

commentary

from other pens...

Cold weather rule, making it fair for all

The Manhattan Mercury on cold weather rule:

The Kansas Corporation Commission will have a tough challenge when members begin rewriting the so-called "cold weather rule."

That's the policy that prevents utility companies from disconnecting gas and electricity service between Nov. 1 and March 31 for customers who haven't paid their bills.

The challenge will be preventing utility cutoffs for people who are poor and who do the best they can to pay their bills while making sure the utility companies aren't being ripped off by people exploiting a well-intended rule...

Indeed, the KCC agreed to consider rewriting the cold-weather rule after turning down a request from Kansas Gas Service to require customers to pay their outstanding balance before receiving winter gas service...

The rule isn't the main problem, though utility company frustration is understandable. Customers now are required to pay just one-twelfth of their balance (slightly more than 8 percent) to get reconnected... Utilities and KCC staff consider 15 percent or more a fairer figure...

Citizens Utility Ratepayers Board (CURB) is right to insist that any proposal to change the rule distinguish between people who are content to exploit the system and those who are poor and who pay what they can.

If the KCC errs, it must be in keeping honest people warm, even if that means a few folks who deserve a dose of cold reality slip in.

The Garden City Telegram on the Legislature's inactions

With all the talk during the legislative session about the money crunch, you'd think lawmakers would be diligent and prudent when it comes to spending on themselves. Not so.

Because the Legislature didn't get its work done in the prescribed amount of time, they'll be heading back to Topeka to work overtime. The 11-day wrap-up session will cost taxpayers nearly \$300,000 in legislative salaries and expense reimbursements.

One lawmaker, Lynn Jenkins, R-Shawnee, says she won't accept her paycheck for the wrap-up session. It's a modest gesture and one that the rest of the legislative body should adopt. Why reward tardiness?

The Legislature is going to get paid for working the overtime it created itself by not getting its work done on time...

Children look to adults and will learn from what they see. They'll pick up on the values adults exhibit.

They're taught to look to their elected officials as leaders, people to emulate. That's how politicians posture themselves when carrying votes.

But alas, we've seen myriad examples to underscore the necessity to not put politicians on a pedestal.

Maybe Jenkins can serve as a beacon of light for the those who want to find virtue in an elected representative.

By forgoing her paycheck, she sends a positive signal to her constituents, indeed all Kansans, that lawmakers shouldn't exacerbate a problem they've been elected to solve.

where to write

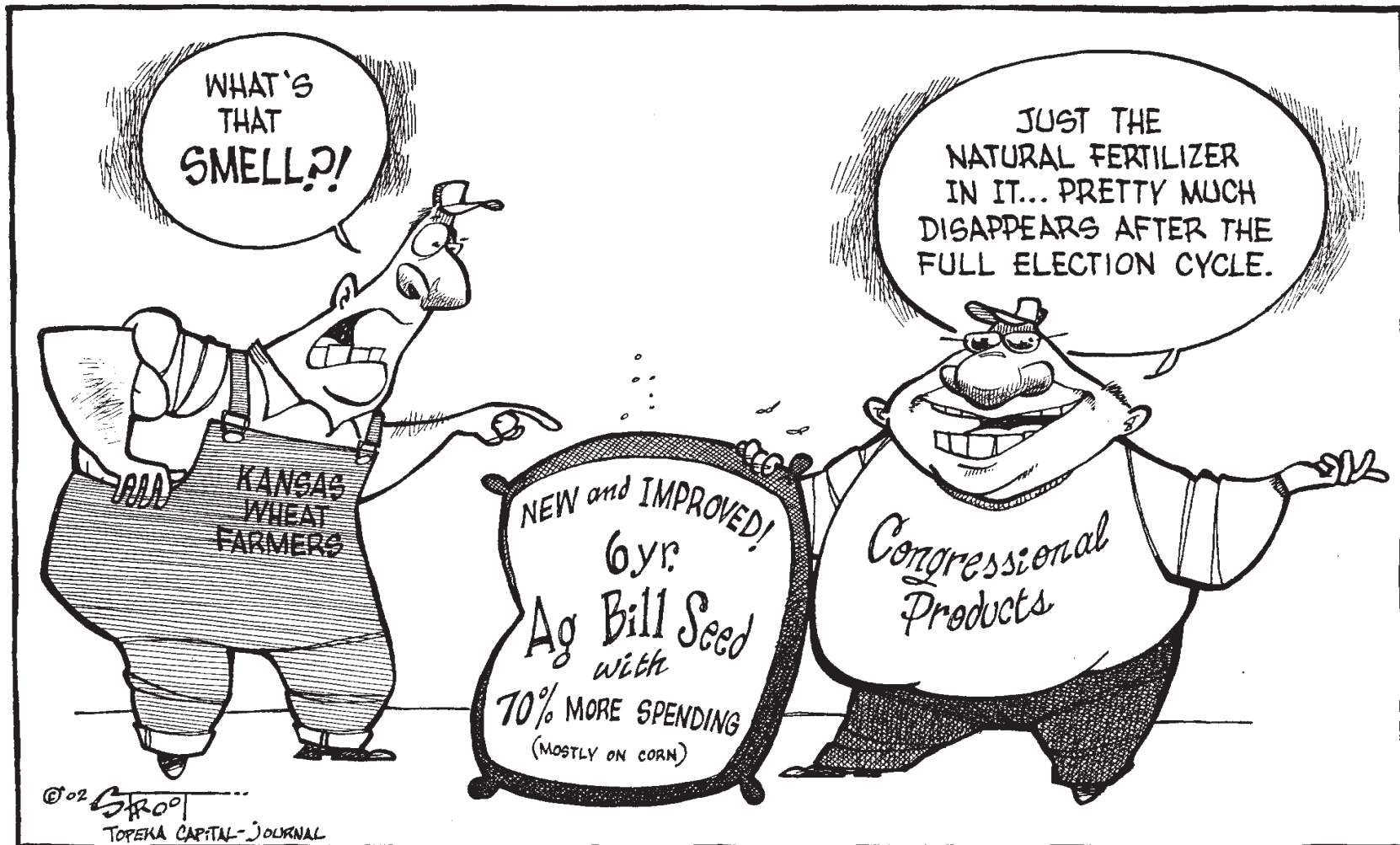
U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676

State Sen. Stan Clark, State Capitol Building Rm. 128-S, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399



You can be charged for 'signal calling'

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I have relatives who periodically call me collect. Although I refuse the calls because they are expensive, I then call my family members back so that I won't have to pay for the collect call. However, my telephone company is wanting to charge me several dollars for these collect calls that I do not accept, even though I do not even speak to any of my family members when they call. Attorney General Stovall, is there anything I can do to dispute these charges?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

My office contacted your phone company to ask about your billing. What you have described is referred to by the company as "signal calling," which is an arrangement between two parties whereby one party places a collect call to another. The second party refuses the call and then calls the first party back. The phone company says this is a fraud against the company because the parties are



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

using the phone lines to communicate for free.

In your particular case, the operator placing the call was alerted to the signal calling because when you were told who was on the line you declined the call and said, "I'll call you back," then hung up. You later admitted to the operator that you were trying to avoid the collect call charges. The operator explained to you that the company did not allow signal calling, and that you would be charged for a one minute collect call. After this warning you continued the practice, and the company billed you for a one-minute collect call after each occurrence.

The company stated that its fraud department does not normally have a practice of looking for signal calling.

However, if brought to its attention, the company may watch the calling patterns of an account and bill accordingly if signal calling is discovered and after notice has been given to the party being called that signal calling is not allowed.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

Thank you for the kids wrestling club coverage

To the Editor:

Thank you so much for your recent coverage of our wrestling club's activities. This is a highlight for our kids and their accomplishments. Thank you for your sponsorship.

The Goodland Kids Wrestling Club



from our readers

• to the editor

To the Editor:

Some legislators are rallying around the argument that targeted taxes will pull us out of the state's budget deficit. They mistakenly contend that consumers of alcoholic beverages, tobacco and lottery tickets should be obliged to pay disproportionately high taxes to help underwrite services that all Kansans enjoy.

Targeted taxes of any kind are the fuzziest form of math, and dangerous because of the implication that a small group of "others" should and can generate enough revenue to fill our current budgetary shortfalls. They are certainly no way to balance the budget.

According to the National Conference of State

Legislators, a stable revenue source is "one that is broad-based, equitable and not narrowly targeted at one specific type of economic activity..." The suggested taxes do not pass this test.

The state's spending is overwhelmingly for general purposes: education, social services, transportation and public safety. Where all citizens benefit, all taxpayers have been willing to contribute equitably to the even larger taxes on targeted industries to subsidize statewide needs, and in fact, the numbers that are coming out of conference committee have too large a hole to be filled with a simple targeted tax.

The needs of all should not be carried on the backs of a few. In his March 22 remarks on the state

budget solution, Gov. Graves said, "Every Kansan will be affected. Every Kansan will be asked to contribute to the solution." The citizens of Kansas, when shown where specific monies can be directed to provide services, have always been willing to pay their fair share, but first have rightfully asked exactly how existing revenues have been allocated. Increasing the tax burden of the hospitality industry, a segment already hard-hit after the Sept. 11 tragedy, and first affected in the current economic downturn, would be counterproductive.

Asking every Kansan to be part of the budget solution is, I suggest, the fairest way out of the budget crisis. And the only route that will put the state back on a fiscally sound track. To attempt to balance the budget with any other selective form of taxation would not only be punitive to the targeted group in the short term, it would be fiscally irresponsible in the long run.

Philip Bradley, executive director
Kansas Licensed Beverage Association
Lawrence

Looks like a long wrapup session

We should be completed with the budget and omnibus bills this week. Most expect the "final" day to be Wednesday. That will likely be a late evening as we finish tying up all the loose ends of the 2002 session.

As back in January of this year I still believe we will be leaving here with around .7 percent increase in sales tax, at least 1 cent increase in all fuels tax, modest increases in income taxes and some "sin" taxes. Right now the House has refused to pass any type of tax increase.

I have been voting for most of the increases as we really will not be able to continue without forcing either the state or local governments to increase taxes. An increase in taxes is not necessarily an increase in spending.

The value of our dollar has decreased so just to stay even it takes more "dollars" to pay the same bills as paid last year. That often overlooked fact is what is making this session so difficult.

When folks say services need to remain at last years levels they are saying that they support a tax increase. Only if one states that last years support programs need to be reduced can we keep the state budget anywhere near "even." Unfortunately that still means an increase in taxes!

The Senate tax position is now a 4 cent increase in gasoline taxes and 2 cent increase in diesel fu-



jim morrison

• capitol review

els plus assistance from the tobacco money to fund a \$20 increase in base state aid to K-12 schools and a \$75 million transportation fund. The House will be looking at their bill today or Tuesday.

Friday the House passed legislation to legalize electronic gaming machines at pari-mutuel facilities. The counties involved must first have authorization for the gaming by majority vote of the voters in the requesting county. The Senate is expected to pass the measure but right now is apparently "short" by two votes. The issue will not be brought up in the Senate until supporters are relatively certain they have the votes to pass so I expect it will be one of the last items considered this session.

The congressional map has been rejected and remains in conference committee. Our State Board of Education districts will not be completed until the Congressional maps are completed. This may be a long summer.

Current hall talk gets us out of here on Friday. I was expecting today so who knows what the week holds. Consensus is very difficult in such an open system as we have in the Legislature. That is good though as single individuals have less control of the process than they used to so the people are benefiting.

I can be reached at (785) 296-7676 through today. After that we will not have secretaries so email me at jmorrison@ink.org else you may have difficulty reaching me.

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N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansan.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansan.com)

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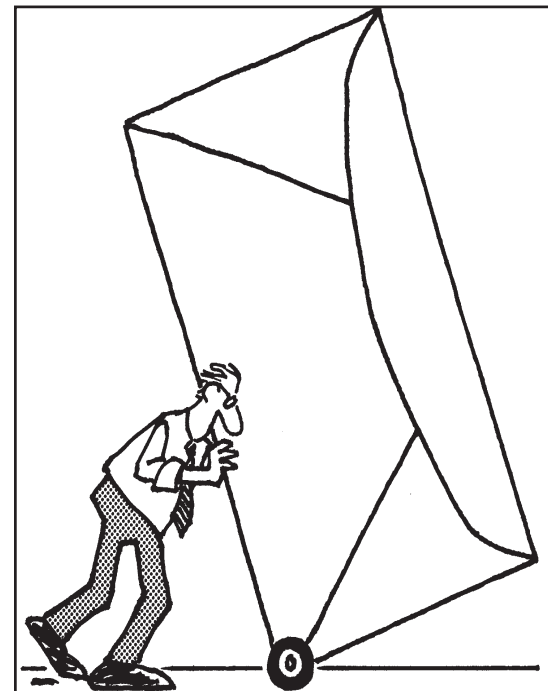
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Jim Berry
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