

commentary

from our viewpoint...

Forces build pressure for state to raise taxes

Powerful forces are building momentum in Kansas to raise taxes and keep state government going.

It's too early to tell what will happen in the Legislature, but there is no doubt that the state faces a fiscal crunch.

All through Bill Graves' first term, the governor and the Legislature cut taxes each year. Times were good and the money just seemed to roll in.

Then came the realization they had cut taxes more than anyone thought. Too much, some said. Not enough, conservatives cried.

No matter; the antitax crowd was firmly in control of the Legislature. Through two tight years, hardly a cent has stirred.

This year could be different. In addition to the usual forces pushing for more spending — social services, school boards, the teachers' union, state employees, colleges — whole new lobbies have been created.

And the crunch will be more severe this time. The governor has told all agencies to trim their budgets. Millions in highway projects have been scrapped. Schools don't know whether to expect any increase, not even the minimal amount they got last year. KBI agents have been ordered to limit driving to 1,000 miles a month, and there is little or no hiring.

The players are cranking up the pressure. At least two groups have been formed to pressure legislators to approve school spending and tax hikes. They say they want to put kids first, but of course, kids won't get the money.

Universities have announced steep tuition hikes. Social service can claim more money as "entitlements," even if the state has less. Federal law requires the state to offer welfare programs to anyone who qualifies. And with the economy down, a lot more people will be looking for help.

The governor has said he wants a tax increase to take the edge of the cuts. He doesn't think you can raise them enough to prevent any cuts.

Whether the new and old lobbies combined can generate enough pressure for an increase is anybody's guess right now. The same old players will be making the decisions in the Legislature, but the key to the new pressure is the threat of campaigning against those who don't "back the kids."

For now, looking at the forces arrayed for the battle, we'll say a tax increase is no more than even money.

And even money would make a lot of people pretty happy this year.

—Steve Haynes

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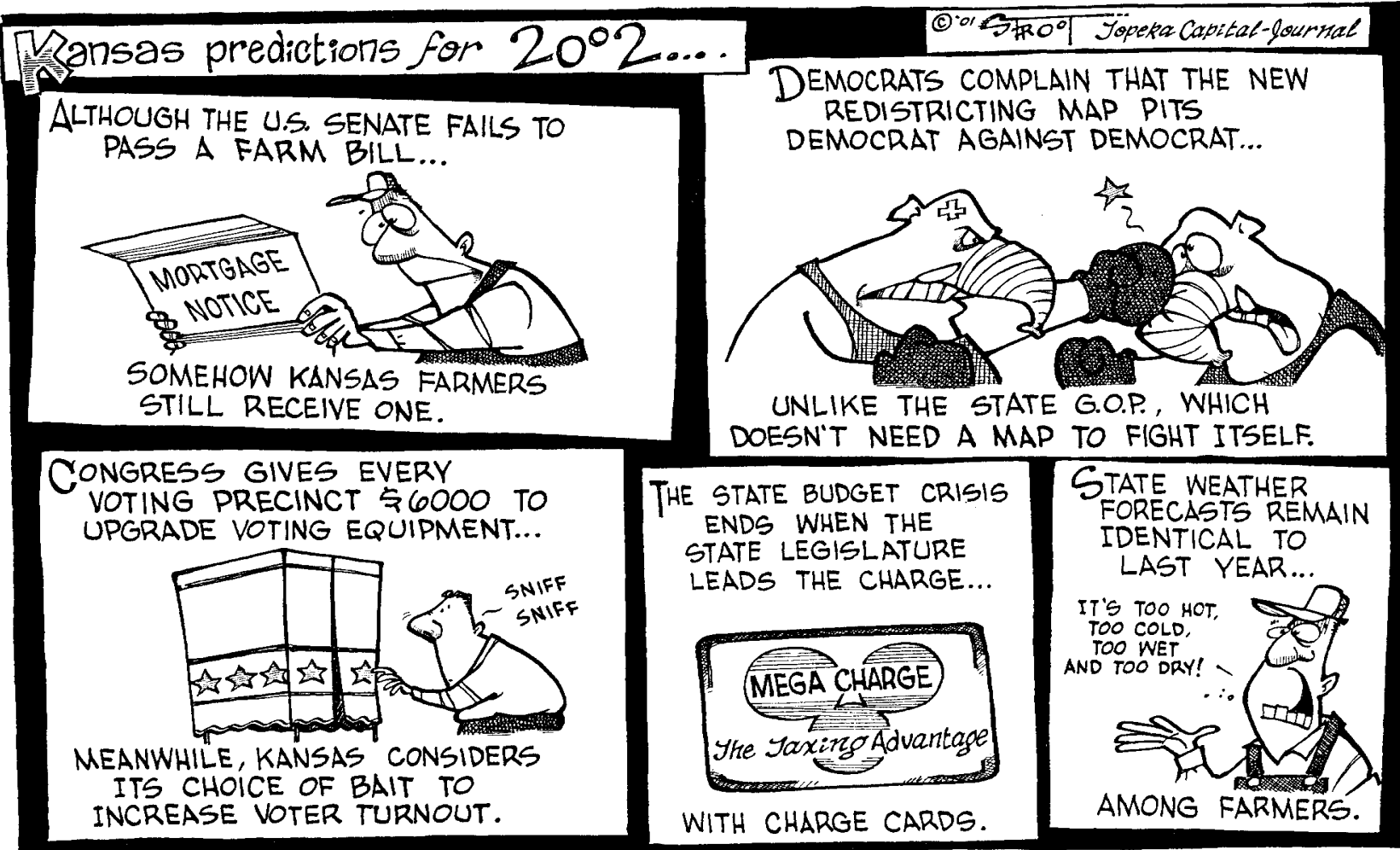
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Remembering the wonderment of Christmas

I don't know about you, but this Christmas I'm wondering. But my wondering is so much different than when I was a child.

I still remember that wonderful kind of wonder. Everything about Christmas was mysterious. The pretty lights and ready smiles seemed to make the season exciting and special.

Even as a child, I knew Christmas was first and foremost a celebration of the birth of God's Son. We would sing Christmas carols at church, at home and at school. We would read the Christmas story, and each time it seemed new and different.

I wondered if I'd get something wonderful for Christmas. That was often clothes which I appreciated; we usually didn't get clothes except when we outgrew something. We expected to receive a gift or two, but we never knew what it would be. Of course we expressed desires, but would never have dreamed of making out elaborate and lengthy lists. Then, parents chose what was appropriate. Not having a clue as to what might be received was part of the wonder.

Sometimes, Christmases brought unexpected surprises. And sometimes, they didn't. I remember some Christmases as just bowls full of candy and nuts and then jigsaw puzzles with the family putting them together — together — over and over



lorna g. t.

• commentary

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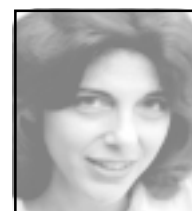
We were happy to be snuggled in out of the cold, able to spend time together. We weren't enticed by TV ads or after-Christmas sales. I don't know for sure, but I'd guess the only theatre in town was closed for Christmas Day.

But there was always "wonder." There was a building of excitement and hushed whisperings. I couldn't wait for Christmas morning. It never occurred to me to snoop in my parents room or closet to see if they were hiding gifts.

There was no chance to cheat or even shake the boxes; there weren't ever any gifts under the tree until Santa came. That Santa could pull off such a miraculous feat as getting into every home in one night added to the wonder.

Family members made heroic efforts to be together at least for one meal during the season. We wanted to be together. Grandparents, aunts &

A tale of two exhibitions



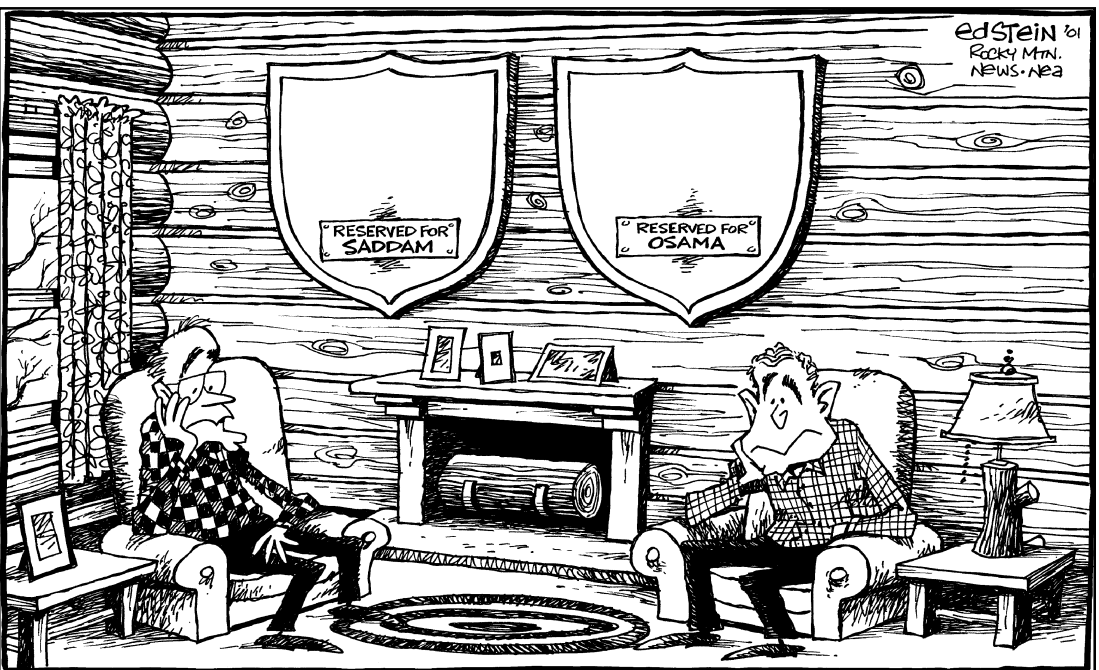
diana west

• commentary

mundane and easily ignored corner. How this ties in with what is described as the "political, social and cultural turmoil of the 1960s" is not immediately clear. Of course, it gets no clearer later, either. The catalog tries to be helpful, in its way, explaining that the video image of the corner may also "be understood as an implicit critique of the institution of the museum and gallery, as well as of conventions of art presentation."

To what end? Don't ask. It seems that the "artist's" use of what the catalog calls "neglected locations" — you know, corners, floors, broom closets — rejects "traditional hierarchies of value (such as the pedestal and the frame)." Got to watch those pedestals and the frames: No doubt they're in leagues with the Western patriarchal whatsis, if not the vast, right-wing conspiracy.

Anastasi, meanwhile, is said to be responsible for another video sculpture of ... a wall socket. This particular artwork, alas, is not on display, so there is no word on which traditional hierarchy the artist has implicitly rejected this time (desk lamp? blender?). The fact is, while such "sculptures" are made from the most accessible and easily understood media in existence — film and video — they are totally senseless without explication. They are also totally senseless with explication. They are, in fact, totally senseless. Nevertheless, the arts mainstream — the avant garde has gotten so crowded it qualifies as a mainstream — insists they are a kind of art.



uncles, and cousins were invited to be with us. (And we didn't expect gifts from them.) We didn't struggle with scheduling as modern families do. There weren't broken families, stepparents and extra grandparents to consider, visitation rights, two parents working, day care schedules, etc. We knew who we were and to whom we belonged — both as members of a family and as children of God. We knew we were loved and wanted. And that made Christmas special.

But then, those are my memories. And tonight I'm wondering how many people of that time don't have the same kind of memories I have. I regret they might not; my memories sustain me when modern times and reality crowd in too closely. And I'm also wondering what kind of memories this current, more materialistic generation will have.

I love my memories. I remember the times together much more than the gifts I did (or didn't) receive. Somehow I knew that every Christmas was as it should be — as much as my parents could give.

Only later did I fully appreciate the sacrifices they made to give what they did. Tonight I'm wondering if they ever knew how much I loved them, how much I still do.

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So be it. Worth noting, though, is that there is no such consensus on another exhibition farther uptown at the Guggenheim Museum. There, on a different day, my companions and I take in the Norman Rockwell traveling show, now ending its run with a stint at what has always been thought of as a temple to abstract art. Now, amid a genuine, if limited, surge of art world interest in the Rockwell oeuvre as "art," not "illustration," huge crowds are filling the museum's Robert Mapplethorpe Gallery (of all places) to see dozens of Rockwell's tableaux. After Sept. 11, these museum-goers look through eyes less jaundiced against Rockwellian themes of national community.

As a preternaturally gifted painter of anecdote and illustration, Rockwell tells folkloric, often humorous tales of the common American man with an unmistakable clarity — too unmistakable for some people (for a lot of people) who regard him only as a commercial artist for an illustrative style that leaves little, if anything, to the imagination. No Fluxus-inflected implications here. But like him or not (or, even as I do, like a good deal of his work, but not all), it seems capricious to deny this one painter a foothold in a seemingly boundless art world, one that finds a corner for just about anything — even video sculpture.

Diana West is a columnist and editorial writer for The Washington Times. She can be contacted via dwest@washingtontimes.com.

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