



Free Press Viewpoint

Taxpayers skipped by 'public' lobbyist

A bill in the Kansas Senate this year that would have prohibited lobbying by public agencies and local government apparently has gone nowhere fast.

While there are interesting arguments on both sides of this issue, it's hard to believe that lobbyists from cities, counties and school districts always represent the interests of "their constituents" when they gather at the Statehouse.

They represent the interests of their employers and/or members as public officials and public agencies, and that can be far different.

Public officials often want to spend more taxpayer money, for one thing, and their constituents may or may not agree with that. But when a city or county hires a lobbyist to argue for the ability to spend more on something, or make it easier to borrow money or raise taxes, there's usually no consulting the voters first.

In fact, the taxpayers' interests seldom come to the fore in these discussions — and may be diametrically opposed to the interests of public officials.

A lot of public-agency or local-government lobbying is conducted by associations which owe no allegiance to the voters. These associations, and their staffs, are beholden only to the municipal, county and school officials who elect them and hire them and keep them in office.

Their interest is in keeping their jobs and representing their constituents, the public officials who pay and hire them.

That doesn't make these groups bad per se, but it doesn't make them representatives of the voters, either. And while you'd think the legislators themselves would represent the voters, many of them are former city, county and school officials who see things much the same way these groups do.

When the lobbyists for local government come to the Capitol seeking a change in state law or to block a bill that might make it more difficult to raise taxes, it's hard to see them as representing taxpayers.

The same goes for state agencies that try to influence legislation. The Department of Revenue, say, may have an interest in increasing the tax take by changing certain rules. Who represents the taxpayers then?

Another thing local-government associations often want is more secrecy. These groups typically oppose changes in open meetings and open records acts to make information more accessible to taxpayers. They push to ease requirements for publication of public documents, reports on public spending and the like, and back proposals to allow local government to hide their "publications" on obscure city or county websites.

Voters pretty clearly need and want more information, not less, and these "public" lobbyists are not representing them in Topeka when they do this.

The idea of SB 109, which would have banned use of any public money to lobby the Legislature, may seem a little harsh, but in the current system, taxpayers' needs generally get lost among the wants and desires of their elected officials.

Democracy is best served by open government, a free flow of information and a regard for the voters' and taxpayers' interest that is largely lacking when local governments spend taxpayer money to lobby. It's a system that should be changed.

There should be severe limits on how a government agency can spend money taken from taxpayers in ways they may not approve. — *Steve Haynes*

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The TEA PARTY

Extra bacon spices up the daily grind

Steve's sister and brother-in-law gave us bacon for Christmas.

This was a great gift. We really love bacon, especially from the small meat-packing plant they get it at in Emporia. And, besides food is a wonderful gift that you never have to dust or worry about what to do with it — you eat it, or take it to work and let everyone else eat it.

We gave them a ham for Christmas. I'm pretty sure they ate it.

Anyway, we ate a lot of the bacon, but they gave a whole lot of bacon, and some of it was really thick cut, like a quarter-inch thick cut, like pie-dough thickness cut. Little sister said to just cook it longer. That's what I was planning to do, but then I got another idea.

Back in the summertime, when we were in Colorado, I bought some sausage a cousin of mine made at his grocery. He called it baconlicious. And it was. He mixes bacon with his traditional sausage mixture and the result is really, really yummy.

I brought several pounds home, but by February, it was all a long-ago memory and here I was with all this wonderful thick-cut bacon. Maybe, I thought, I could make some baconlicious sausage of my own.

Now as much as I love my cousin's baconlicious sausage, his regular sausage isn't nearly



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

as good as what they make at the local grocery. So I trotted down to Raye's and bought several pounds of their best homemade sausage and froze it down.

It took a month or so to get around to finding the time and assembling all the pieces needed to make my sausage.

My mixer has a meat-grinder attachment. In the 30 or so years I've had it, I've never used that piece. In fact, I've got all kinds of parts to that mixer, from dough hooks to a food processor, that I've never used.

It took a little while to figure out how everything went together, especially since the meat grinder goes on just opposite of how the mixer sits on the motor housing.

Eventually, I got it all figured out. Now I just had to decide what proportion of bacon to sausage I needed. I eventually decided that a 1-to-2 ratio of bacon to sausage would be best,

since I wasn't adding any extra seasonings and I didn't want the bacon to completely overshadow the wonderful sausage flavor.

I ended up with about three pounds of funky looking meat which I carefully mixed together and made into patties.

Then I fried all of them up, setting all but one aside for later.

I got rid of most of the grease in the skillet, added two packages of sausage gravy mix, plus the required milk and water, and crumbled my saved patty into the pan. Soon I had biscuits and gravy on the table for supper and 15 cooked baconlicious patties in the freezer for breakfasts.

They were all gone within a couple of weeks. After all they were baconlicious, too.

Next time, I may have to buy my own bacon. Or maybe, if I talked right to Steve's sister, she'd get some in return for a cut of the product.

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

Governing by extortion destroys freedom

Merriam-Webster defines extortion as the "...exaction of money or property through intimidation or undue exercise of authority."

It's illegal for individuals or corporations to engage in extortion, but some governments are increasingly using forms of extortion to exact higher taxes, make citizens more dependent upon government and ultimately, strip away economic and political freedom.

Government intimidation may not come with Soprano-like threats of violence. Some government officials may not even realize they are extorting the populous — the practice of presenting the government solution as the only option has become that commonplace. But no matter how politely or subtly phrased, the message is "give us what we want or else..." The "or else" comes in many forms.

The federal government punishes citizens with flight delays and service cuts to senior citizens while continuing to lavish taxpayer money on favored political friends and countless other examples of waste and duplication. The federal government will either get to borrow and spend as much as it wants or innocent citizens will pay the price.

Some state officials in Kansas want to extend a temporary sales tax and/or take away deductions for home mortgage interest and property taxes. They say it's necessary to avoid massive budget deficits that would de-fund schools and services. The message is that higher taxes are the only alternative, when in fact they could

Other Opinions

• **Dave Trabert**
Kansas Policy Inst.

choose to bring down the cost of government services and stop giving out corporate welfare in the name of economic development.

University officials in Kansas say they will raise tuition, eliminate professors and restrict student admissions if state aid is even slightly reduced. They say nothing of reducing administrative costs that rose three times faster than inflation or using large cash reserves that accumulated from a 137 percent increase in tuition and fees over the last 10 years. Give them what they want or students, parents and staff will suffer.

Local governments routinely tell citizens that taxes must be increased to avoid police and fire layoffs, pool closings and other direct service reductions. Why not consolidate overlapping government programs and bureaucracy instead of raising taxes? Or maybe stop giving taxpayer money away to friendly developers who support the growth of government and help underwrite campaigns for public office?

Our state and nation were founded on the

principles of freedom and limited government. Yet those who stand in defense of freedom are often met with ridicule. The Mayor of Wichita recently issued a thinly veiled threat to sue a woman for asking him to recuse himself from a vote to give a \$700,000 sales tax exemption to a campaign contributor (and fishing buddy). A columnist for the *Hutchinson News* falsely blamed those who want less government intrusion in our lives for poverty, high property taxes and other woes as opposed to following his prescription for progressive, big government solutions.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Government exists for the interests of the governed, not for the governors." Some in our state seems to have forgotten that and are working to prove another of his maxims, "The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground."

Citizens must be persistent and vocal in reminding elected officials of the former or we shall continue to suffer the loss of liberty.

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