

from our viewpoint...

Streamlined sales tax anything but simple

Here's another example of why the Legislature shouldn't pass complicated bills late in the session.

It's called the Streamlined Uniform Sales Tax. But like many things in government, it's not streamlined and hardly uniform.

In fact, for Kansas businesses, it may be more like a nightmare. It was a bill that came up late in the session, with backing from the governor and the Department of Revenue.

The idea itself is laudable: to tax all sales, including Internet and catalog sales, fairly and uniformly.

It sounded so good to the Legislature that both houses passed the bill with little serious debate. No extended hearings where business owners could hear about the law and question its provisions. No fanfare in the press.

Then, in the House, someone said it would be a good thing to implement the law this year, not in 2004 as the revenue department had proposed. And voila! It was done.

That gave the department just a couple of months to draw up regulations and put the changes covered by the bill into effect. The department was hardly ready for that.

During what hearings there were on the bill, the secretary of revenue was heard to mumble something about changes in "sourcing" rules under the law. No one, apparently, questioned that much.

Until mid-June, when the department issued a letter to all businesses spelling out what the law demanded.

Sourcing, it turns out, means deciding what tax rate to apply to a sale. Traditionally, it's been the location of the seller for most sales. Now, it will be the location of the buyer, at least if the sale is in Kansas.

That makes sense. If all, or even most, states apply the sales tax that way, then it would be possible to require Internet and catalog sellers to do the same.

That's a good goal. We've said so several times. But it's not one that's easily attainable. Sales tax reports that once contained a few lines now may have hundreds.

No software available today will "source" sales tax rates, even by zip code. The states have promised to provide help, but at least in Kansas, they're not ready. Neither are private vendors who supply business billing and mailing software.

And the task is not easy. Postal codes are commonly used to demark territory, but many Zips in Kansas (and elsewhere) cover more than one tax territory. It's common for cities and their counties to have different rates, for instance, and equally common for a zip code to cover both city and rural territory or more than one city.

Despite that, Kansas businesses have been given just two weeks to prepare for this law. The revenue department says it's willing to give people six months to comply, but it might take six years for business systems to catch up.

As one legislator said, "It's no wonder people get fed up with us."

Like many things in Washington and Topeka, it's a good idea gone wrong.

We do need to tax Internet and catalog sales. It's grossly unfair to hometown merchants that out-of-state retailers have the advantage of tax-free selling.

But it's also grossly unfair to dump yet another expensive — and undoable — tax on Kansas businesses. — *Steve Haynes*


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It seems a lot of people ignore problems

I don't know about you, but I think a lot of people try to ignore problems.

I have never understood how you solve a problem that you refuse to admit is there. Someone once said, "Why stick your head in the sand?" Answer: "Because there's nothing worth looking at."

And maybe that's what has happened to our society.

We've avoided problems or felt there was nothing we could do to solve them, and so our society has become one of which we're no longer proud.

It is difficult for me to watch a lot of TV shows; they make me too sad.

When did our inner cities succumb to homelessness, graffiti, drugs, violence, etc.? How did we ever allow it to spill over into the small towns? When did we begin accepting it all?

An editorial I read the other day said it was when parents both began working outside the home. I guess I have to admit I tend to agree with that writer.

Someone else has said, "For years, fundamentalist Christians have considered participation in politics akin to sin. And the result is



**lorna
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● commentary

that we are now living in a society whose laws were shaped for and by the politicians our avoidance allowed to be elected.

We cannot avoid that result. Yet we act as though we had nothing to do with the society that is evolving from it."

We complain about the direction our country has taken, but few of us are even informed voters. Sadly, societies tend to reflect the morality of their constituents, not the other way around.

We must get involved. We need to speak out to our elected leaders, telling them how and why we disagree with or support issues. (Complaining over coffee at the donut shops does little good.)

We need to get involved in the whole process. Allowing this nation to become anti-religion, anti-human rights, anti-whatever else we value is the real sin.

Burbon Street, Jazz, highlights of the Big Easy

New Orleans — What's the first thing that comes to your mind?

Bourbon Street, jazz, Mardi Gras, swamps, food, alcohol, the War of 1812, partying, sin, sex and booze?

You're right — all that and more.

We just spent several days recently in The Big Easy, and we saw a little of all of the above. And a few things we hadn't bargained for.

Our hotel took up a block in the French Quarter, with one side facing Bourbon Street. We had a nice room overlooking the hotel pool, which was in a courtyard in the middle. The kids — oldest daughter Felicia and her husband Nik — had a balcony room overlooking the famous street of sin. Their's was a great room for watching the moving party and a bad one for sleeping.

We walked everywhere and put in more than 15 miles during our four-day visit.

We arrived on Wednesday and went out for red beans, rice, sausage, crawfish and shrimp. The food was great.

Thursday, the plan was to go to the aquarium, take a boat ride to the zoo and then take the streetcar back to the hotel. We did most of those things in the rain.

The aquarium was great and we saw the alligators. The boat ride up the Mississippi was in the rain, so we didn't see very much but a couple of tugs and an angry river. It was still raining when we got to the zoo, and zoos tend to be outdoors, so we took a quick tour and headed for the street car.

The ride was great for the first 15 blocks, but we noticed that the water was filling the streets and people were starting to abandon their vehicles. We soon had to abandon the streetcar and slosh back to the hotel as people started to



**cynthia
haynes**

● open season

park their cars on the tracks — the highest ground around. It was a long, wet walk.

At the hotel, we encountered sandbags and learned that the French Quarter had been flooded while we were out playing in the water.

As the water receded, we headed down the street to see what night life was like on Bourbon Street. That's where we found the sin, sex and booze.

As folks held out 25-cent Mardi Gras beads from the many balconies, college boys and girls would show off parts of their anatomies normally covered so that they could get the beads. You could also pay to see just about any form of strip show there is. Shops offered items of clothing made out of net, feathers, leather and tiny bits of cloth. Every other storefront was a bar and alcohol was sold on the street,

where to write

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