



Other Viewpoints

Lawmakers wild with 'dumb' bills

State lawmakers are setting a new standard for unneeded, unfounded and legally questionable legislation.

Though every session has its dumb bills, the current Kansas Legislature has set an exhausting new standard for the introduction of legislation that would flout the feds, trample on local control and judicial review, and serve as lawsuit bait.

It's a further embarrassment that the push for some of these measures is coming from members of the Wichita-area delegation, and a mystery as to how some of the people introducing and voting for these bills can call themselves small-government conservatives.

Proposed legislation would tell courts to butt out of school funding, tell science teachers they have to spend class time on climate-change denial, and tell doctors they can't ask patients whether they own guns and that they must tell women seeking abortions the fiction that abortion is linked to breast cancer. One measure would tell Transportation Security Administration screeners which passengers' parts not to pat down in Kansas. Another bill would regulate dancing at strip clubs. There's a measure requiring communities with fluoridated water to provide residents with the bogus warning "that the latest science confirms that ingested fluoride lowers the IQ in children." Other bills would bar local governments from using public dollars to promote sustainable planning or to lobby the Legislature about anything.

The urge to meddle in public schools is especially egregious — bills would block use of the Common Core standards and require that slow readers repeat third grade, for example — given that Kansas already has a State Board of Education to make curriculum and policy decisions statewide and local school boards and superintendents to manage districts.

Of course, the poster child for bad bills may be the mandate that the University of Kansas and Kansas State University play Wichita State University annually in men's basketball.

At least Rep. Steve Brunk, R-Wichita, who introduced the anti-fluoridation bill, told the Kansas Health Institute News Service that he didn't expect it to advance and had no interest in it himself.

But other bills have strong support, unfortunately.

Lawmakers eager to pass the Second Amendment Protection Act, which supposedly could shield Kansas-made and -owned guns from federal restrictions, should heed Assistant Attorney General Charles Klebe. In written testimony, Klebe noted that "the supremacy clause of the United States Constitution cannot be waived by state law" and that barring physicians from asking patients whether they own guns raises First Amendment issues. His office also thinks the bill could cost the state \$825,000 for lawsuits over the next three years — reason enough not to pass it.

Local officials and other constituencies must be alert and ready to respond to all these proposals with facts, as they did last week at the packed hearing that apparently beat back the fearmongering bill from state Sen. Michael O'Donnell, R-Wichita, that would have told local health departments they couldn't pursue national accreditation.

But 28 days in, it's hard not to be impatient for the final gavel on what the Legislature's GOP leaders hope will be an 80-day session. While a bill's introduction hardly assures passage, Kansans will only be safe from all the unneeded, unfounded and legally questionable legislation once lawmakers have called it a year.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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Extra storm add extra adventure to trip

We spent the weekend either rushing to leave someplace or driving slow and careful, it seemed. In between, we went to meetings, did job interviews and chatted with old friends.

It was time for the Colorado Press Association convention, held every year near the end of February. Cynthia and I have been going for 32 years now, though we haven't lived in Colorado for 20. We kept going because we had made so many friends there, and I'm invited to the past president's breakfast forever.

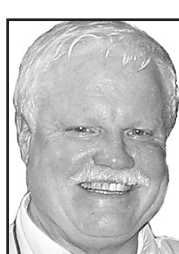
There's no parole from being a past president. You're only excused by death or infirmity.

We've never seen the time we couldn't get to Denver for this meeting, though over the weekend, I came to think maybe we should have made this year an exception. The fun started Wednesday when Cynthia started checking the forecast.

"Maybe we should get out of town ahead of the storm," she said.

We threw everything together and wolfed down some lunch. We started west with snow already filtering down, though the "main storm" wasn't to hit us until the next day. Little tendrils of snow danced across the pavement pretty much all the way to Denver.

Things went well until we got into the city. There, the interstate was snowpacked and slushy. We got off onto city streets, and that worked fine, except that we picked one that was backed up for a mile under the freeway.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

We were a little late getting downtown.

The fancy convention hotel didn't want us early unless we'd pay the regular (read expensive) rate, but some friends offered a room.

We found Internet access and worked all day. That night, we saw old friends and went out again. Next day there were meetings and seminars and interviews with college seniors. That's a vital part of the meeting for us.

Saturday, more meetings. We skipped the awards, since we didn't win anything. I was trying to take a nap — I'd had two of those nights where you wake up around 4 a.m. and, boing!, can't get back to sleep — when she decided to check the forecast again.

"Have you seen this?" she shouted.

Seems they expected a blizzard across eastern Colorado on Sunday.

"We might not get home until Monday," I said.

"Or Wednesday, if we were really lucky," she added.

But I reminded her what the hotel did to unexpected guests. Maybe we should just go

home, she said.

But we'd promised our niece we'd take her to dinner, and she was holding a lounge chair belonging to our son in Lawrence. She's in medical school, poor thing, and doesn't get out much.

So, we headed down to Parker to get her and the chair. The Garmin got us to her door. Cynthia rearranged things while Elsie and I muscled the chair down three floors of apartment stairs. And glory be, it fit in the truck.

Dinner was great, but that put us out of the city at 10 p.m., losing an hour for the time line, and gave us an estimated arrival of 2:50 a.m. The storm was spitting snow east of town, however, and we shied away from U.S. 36, since Colorado can't afford to plow or patrol the road at night.

I-70 takes a half hour longer on a good day. Actually, we made good time until we drove into this wall of fog somewhere around Flagler. Cynthia was napping when I woke her up to drive.

"Just go 50," I said. "We'll get there someday."

And we did. At 3:50, an hour late and who knows how many hours tired.

Next time, I'm going to suggest we stay home. I'd say go to Arizona, but we'd have to drive to Denver to catch a plane.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

High taxes just business as usual

Taxes have always been a controversial issue in America.

Colonists dumping tea into Boston Harbor to protest British duties is one of the defining events of America's birth. Colonists were not necessarily protesting all taxes, but they resented and opposed a far-off king and Parliament imposing taxes on them: "No taxation without representation."

Many of these same protesting colonists, our Founding Fathers, maintained their same concern about an all-too-powerful federal government, and wrote a Constitution that permitted only the House — the direct representatives of the American people — to raise taxes or revenue. In a nation that valued freedom over the power of the state, it was supposed to be a big deal to raise taxes.

It still is, and it still should be. But for some in Washington, raising taxes is seen as no big deal.

With the passage of the "fiscal cliff deal" last month (which I opposed), 77 percent of all American households saw taxes on their incomes increase. Paychecks shrank for all workers as the Social Security tax holiday was not renewed. And, for many family farms and other small businesses, the President's tax-in-



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

crease agenda will hamper their ability to hire new employees, invest in equipment and pay for employee health care. The so-called tax on the rich pushed by Obama will trap many a Main Street business here in Kansas — taxing more of the owners' incomes now and more of their estates later.

This February marks the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 16th Amendment, which allowed Congress to tax individual income directly. Except during the Civil War — when an income tax was levied to pay for Union efforts — taxes were not imposed on wages and earnings. In fact, prior to the 1913 Amendment, a flat income tax had not passed constitutional muster.

While it is unlikely that the 16th Amendment will be abandoned, there is no reason why we have to continue suffering under the

current complicated and convoluted system. When it takes Americans more than six billion hours to prepare their taxes and at a cost to them of \$168 billion, we have a problem.

A tax code with 4 million words is destructive and full of danger; the complexity has negative economic impacts, is ripe for political favoritism and cronyism, and even an unintentional mistake may invite penalties and fines.

We can and must simplify the tax code to make it fairer, flatter and smarter. Doing so not only lessens the burden on individuals, families and businesses, but might also address the challenges we have with revenue shortfalls.

Make no mistake, the problem in Washington is still that we spend too much. But cleaning up a messy web of deductions, credits, exemptions — and reducing tax rates — would certainly create a pro-growth economic environment that benefits everyone, not just large businesses like GE or billionaires like Warren Buffett who can afford legions of lawyers and accountants to avoid taxes other Americans must pay.

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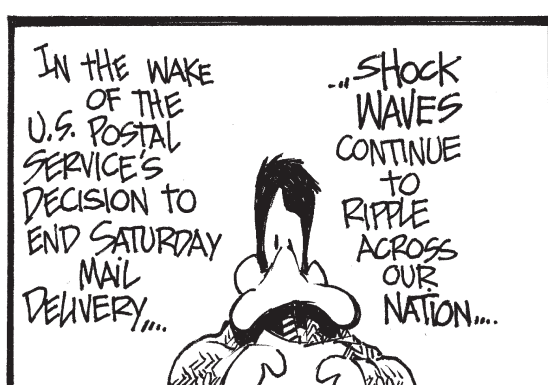
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