

Free Press Viewpoint

Legislative issues sidestep tax mess

There is one thing the Kansas Legislature must do before it adjourns "sine die," and that is to fix the state's tax system so it works as intended.

The 2012 Legislature left the system in a terrible mess. It adopted income-tax cuts proposed by Gov. Sam Brownback but not the corresponding adjustments – such as eliminating some tax deductions, or loopholes, and retaining the state's sales tax at 6.3 percent.

With the balancing moves, the state would have enough money to finance its current spare budget. Without them, experts project a \$267 million "shortfall" in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Everyone agreed on the problem, but no one could agree on how to plug that hole. The Senate passed a tax plan believing the House would agree to a conference committee to hash out the shortage, but that didn't happen. The governor signed the bill, apparently feeling the Legislature would have to come to its senses.

So far this year, however, there's been no change in the mood of either chamber. The House is reluctant to keep the higher sales tax. The rate is now 6.3 percent, but is scheduled to drop to 5.8 percent. House members say voters were promised the sales tax passed under Gov. Mark Parkinson during the Great Recession would be temporary. They still seem to feel that way.

The Senate, like the House, now is controlled by conservative allies of the governor, and in theory, he should be calling the shots. From here, however, the members of both chambers seem to be a lot more independent than critics claim. Getting them together could be a real trick.

And while we're comfortable with the current level of state spending, hardly anyone thinks another \$267 million in cuts won't hurt.

Compromise? So far, no one is talking about it. We think, however, that's what voters would like to see. And we're not real picky about how it's done. Right now, public schools are nervous, universities are sweating another round of cuts, the highway fund has been robbed twice already and advocates for the disabled, mental-health care and prisons, and a host of others are clamoring for more money.

A combination of retaining some sales tax and adjusting some tax rates makes sense. The governor has pinned a lot of his hopes on his plan to eliminate the income tax, but even he did not plan to do it this year. With a big start made, there's no hurry to polish it off – at least not for most of us.

Better to adopt a sensible plan, than wait a year or two and see how things go.

Sensible. Legislature. Governor.

That may be asking for a lot, but we think it's vital to the state's future. — Steve Haynes

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters.



Weird spring confuses her blossoms

It's been a weird spring. If you don't believe me, check with my daffodils.

The poor flowers came up all ready to bloom and be beautiful in the bright spring sun.

Then it rained. Fine; daffodils love rain.

Then it snowed. OK, daffodils can take a little cool weather and some snow isn't too bad.

Then it went down into the 20s for two days and two nights. Not so good. Daffodils can take some freezing weather, but they don't like lots of it.

But, amazingly, when the weather warmed up and the snow melted, the flowers looked as good or better than they did before.

Then it snowed but it didn't get so cold.

My flowers are starting to think twice now. The daffodils are fading and the tulips are budding out. Several neighbors have gorgeous tulips, arrays of reds, pinks and yellows.

But it's raining again and they said snow is on the way.

I was out about noon Monday and the temperature was 46 with a brisk breeze. By 1:30 p.m., the thermometer had fallen to 37 and that



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

brisk breeze was a cold, bone-chilling wind. I ran home and traded in my sweatshirt for my winter coat.

Dang, I wish the weather would make up its mind. And I especially wish it would decide to be spring.

I've spent a lot of time running my winter clothes up and down the stairs. My old house doesn't have enough closet space to hold one season, let alone two or three. I keep thinking that spring is here, so I get out my short-sleeved tops and sandals. Then it snows and I have to go back down the basement and grab the sweaters and boots.

The only advantage is that I'm getting my

exercise when I can't go outside because of the bad weather.

Then there's my poor, confused garden.

I put my lettuce, radishes and spinach in the ground a week ago. On Sunday, I planted peas. All these plants can take a good deal of cool and even some cold weather. However, as Steve keeps pointing out, nothing is going to stick its little head above the ground when the soil temperatures are so low.

Somewhere, I came upon this quote from Mark Twain and I'd say that he knew what he was talking about:

"In the spring, I have counted 136 different kinds of weather inside of 24 hours."

I didn't even realize that the great humorist had ever lived in Kansas. He sure did nail the weather around here.

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@nwkansan.com

Where were the inspectors in Texas?

To the Editor:

I just finished reading about the fertilizer plant that exploded near Waco, Texas. As many as 15 people died in the blast and more than 160 were injured. Do you suppose this tragedy might have been prevented if the Occupational Health and Safety Administration would have inspected the fertilizer plant more recently than 28 years ago?

I'm betting that if those 15 people had died from gunshots, our government would be on the case like a duck on a June bug.



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

Those in the government are too busy playing politics with each other and the American

people, writing gun-control laws that either have no meaning or can't be enforced, to enforce existing laws that could have saved the lives of 15 innocent human beings.

I am holding our government responsible for the explosion in Texas and the subsequent losses. It's evident that the employees of this agency are not doing what they were hired to do and should be taken off the payroll of our morally and financially bankrupt government.

Mel Fry Jr., Colby

Stay in touch; skip the spam

I would like to thank everyone who contacted me during the session this year. The input from 120th District constituents is important to me.

On many issues, I hear both sides, but it helps me get a feel for how northwest Kansas wants to be represented. I have answered each e-mail received from our district, if it's not a form letter. I try to answer the day I receive the contact.

Receiving hundreds of form e-mails from a lobbying group really does no good, as every legislator I know simply deletes them. The other e-mail concern is when a response is forwarded to a lobbying group.

A few updates on some of the major areas that I received contacts:

Judiciary – the governor signed into law a bill granting Kansas governors greater influence over selection of judges to serve on the Kansas Court of Appeals. The federal model will enable governors to nominate judges for vacancies, pending confirmation by the State Senate. The governor advocated for a move away from a nominating commission that he felt gave too much influence to lawyers.

The Senate approved a state constitutional amendment that would apply the same process to the Kansas Supreme Court. The House did not vote on the measure. It could be considered in the 2014 session in time to place the issue on ballots next year.



Ward Cassidy

• This week in Topeka

Kansas Public Employees Retirement System – the House, but not the Senate, advanced a bill that would authorize sale of \$1.5 billion in bonds with money invested in the pension system to cover the anticipated \$9 billion shortfall between pensions promised members and what the system projected to generate in revenue over the next 10 years.

Liquor – all the talk did not produce a bill again this session. The session began with a huge push from large grocery and retail shopping interests to alter Kansas law blocking them from selling wine and liquor. Under current state law, those beverages are the domain of individual retail liquor stores.

Over the next two weeks, I will highlight education, gun laws and other legislation of interest.

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 Deca-

tur, 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.

Where to write, call

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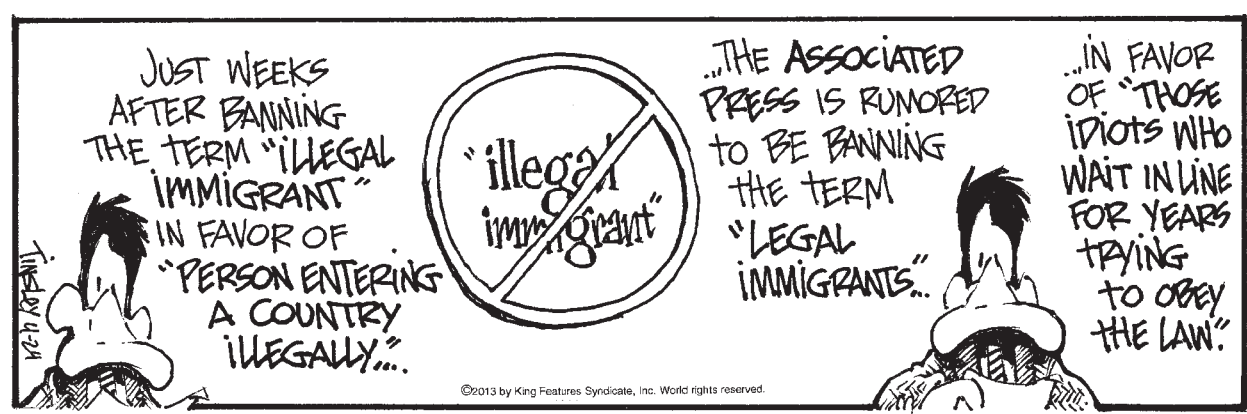
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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