

commentary

from other pens...

Legislature shouldn't be excused for delays

The Hutchinson News on governing inefficiency:

At a cost of \$40,000 a day, the Kansas Legislature should follow a well-established process for finishing its business on time, for deliberating bills and deciding their fate, when it meets for the regular 90-day session in Topeka.

Unfortunately, the Legislature showed no such discipline this year. Lawmakers will claim that the state's revenue shortfall and the contentious reapportionment process dominated the agenda since January. Agreed, those items required a great deal of debate and discussion to resolve.

Even that explanation, however, fails to justify why legislators waited until this week ... to deal with a range of other issues.

Kansans should ask their representatives and senators to explain why they could not decide until the middle of May what course of action to take on:

- A compromise bill giving citizens a way to avoid telemarketing calls. ...
- Two bills designed to strengthen Kansas laws dealing with domestic violence and stalking.
- Legislation banning cockfighting in the state.
- An initiative to help rural communities recruit foreign physicians to practice in underserved areas.
- A proposal to register but not license naturopathic doctors under the Kansas Board of Healing Arts.

None of these bills represented a watershed policy change for the state. Yet lawmakers could not find common ground on chicken fights, registering medical quacks and discouraging stalkers until the wrap-up session.

No wonder it turned into the longest-in-history, 16-day wrap-up session. And the cost of \$40,000 a day makes a \$150,000-a-year salary for a school superintendent look like a bargain.

The Manhattan Mercury on the positive results of the last legislative session:

Though the legislative focus in recent weeks has been on the state budget, tax increases and the length of the session, lawmakers did get a good share of things right this session.

Perhaps the foremost achievement of the session was the Legislature's authorization to issue more than \$100 million in bonds for research centers at Kansas State University, the KU Medical Center and Wichita State University.

... Lawmakers who have been justifiably criticized for lacking vision on more than one issue deserve credit for seeing and grasping the future on this one.

Legislators also were right to reject proposals to expand gambling. This came as a pleasant surprise primarily because the states financial condition makes almost any source of revenue tempting. ...

Among the reasons legislators turned the proposals down is that the states cut of the winnings would depend on citizens losses. Lawmakers, who acted responsibly, doubtless will deal with this topic again.

Legislators also deserve some credit for adding \$20 per pupil in state funding for public schools. The action provides a little assistance for a system that needs a lot. The ... additional \$20 per pupil will help not just school districts but the students those districts serve.

And, though the revenue package lawmakers did approve last week wasn't all it should have been, they earned some praise for approving needed tax increases when doing so was most difficult in an election year.



Immigration has a lot of work to do

"We can do a better job of making our borders more secure," President Bush said last week before signing legislation designed to do exactly that. "We must know who's coming into our country and why they're coming. We must know what our visitors are doing and when they leave," he continued, adding, "It's knowledge necessary to make our homeland more secure."

Easier said than done? You bet. For all the spiffy, new immigration guidelines provided by the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Bill (intensifying immigration checks at American ports-of-entry; creating an easy-access database of known terrorists; strengthening the student visa program; and hiring 400 new INS inspectors and investigators) the same old problem remains: an understaffed and under-trained immigration agency overwhelmed by the magnitude of its duties.

Take the New York office of the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service. Bush may have just signed a grandly titled and — with a \$3.2 billion budget — grandly priced bill into law, but the fact remains that today, on the ground, at our flagship port of entry, it's up to just 14 federal immigration agents, assisted by seven New York City police detectives and two state troopers unfamiliar with immigration law, to find and deport the roughly 1,200 illegal immigrants from Al



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Qaeda-active countries now thought to be in the New York vicinity. An even smaller federal squad, a mere seven agents, is supposed to be making sure that no illegal immigrants from Arab or Muslim nations hold any of the several thousand potentially sensitive jobs at local airports and nuclear plants. Cross your fingers and hope none of these guys catches a cold. Meanwhile, no one from the New York office has had time even to begin what the INS calls a national priority — tracking down student-visa violators from Muslim and Arab nations.

"They just have nowhere near enough people," said James K. Kallstrom, a former assistant director of the FBI and a security adviser to New York Gov. George E. Pataki, *To the New York Times* in a recent article. "They need a geometric increase."

Why the thin, thin, thin blue line? Low morale and equally low pay, say agents and union officials. Topping out at \$49,959 a year, rank-and-file special agents make nearly \$10,000 less than their counterparts at other federal law enforcement agen-

cies, an economic fact of life that often leads INS agents to move on to the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Customs Service and other better-paying agencies. Perhaps it's no wonder, then, as *The New York Times* reported, the law enforcement arm of the New York INS office is operating at roughly half-strength. Where as many as 150 agents worked there in years past, just 80 federal agents are now responsible not only for the more routine crimes of immigrant smuggling and document fraud, but also for new and urgent terrorism-related duties. "Much of their work," the newspaper wrote, "remains undone."

And will remain undone for the foreseeable future, despite lawmakers' efforts to date. The border-security bill promises to plug some of the holes in our borders, but implementation takes time — for example, more than a year, say INS officials, just to get new agents recruited, trained and assigned. Why so long?

It sounds like a major recruitment campaign to beef up the INS is in order. With our leaders preparing us not just for the possibility of future attack but for its deadly certainty, time is an antiquated luxury of the past. Something needs to be done now to protect ports like New York.

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

Biofuels no great treasure trove for farmers

To the Editor:

American farmers are once again the ignorant pawns in another big business shell game. Ethanol and biodiesel are nothing more than another taxpayer-funded moneymaker for big business.

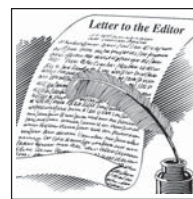
Regardless of the products merits to the environment, an engines' durability or America's dependence on foreign oil, American farmers are fools if they believe they will gain any real, lasting benefit from this new product.

Most farmers naively believe an increase in usage of corn or soy will increase their bottom line. It is nearly irrelevant how many new products are invented; the price to the farmers will not change appreciably. The fundamental problem is not being addressed, namely, commodity producers, whether corn, coal or coffee are price takers not price setters.

History shows that in time all raw commodity producers will be paid as close as possible to a break-even price. Actually now the prices paid are below the cost of production. This will continue until the taxpayer discontinues paying the gap between the market price and the true price or until a cataclysmic human event occurs such as a major war, a continental drought, etc.

World agricultural commodity prices have left the realm of real supply side economics and are now mostly influenced by socialistic subsidy programs. These programs doom nations to overproduction.

Case in point: It has been calculated that if the price of wheat paid to the farmer doubled, the cost of a loaf of bread would increase 5-10 cents. The consumer would hardly notice. So why doesn't the miller pay more for wheat? He doesn't have to; the taxpayer is paying it for him. This type of subsidized overproduction is what will insulate crop



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prices from any real upward movement. Big business will be able to continue to pay low prices for commodities since Uncle Sam is making up the difference.

Ethanol and biodiesel fuels are based on this flawed model. Unless farmers have ownership in the manufacturing facilities and produce both the crop and the fuel without taxpayer money, no net improvement to the farmers will be realized. Why do you think oil production companies such as Exxon and Texaco (fellow commodity producers) own gas stations? Hint, these guys have done their homework and found they were doomed to slim or nonexistent profit margins unless they became vertically integrated.

One other glaring error in this business plan is that biofuels will not be marketable if they achieve their goal. Meaning, farmers are sold the bill of goods that if biofuels make a hit then the price of their commodity will rise.

In reality, if the price of the commodity rises so will the price of biofuels and it will no longer be marketable due to price. Admittedly, production costs should fall with increased volume and in turn help keep the products marketable, but this will be negated when the subsidies for the manufacturers end. Yes, that's right, the manufacturers are subsidized too. These factors will keep a lid on any real benefits to farmers.

Some believe the government has a "cheap food policy" wherein our government, for reasons of

national security, world dominance and political expediency, attempts to keep food cheap. Will our dependence on this same food for fuel lessen or strengthen the government's tendency for a cheap food policy? I think we all know the answer to that one.

When I hear that biofuel is grown and manufactured without taxpayer money, and is cost/value competitive with conventional fuel, I will agree that something of value has been created. Until then biofuel is nothing more than a half-developed university science project that, while it does have some merit, cannot survive real world challenges just yet. I fear this, too, will prove to be one more dead horse sold to the farmers of America.

The next time you fill up with biofuel remember that greater than 50 percent of farm income is from government payments. That fuel going in your tank is partly yours and my tax dollar and your getting ready to send it out your tailpipe. Farmers need to free themselves from the taxpayer teat and in so doing will regain their profitability and freedom. American taxpayers do not need another mouth to feed. Biofuel will help neither the farmer nor the taxpayer.

Kenneth J. Klemm
Goodland, Kansas

berry's world

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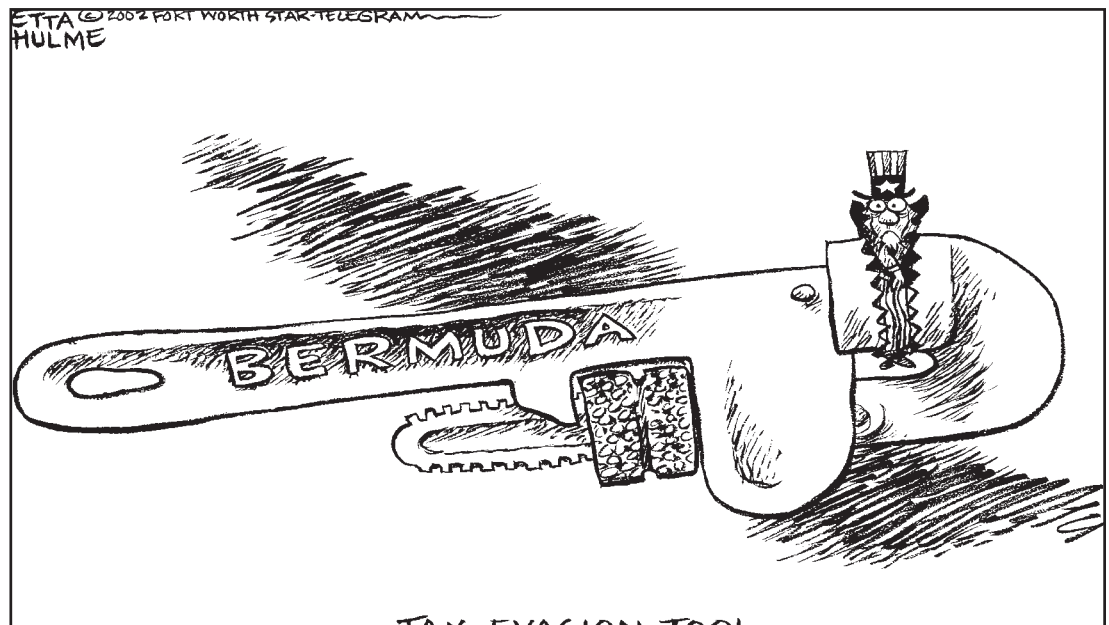
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