

commentary

from other pens...

Pros and cons of slots almost lost in rush

The Topeka Capital Journal on slot machines:

You can consider something for years, then rush into it. That's nearly what the Kansas Legislature did this year with regard to proposals to allow casino-style gambling at the state's pari-mutuel tracks.

The issue has been around for years. But after a quiet few months at the Legislature, the proposal suddenly surfaced in the waning days of the legislative session. ...

Thankfully, after narrowly being passed by the House, the bill stalled in a Senate committee.

It just didn't feel right. It didn't feel as if it was time. ...

You also have to wonder how smart it is for the state to stay out of the game when everyone else at the table ... is rolling in dough. It gets very tempting.

Gambling proponents would also take issue with the contention that passing the bill would have been rushing into it. ...

Consider, too, the fact that the bill, at one point, included provisions for slot machines at an undetermined non-race-track site. ...

Yes, the slots wouldn't go in unless local voters agreed. But have the pros and cons of such a move really been thoroughly debated? No. Most folks are only privy to the benefits of expanded gambling. ...

You can bet that the slots proposal will be back. The state expects to be short of funds next year, too. ...

The bottom line is that legislators should be more prepared next year, and should take the public along with them. ...

After so many years, we need not rush into this.

The Iola Register on the gubernatorial campaign:

Bob Knight, who is running for the Republican nomination for governor, picked Kent Glasscock to be his running mate. ...

Tim Shallenburger greeted the news by declaring that Knight "has effectively defined himself to be a tax-and-spend liberal."

... Shallenburger's instant attack should tell the Republicans who elected and re-elected Bill Graves governor all they need to know about their party's candidates thus far into the campaign.

Shallenburger represents the anti-tax, anti-government David Miller wing of the party. ...

Knight and Glasscock are pro-education progressives who, if they are elected, will try to pull Kansas out of the hole it is in and take it forward. ...

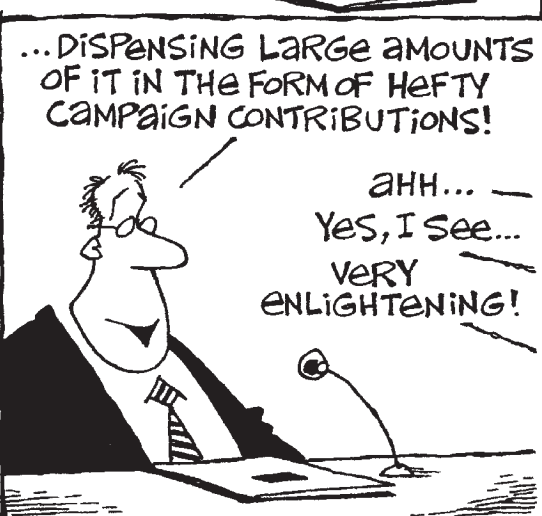
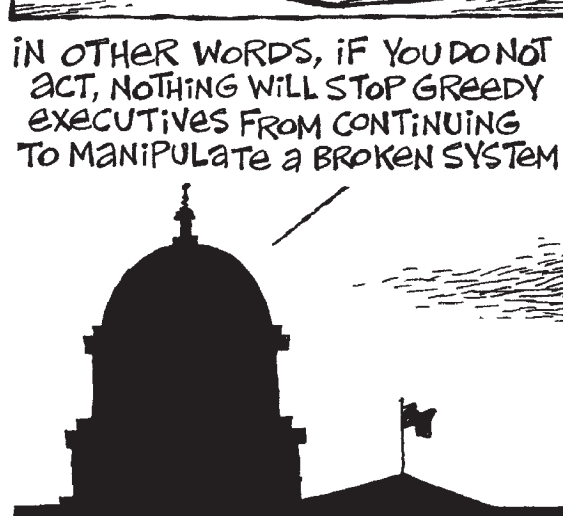
Knight said he wouldn't rule out the need for another tax hike next year, but wanted to watch Kansas economic trends for the next six months before deciding. ...

Since it is unlikely that Sen. Kerr would win a majority in a three-way race, his candidacy could quite possibly tip the contest to Shallenburger. ...

Whoever becomes governor next year will need a Legislature dedicated to supporting Kansas schools from kindergarten through graduate school. ...

But if the same anti-tax, anti-education Republicans and Democrats are sent back to Topeka after the Nov. 5 elections, the 2003 session will be even more damaging than the one the state just endured. ...

Kansas will not thrive until those naysayers are replaced by men and women with a brighter vision for the state's future.



10 years of my life just went down the toilet

Something I've been building for at least 10 years went down the toilet Friday evening. Literally.

It was my keys — to my car, my house, the office. I accidentally flushed them down the toilet at Goodland Sinclair gas station when I stopped to fill up before driving to Denver. If you don't believe me, ask Arlo Hansen, manager of the station.

The first thing he said after I told him I had just flushed my keys was, "Are you going to write a column about this?"

I'll tell you how it happened, but first I have to explain why my keys are important to me — beyond opening locked doors.

I don't just have a few keys on a key chain. I carry around at least 50 that I have collected over the past 10 or more years. They open houses I no longer live in, offices where I no longer work and cars owned by people I haven't talk to in years.

They are attached to a key chain my step-brother



rachel miscall

• unraveling

gave me for Christmas about four years ago and a bottle opener I used a lot in college, but not much anymore. People ask me why I carry around so many keys, and say I should get rid of them. But I never do.

I guess they hold a sentimental value for me. They remind me of places I've been and friends I've had.

I should've known I couldn't hang on to those memories forever.

I set the keys on the back of the toilet. When I was done, I flushed with my left hand and reached for the keys with my right. But instead of grabbing

them, I accidentally knocked them into the bowl.

I quickly stuck my hand in the toilet, but it was too late. They were swooshed away and there was no sign they had any problem going down.

I ran out of the bathroom into the front of the convenience store, where my fiancé was buying drinks for the trip. I told him I just flushed my keys down the toilet.

He didn't believe me, of course, until he noticed my hand and forearm were wet.

Arlo used a wire hanger to try to snatch the keys out of the piping, but it was no use. They were gone.

I didn't even really get that upset, because there was nothing I could do besides laugh at myself.

I had a spare car key in my purse and I called my landlord to ask if he could make me a copy of my house key. He had a good laugh when I told him the story.

"Remember," he said, "I'm not laughing at you. I'm laughing with you."

Budget debate dominates 2002 legislature

The legislative debate this session centered on state budget and revenue shortfalls.

When we started the session in January, reports indicated the legislature would have to address a \$426 million revenue shortfall for fiscal year 2002 and fiscal year 2003. Since that time, revenue estimates and caseloads have been revised and actual receipts have been considered. On returning to the Capitol for the legislative wrap-up session, we faced a shortfall of around \$780 million for both years.

In order to address these shortfalls, we worked to find a balance between two philosophies: state agency cuts versus increasing state revenue. House and Senate appropriations committees spent hours combing through the budget identifying areas of state agency spending which could be cut. We also made priorities for spending and worked to ensure efficient utilization of existing state revenue. It became clear during the early part of this session that all efforts would be made to protect K-12 education, services to the frail, elderly and disabled and to transportation.

While state agency cuts were being made, we were examining sources of revenue. State money is deposited in a variety of funds including the state General Fund, federal funds, the Highway Fund, the Employment Security Fund, the Retirement Fund, the Economic Development Initiatives Fund, the Kansas Endowment for the Youth Fund, the state Water Plan Fund and other special revenue funds.

The Legislature uses these funds in various areas of the budget. For example, money for economic development projects within the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing goes in the economic development fund. Likewise, the youth fund is used for children's initiatives and the State Highway Fund is the source of funding for most transportation expenditures. Most of the money from these funds comes from special revenue sources and not from general taxes. While we have some flexibility with these special revenue funds, we do not have much control over the amount of money deposited into each of the funds.

Most of the state's expenditures are made from the general fund. This fund finances education, human resources, general government, agriculture and natural resources, transportation and public safety. The Legislature has the most control over the amount of money in the general fund as well as the greatest amount of flexibility in making expenditures from this fund. The two biggest sources of revenue for the fund are individual income taxes and the sales tax.

The general fund also receives money from corporate and financial income taxes, the severance tax, insurance premium tax, the estate tax, alcohol taxes, tobacco taxes and other taxes. The Legislature can raise or cut these taxes, affecting the amount of general fund receipts. So, when the state is faced with a revenue shortfall, as it was this year, the Legislature can choose to increase the amount of general fund receipts by increasing specific tax rates.

Before we adjourned the regular session on April 13, the House and Senate passed fiscal year 2002



jim morrison

• capitol review

and 2003 budgets based on the March revenue estimate. Both the Senate version and the House version included agency budget reductions and required tax increases in order to balance.

When we returned for the wrap-up session, the House and Senate passed a conference committee report on the budget. The 2003 budget bill, as passed by the Legislature, held K-12 education at the 2002 funding level of \$3,870 in base state aid per pupil. It also held higher education operating grants (Regents institutions) at the 2002 level.

The bill provided funding for the disabled and elderly through Social and Rehabilitation Services caseloads and aging services in an effort to protect our most frail citizens. The conference committee report required \$222 million in "revenue enhancements" in order to comply with a 5 percent ending balance requirement. The bill identified priorities for state spending and after its passage, we turned our focus towards providing the money.

This year, many proposals were considered to increase state revenues. On the final day of the session (May 17), we passed a tax package increasing various taxes in order to fill holes in the budget and provide \$252 million in needed revenue for 2003.

Under this bill, the state sales tax will increase effective July 1 from 4.9 percent to 5.3 percent. This rate will then be reduced to 5.2 percent in July 2004 and 5.0 percent in July 2005. The measure increases the current 24-cent tax on cigarettes by 46 cents and 55 cents throughout the next year, which places the cigarette tax in Kansas at 70 cents per pack on July 1 and at 79 cents on Jan. 1. We also approved the reimposition of the Class C Inheritance Tax on persons other than immediate family at rates ranging from 10 to 15 percent.

In addition, the tax package included an increase in corporate franchise taxes and fees. Even though I opposed the inheritance and corporate taxes, I could only vote for or against passage of the budget and I voted for its passage. It passed with the minimum votes required, 63-60. All other parts of the budget and omnibus bill I supported.

This bill also included tax incentives for individuals and businesses across the state. The measure increased the Kansas Earned Income Tax Credit from 10 percent to 15 percent of the federal credit. This incentive saves qualifying Kansas taxpayers an estimated \$10.5 million in the next tax year. The food sales tax rebate program was expanded by indexing the qualifying income thresholds for inflation and by increasing the dollar amounts of the rebates to \$36 and \$72, saving Kansans over \$5.5 million each tax year.

The package increased tax credits for property taxes paid on business machinery and equipment from 15 to 20 percent beginning in tax year 2005 and further increases the credit to 25 percent in tax year 2007. Included in SB 39 is a section com-

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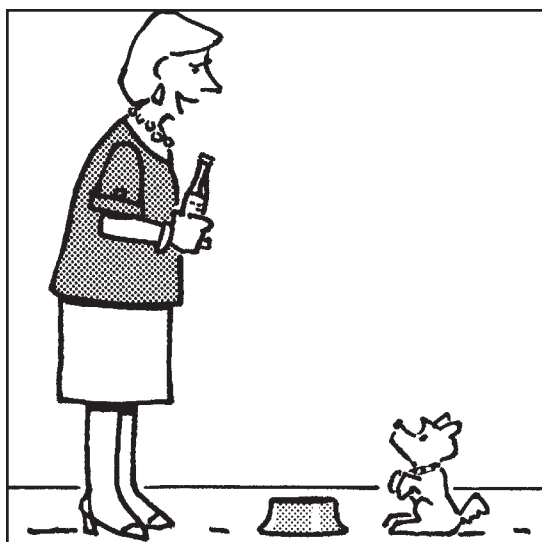
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