

# commentary

from other pens...

## Legislators and budget never-ending debate

**The Hutchinson News on government spending:**  
When legislators return to Topeka later this month, they will renew the never-ending debate about government spending.  
On one side of the fence, they will hear the anti-tax crowd claim that Kansas government has continued to grow despite a shrinking private sector and meet with business lobbyists who contend that restoring taxes will stifle the Kansas economy.  
From the other side of the debate, they will listen to advocacy groups describe the decline in services offered to Kansans-in-need ...  
Before the robust debate resumes, however, perhaps lawmakers should consider a series of reports from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities as a source of detailed, objective information. ...  
In Kansas, state taxes amounted to 6.7 percent of personal income in 1999, up only 0.1 percentage points from 6.6 percent of personal income in 1990. ...

Fourteen states, including Kansas, reduced general fund expenditures from fiscal 2001 to 2002. General fund expenditures in the Sunflower State declined 1.4 percent, from \$4,429.6 million in 2001 to 4,363.8 million in 2002.  
A third report, published in mid-November, details how total tax revenue for the 50 states last fiscal year decined \$38 billion from the previous year. ...  
Kansas lawmakers joined the tax-cut frenzy those years. The tax rate changes they approved reduced state revenue by \$805 million last fiscal year, according to estimates compiled by the state budget division, and a projected \$829.2 million this year.  
Simple subtraction shows that restoring some of those taxes would solve the state's \$600 milion budget crunch projected for next fiscal year.  
**The Newton Kansan on fresh approach to crisis:**  
That tried-and-usually-true political adage — "to the victor go the spoils" — may not hold quite as much water this year as the Kansas Legislature gets ready to kick off the 2003 session in Topeka.  
After all, Kathleen Sebelius was the victor. She beat a conservative Republican opponent and is on her way to the governor's mansion at Cedar Crest in Topeka.  
What she's going to inherit in Topeka, however, are not "the spoils," the fruits of that victory, but a budget in crisis, little or no money for her own new ideas and an electorate that isn't exactly ecstatic about huge budget cuts that have decimated social programs designed to help the most vulnerable.  
Despite that, the newly elected governor will ... take her place among the elite in Kansas history. She's the second woman governor in a little over 10 years, but many observers expect more of her than Joan Finney, who broke the glass ceiling in 1990.  
Unlike her predecessor, Gov. Bill Graves, she won't start her term with an economy that is humming and revenues that often outpace forecasts.  
Graves' first four or five years were marked by a strong economy, booming stock market and overflowing tax coffers. In the process, the governor and the Kansas Legislature cut taxes by some \$4.7 billion.  
While just about everything was coming up roses in the 1990s, today the thorns far outnumber the flowers.  
We wish the new governor the best as she embarks on a difficult journey. We've got one advantage here: she's fresh, invigorated by her victory and ready to tackle the problems already loaded on her plate.

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### The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants  
1935-1989

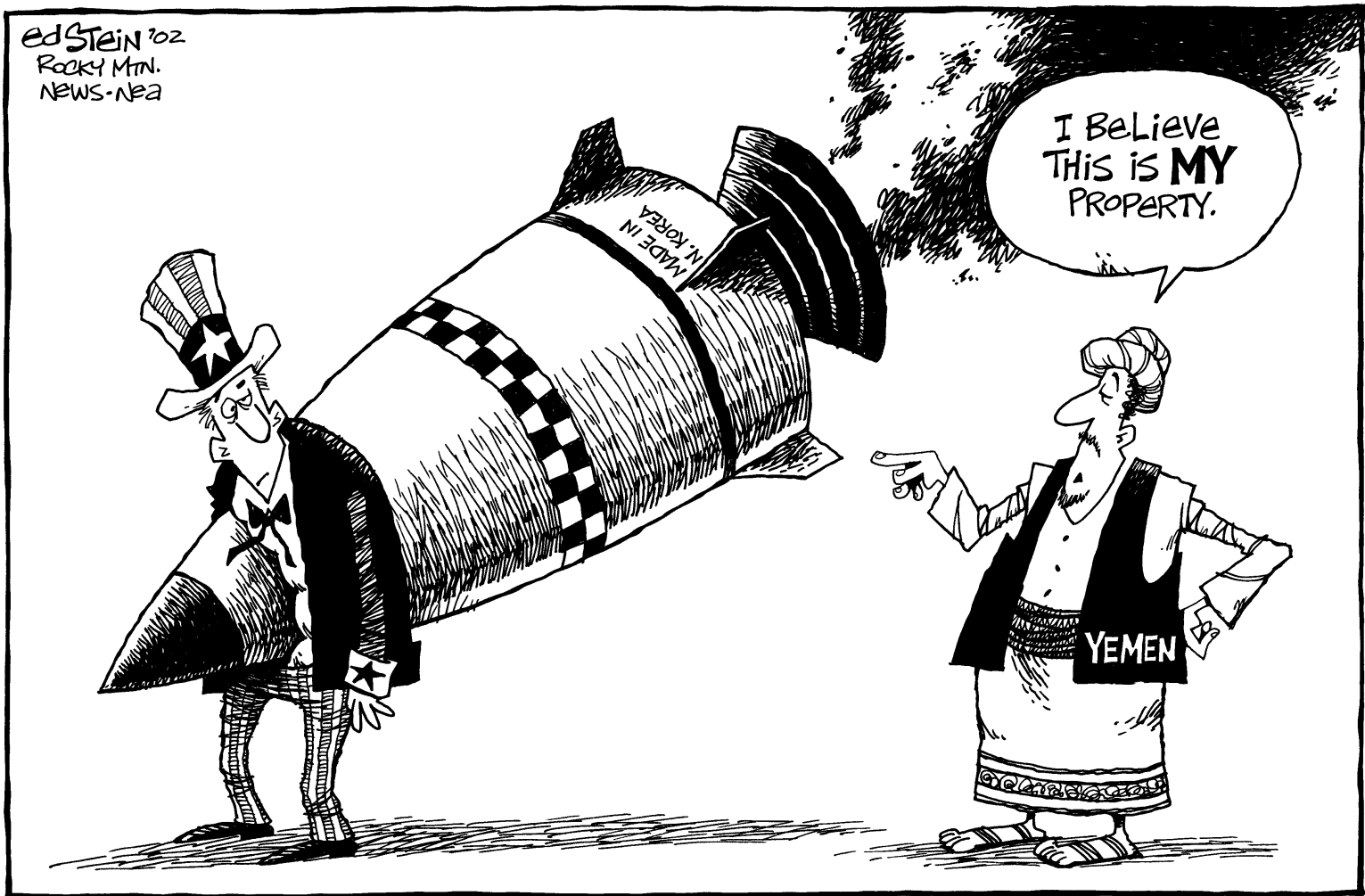
THE SHERMAN COUNTY

## STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey  
1994-2001

### Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



## Rumblings of war disturb me

I don't know about you, but rumblings of war disturb me.  
On Christmas day, my brother-in-law died.  
In going through some of his papers, we found a piece that he wrote years ago about his naval unit landing in the Philippines.  
I offer it for contemplation:  
"We squinted through the murky rain of an early dawn as we caught our first glimpse of Cavite, lying 35 miles from Manila by land, 15 by sea. The bow of our ship moved slowly through the half-light toward a dilapidated dock beyond which Cavite cowered — trying to rebuff curious stares by pulling closer its ghostlike cloak of mist and vapor.  
"Men shivered in the cold and wondered, 'City of refuge — or stronghold of death?' As though in answer, probing eyes discerned the charred, skeletal remains of what had once been much larger docks than the one the ship now approached. A sense of foreboding silenced even the whispers of those aboard the small craft as it nosed gently against the pier.



**lorna g t**  
• commentary

"The rain almost ceased, and as visibility improved in the bright light of early morning, the jagged scars and ugly wounds of a stricken city were slowly unveiled. This once proud symbol of civilization lay in mocking ruins — mute testimony that men build or destroy with equal skill.  
"Shattered debris lined the muddy, desolate avenue leading away from the wharf, and the vacant stare of paneless windows in the few walls remaining upright seems almost hypnotic. All that was left of one building, which must have been majestic in its entirety, was a single partition thrust skyward in silent defiance. Gaping shell holes pockmarked its face.

Rubble littered the landscape as though scattered by the violence of the city's final death throes.  
"A hundred yards up the street stood a huge tree, a dejected sentry with bare branches drooping earthward. Its garment of bark had been rent by probing projectiles, leaving strips of white flesh exposed to the elements: another victim of two conquering armies.  
"The silence was broken then as rhythmic feet crossing the wooden dock awakened echoes of military cadence. Weary men sloshed forward through ankle-deep puddles of water. A grizzled veteran shifted his heavy pack and spat a stream of brown juice across the face of a placard by the wayside. The placard read 'Welcome. Kilroy was here.'" (L.N. Hill)  
Each war has its own humor I guess, but more than that, destruction. And each war plants the seeds of hate that brings the next war.  
When will the we all learn to treasure the ones we love, to value the ones we don't even know and stop the senseless hate and killing?

## The world is populated by lawyers

The world we live in ... is populated by lawyers.  
Take, for example, Sunshine Biscuit's Cheez-It cracker.  
This venerable brand has been around forever — the company claims it has been making the little cheddar squares since 1921, nearly 82 years. And they're still a pretty good snack.  
A couple of years ago, the company wanted to jazz up the line. They started making all kinds of specialty Cheez-Its, white cheddar, garlic, party mix, you name it.  
And they hired someone to redesign the box. Some smart kid in marketing, or at the advertising agency, came up with the idea of a campy little "engineering diagram" for the crackers.  
It labels the perforations along the edge as the "no-slip grip." "Helps you grab more Cheez-Its in every handful."  
The hole in the middle is the "air intake, improves aerodynamics during periods of rapid Cheez-It consumption."  
And the bumpy, lumpy surface is covered



**steve haynes**  
• along the sappa

under "surface dynamics: bumpy, crispy, crunchy, utterly satisfying."  
Cute, huh?  
It was, too, until somebody showed it to legal.  
Nothing gets done in the corporate world unless you show it to legal.  
And legal was, apparently, not amused.  
Someone might read the cutsie description of the cracker and take it seriously.  
The mind conjures up a vision of Dave Letterman's Dumb Guy: "Hey, Bill, look at this, wouldja, says these crackers can fly."  
Then came the disclaimers: Under the heading, "Anatomy of a Cheez-It," (but don't believe it!)

And down below, in tiny type, "These qualities make Cheez-It fun, but do not suggest any serious product performance claims."  
Duh.  
Heck, it makes more sense for McDonalds to print a warning on their coffee cups: "Contents may be hot."  
McDonalds is kind of stubborn that way. They didn't want to turn down the heat on their coffee, even after they were sued, so they added a warning to the cups.  
Personally, I think their coffee is way too hot to drink. But I can tell that without a label.  
Oh, back to the Cheez-It box. Somebody at legal made them put another line on in tiny type, by a picture of a cracker in the "anatomy" section.  
"Not actual size," it says.  
Not true. The crackers on the front of the box are smaller than real ones. The one in the diagram is actual size.  
But don't believe it!

## Don't stop, don't look, don't listen

It wasn't long ago, at least in geological terms, when you could listen to one radio station and hear a song by the Beatles followed by a song by country star Roger Miller then hear a hit by Frank Sinatra. An instrumental by Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass might come after a Four Tops record but before a Peter, Paul and Mary folk song. In an hour you might hear 10 or 12 different types of music. Sure, there were country stations and soul stations and classical stations, but the big winners played the Top 40 songs over and over.  
Today's radio is the opposite, with each station playing one type of music all day long. Rap, country, metal, classic rock, pop and nothing else. Some stations get ridiculously specific. "At XYZ-100, we play the best hits of 1987 through 1992 and two songs from June 1994!" "At Attention Deficit Disorder 102, you'll hear the best music of the mid-'60s to 1973!" The country stations play music by people who grew up in big cities but pretend they were raised on a poor dirt farm. When these guys are not out golfing in Palm Springs and skiing in Aspen, they're singing about picking cotton and spitting tobacco.  
It's not just radio. You can hardly find a magazine on the newsstand that any two people in the same household would both enjoy. Instead of something for everybody, there's something for almost nobody. Look at the magazine rack in any grocery store and you wonder which of your neighbors is buying Garage Door Opener Aficionado, Surrogate Father News, New Working Mother Woman, Bowling Ball Collector, Taxidermy Today or Teen Lawyer. The wife is buying Sophisticated Living while the husband is buying WWE



**jim mullen**  
• the village idiot

SmackDown! Is that Junior rifling through Super Sadistic Videos while Muffy is picking up Xtreme Piercing? What does that family talk about at dinner?  
As a young kid I remember waiting for my granddad to finish his Saturday Evening Post so I could read it, too. What grandkid is waiting for today's grandparent to relinquish his copy of RV Monthly so he can read it?  
The greeting card companies are doing it, too, making incredibly specific cards for the most unlikely events. You can now buy "Happy You Passed That Kidney Stone, from Your Second Cousin, Bob." cards, "Your Grandmother (mother's side) is So Sorry You Got Voted off 'American Idol'!" cards and "From Your Nephew Joe in the Navy — Heard You Got the Cat Spayed!" cards.  
Last year I got a Happy Halloween card from normally normal Alice down the road. What is the etiquette here? Am I supposed to send her one back or send a mental health worker to her home to check up on her? You might think, "What a harmless gesture, a Halloween card." But trust me, that's how it starts. First, it's cards; in 10 years they'll want us all to exchange Halloween gifts.  
But for your niche-marketing dollar, nothing beats the cable television. Why spend a million dollars a minute advertising on "Friends" when, for pennies, you can run your

infomercial on "The Left-Handed Blond Bass Fishing Awards." Over and over and over again.  
They sell an awful lot of cleaning products on these infomercials. And all of them brag about how well they remove bloodstains. If you're cleaning up so much blood that you need to buy two bottles of this stuff for \$19.99, I can't help but wonder, what is going on at your house? Maybe you should be calling a doctor, not an 800 number. Or the police. Sure it removes bloodstains, but what about those unsightly bullet holes in your living room walls? No problem. Buy Bullet Patch! One application and you'll never know it was there! From the wonderful folks who brought you Organic Citrus Blood Remover!  
Jim Mullen is the author of "It Takes A Village Idiot: A Memoir of Life After the City" (Simon and Schuster, 2001). He also contributes regularly to Entertainment Weekly, where he can be reached at [jim\\_mullen@ew.com](mailto:jim_mullen@ew.com)

### Letter Policy

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