



Other Viewpoints

No one wins in state's budget

It has been suggested by some that adjournment was the best thing to come out of the 2013 Legislature. That assessment is premature – although legislators have finished for the year, they haven't yet returned to Topeka for the official adjournment – and overlooks the fact the Legislature adopted a budget that reduces state spending.

The two-year spending plan legislators sent to Gov. Sam Brownback for his signature reduced spending by \$200 million in fiscal year 2014, which begins July 1. Expenditures are projected to increase \$250 million the following year under the two-year blueprint, but there is time enough to address that issue.

The most important thing governments at all levels can do is reduce their spending. Increased government spending at all levels takes a toll on taxpayers that cannot be sustained over the long haul if the goal is an economy with a thriving private sector.

That said, it should be noted a 1-cent increase in the state's sales tax that had been scheduled to sunset at the end of this month has been dimmed somewhat but still shines brightly. The increase, adopted under a previous administration, raised the state's sales tax to 6.3 percent. It was to fall to 5.7 percent at the end of the current fiscal year.

After a prolonged tussle – Gov. Sam Brownback wanted to hold the tax at 6.3 percent, many legislators wanted to go to 5.7 percent as scheduled and others sought a compromise somewhere in between – majorities in the Senate and House finally agreed on setting the sales tax rate at 6.15 percent.

That was a deal that many would say should have been made during the 90-day regular session, but an overtime period that stretched into its second week was needed before enough legislators realized compromise was necessary.

Brownback noted, correctly, late in the session that nobody gets everything they want.

That is especially true for those government agencies and functions that will take the hardest hits – among them are higher education and the Kansas Department of Corrections – as spending falls for the state's 2014 fiscal year.

It's too late now to debate whether those were the best places to economize. Someone is always unhappy when budget allocations fall short of expectations.

Those who are unhappy should note that the Kansas Department of Transportation's highway funds were raided for another \$300 million to support the state general fund, a practice that has to stop soon.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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Sunny yellow invaders have inside track

I really hate dandelions! They take over my yard, turning my lush, green grass carpet into a sea of yellow. I was sure the problem must be some neighbor. The dandelions from their yards must blow onto mine. I was positive that had to be the case because I had meticulously dug out every one of the dastardly weeds. I loaded on weed-and-feed, heavy on the anti-weed formula. I thought that would take care of the problem, and my yard was great for a while, but then the little yellow aliens appeared again.

I pulled out my weed sprayer. I meant business this time. I loaded in the herbicide, doubling its strength. It was strong enough to knock down an oak at fifty paces. I went around the yard, spraying anything that had any resemblance to a dandelion, or any coloration close to yellow on the light spectrum. I sprayed with enough spray that if they didn't die from the poison, they would surely drown. I sprayed a swath a foot in diameter around them. I was determined to make an example out of any dandelions that came near my yard.

My yard looked good – good of course meaning everywhere except the brown circles where I sprayed the dandelions. But then, in about a month, they were back again. I could swear they were not only back, but they had come back with more ferociousness than before. They were everywhere.

I launched an all-out assault, even spraying along the roads and along all of the neighbor's

Other Opinions

Daris Howard Outtakes

property lines. It was all my wife could do to keep me from spraying the neighbors' lawns. You've heard of the mysterious alien crop circles? Well, this would be the case of the not-so-mysterious lawn circles. Everything looked good, at least everything that had survived the onslaught and wasn't brown. Then, in a month, there they were again, multiplied exponentially from the days past.

I couldn't believe it, I had done everything I could think of, outside of enclosing my whole yard inside a building. I was just about to consider artificial turf when I had a revelation.

In all my frustration, I walked out, and there was my four-year-old. She had two handfuls of snowy white, very ripe, dandelions. She would walk around the yard, and then she would whirl around like a ballerina and watch the vivacious little seeds swirl into the lawn all around her. When all the seeds were gone from the stems, she would throw them down and walk out across the neighbor's field, bring back some more, and do it again and again.

Trying to be the tactful father I am supposed to be, I swallowed the frustration out of my voice as I asked her what she was doing. She grinned. "I'm planting you flowers."

"Planting me flowers?"

"Yes. Every time I go to pick you some, the ones in our yard have died and turned brown, so I have to go a long ways to get some to re-plant them. I have to keep going farther and farther. But don't worry Daddy, I will always have some for you."

Suddenly my heart felt funny as I inquired further. "Why do you want to plant them for me?"

"Because," she said as she hugged me, "God named them 'Daddy Lions' after you, so I could show you I love you."

With that she pulled a handful of smashed, yellow flowers from her pocket and showed them to me. "Aren't Daddy Lions pretty?"

"Yes, sweet heart, Daddy Lions are pretty." With that, she skipped inside to put her little treasures in a cup of water.

You know what? Dandelions add so much to a lawn. I can't imagine why anyone would ever want to get rid of them.

Daris Howard, award-winning, syndicated columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at daris@darishoward.com; or go to his website at www.darishoward.com.

China's space program an American tale

On June 11, 2013, China launched Shenzhou 10, its tenth mission since it began its manned space program ten years ago on Oct. 15, 2003. And if you are thinking – similar to our foot-in-the-mouth Vice President Biden, that China just copies Western technology – well, think again.

China's rockets are of a unique design. Unlike the straight-arrow U.S. rockets or the Russian design that looks like the buttress of a tree, China's rockets go up with a series of four firecracker-like engines around the base. It is the unique design of Tsien Hsueh-hsen, "China's Werner von Braun."

How he came to head China's space program is a sad American tragedy that you can read in American journalist Iris Chang's biography: "Thread of the Silkworm."

Tsien was a brilliant young student from Republican-era [pre-Communist] China who won a scholarship to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. When his classmates thought their physics test was too hard and stormed up to the professor's office to complain, the professor had posted Tsien's perfect paper on his office door.

Tsien completed his doctorate at CalTech and was the World War II U.S. military officer sent to Germany to help U.S. scientists decide whether to bring back vonBraun and his team. Tsien held the Goddard Chair at our new Jet Propulsion Laboratory. In the midst of all of this success, he married the daughter of a Nationalist China Kuomintang official and had two children.

Then his life was turned upside down by the stupidity and fear-mongering that can only come from Washington. It was 1950 and the beginning of the McCarthy era witch-hunts that destroyed many scientists' careers.



John Richard Schrock

Education Frontlines

They mistook math table books for code books. Tsien was placed under house arrest in California for five years as a suspected Communist – something he was not.

In 1955, he and his family were deported to a now-Communist China. Premier Chou En-lai was eager to get him. Abandoned and scorned by the America he loved, Tsien had no other opportunity to use his talent. He became the father of China's rocket systems: the East Wind, the notoriously effective Silkworm, and their early ICBM's that were scaled up to become the 2003 boosters.

China did not have to borrow from anyone. China had a parallel program because we gave them their best rocket scientist. Tsien died in October of 2009. He got to see the next generation of his rockets launch China into manned orbit.

The Chinese public here is giddy and proud. They watch with as much excitement as Americans watched Walter Cronkite describe our Kennedy-era launches. China is committed to a space station, a manned moon landing and base, and even extending that mission to Mars. The role of a national space program in motivating a public cannot be overestimated.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has decided to privatize some of our space efforts, and no one cheers on "Go, Space-X" or any other corporation. But we will still be paying the

bill. Our astronauts are hitching rides on Russian rockets. And the Russians are looking to downsize to unmanned missions.

Meanwhile, Japan and South Korea and India are gearing up their space programs, although China's is far in the lead and ten times larger than South Korea's efforts. China has moved its launch pads to Hainan Island in the south in order to get more "throw" for each launch (a handicap the more northern Russians have always faced). A woman Chinese astronaut on this 15-day flight will broadcast physics lessons to Chinese students from in orbit.

The American student who today wants to pursue a career in space might well consider adding an Asian language minor to their degree.

Tsien Hsueh-hsen left one legacy that we have yet to exploit. With Tsien's experience at MIT and CalTech, and then his experience getting research done as head of China's space program, he became very critical of the Chinese educational system and spoke up in the last days of his life. Former Premier Wen Jiaobao reported this general criticism from their discussion – but never revealed the details.

I suspect that his criticism involves China's need to get off of teaching-to-the-test memorization and adopt more questioning; a process they are beginning. If that is the case, for America (a country that is abandoning questioning for teaching-to-the-test), his wisdom could still save our educational system as well.

John Richard Schrock, currently in west-central China, is a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college and lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

Bruce Tinsley

