliminating the home mortgage and property tax deductions, someone claiming both would pay an average of \$425 more in taxes, a hefty increase.

The proposal is more evidence of the fix that Brownback and the Legislature have gotten themselves into by enacting drastic income tax cuts for some individuals and businesses without figuring out how to pay for them.

Even as he says he wants more income tax cuts as soon as 2014, Brownback is scrambling to figure out how to pay for the ones that took effect this year without cutting further into state services.

To balance next year's budget, he is counting on the Legislature to continue part of a one-cent sales tax increase that is supposed to expire in July, eliminate the mortgage deduction and use state highway funds to pay for school busing. All of that is a hard sell.

We have to wonder why Brownback continues to ignore an obvious and fair way to increase state revenues. Kansas' sales tax structure is riddled with inconsistencies. Roughly two dollars worth of sales are exempted for every dollar of sales that is taxed.

There appears to be no logical reason for why some organizations and services are exempt, and others are subject to the tax.

In his understandable quest for revenue, the governor should muster up the fortitude to slay a few sacred cows, instead of imposing an even greater burden on less-well-off Kansans who already are paying a high price for his fiscal experiments.

– *The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press*

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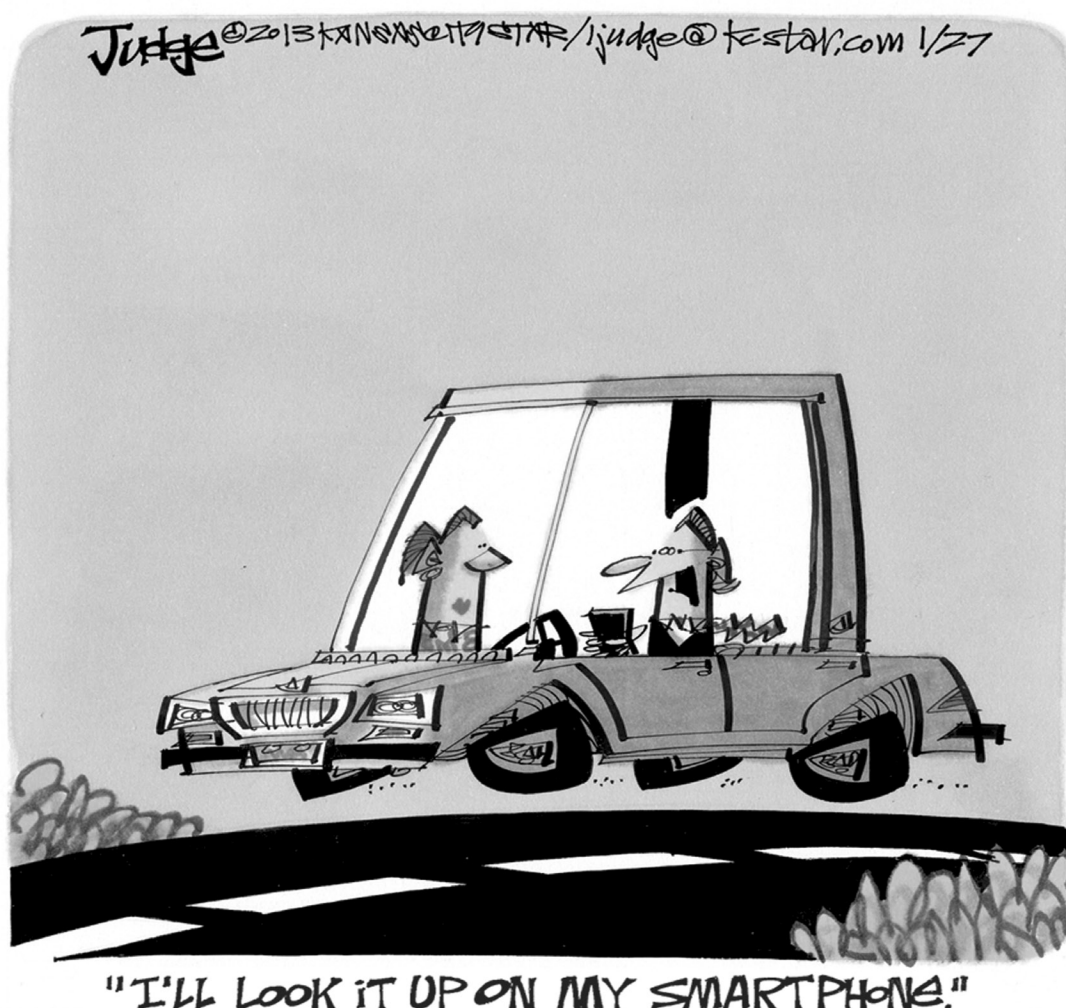
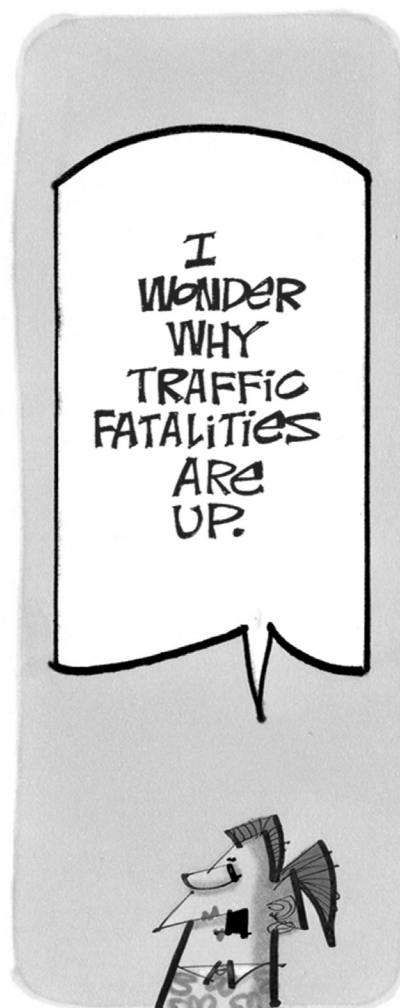
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'Cat nap' of interest to drug dog

I really didn't think much of it when the cat took up residence on my suitcase the night before I was planning to leave for a Mexican vacation.

I brought the partially-filled case downstairs last Tuesday night so that I wouldn't forget to pack my laptop computer in it the next morning. One more thing done before we had to leave at noon, I figured.

I'd have been better off if I had thought to close the suitcase, but that might not have made any difference if the cat had decided to sleep on top of the case instead of on all my neatly-folded clothes.

I'm pretty sure she knew we were leaving, and that meant that she would have to go to the vet for the next week or so, and she was taking one last chance to get close to me. Or maybe she really knew that she could cause trouble by just hanging around and getting her fur and scent all over everything. Poor humans, they have such bad noses. They just never notice anything.

Whichever it was, she spent last Tuesday night putting her stamp on my suitcase and I spent last Thursday afternoon getting a good sniffing from a drug dog.

Wednesday, we drove to Denver. Thursday morning, we flew into San Jose del Cabo, on the tip of the Baja, with our carry-ons, a big suitcase and a cooler. We've been tak-



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

ing a cooler on our annual Mexican vacation for years in case we decide to go fishing. We weren't planning to go fishing, but you never know, and the hard-sided cooler is great for hauling coffee and spices I want to use but can't find in Mexico. I always make sure everything is sealed and that there is no fresh meat, milk, fruits or vegetables to run me afoul of the inspectors.

At the Cabo airport the drug dog came by. He was a cute little thing about the size of a small beagle but the color of a dachshund. He and his handler just sort of walked along among the luggage and all the people getting their checked items off the baggage conveyor.

He made one pass through and was on his second round when he became very interested in my cooler, which was duct taped nine ways to Sunday. The dog didn't bark or get real excited. He just sniffed and sniffed and sniffed at the cooler and the red carry-on suitcase next to it.

The handler asked me nicely if she could look in the cooler.

Like I'm going to say "no." I untaped it and she checked the coffee, spices and assorted clean underwear used to keep stuff in place. She was satisfied, but the dog just kept checking both the cooler and suitcase. Something there smelled very interesting.

"Do you have pets?" the handler finally asked.

"Oh yes, cats and a dog."

Come to think of it, that was the suitcase that Molly spent the night in, and the cooler was right next to it.

She waved us on, but I had to have the cooler checked again – an agricultural inspector looking for oranges – before we escaped the airport. Coolers are just generally suspicious, I guess.

Oh well, I'm hoping the cat smell will wear off before we have to run the same gauntlet back in the U.S. But I'll probably be asked what's in the cooler.

It's OK. Whatever is in there will be legal and a fun reminder of a week in the sun. Maybe some rum, but no Cuban cigars.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Addressing gun control important

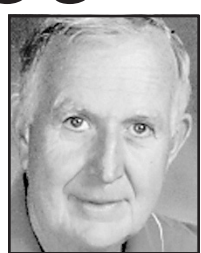
The correspondence I have been receiving this year is weighted heavily toward gun control and Medicaid. There are going to be many controversial and passionate matters that will be addressed in the 2013 Legislature. This week, I will address gun control.

The goal of legislation Kansas is looking at is to ensure that personally responsible citizens have an avenue to protect themselves without infringing on the safety and freedom of others.

In 2006, Kansas passed its first concealed-carry bill, and since then, tens of thousands of law-abiding Kansans have applied and been granted a permit. To obtain the permit, they must complete a certified firearms safety training class and fill out an application, which is reviewed by law enforcement. I myself have a concealed-carry permit.

The motivation behind this type of legislation was that we should not treat law-abiding citizens like criminals. Those who take the time to go to training and fill out the necessary paperwork are not the ones who cause trouble. In fact, to date, only 51 licenses have been revoked out of the more than 55,000 issued.

Many have said that guns should have no place in public buildings and we should keep these areas gun free. It is a point of view that



Ward Cassidy

• This week in Topeka

many share. Last year, I received many communications saying that our courthouses, schools, hospitals could not afford the security necessary if the concealed-carry signs were taken down.

The problem is without adequate security to ensure no one has a gun in a public building, it becomes irresponsible to prevent law-abiding citizens from protecting themselves. Most people can agree that a sign with a gun and a line through it does not provide adequate security.

I was a high school principal when the Columbine incident took place. Several of our area schools received threats shortly thereafter that we would be attacked. After careful consideration, I took measures to ensure that our school would be safe and that, if necessary, force would be met with force. We followed

this plan until I retired several years later. My thought – I would do anything to protect my students and staff.

At this time, I can only see the Kansas Legislature fighting to preserve the rights given to us in the Second Amendment.

On a fun note, I had the opportunity to give the Oberlin eighth-grade students and their sponsors a tour of the Capitol on Martin Luther King Day. We were the only people in the building and the students had time to ask questions and go places normal tours don't get to go. They returned the next day for a picture with the governor.

Every time I have a group from northwest Kansas, I receive compliments on their behavior, and I received several nice compliments about the Oberlin group.

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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

