

from our viewpoint...

Taxes take more of your money

It probably comes as no surprise that 49 states collected more from their taxpayers in 2004 than they had a decade earlier.

The only real surprise was that one state — Alaska — saw a decline of 1 percent, but don't mark Alaska down as thrifty, just rich. Most of the state budget comes from oil revenue and Alaska spends more per citizen at \$12,294 than any other state.

Kansas fell in the middle of the pack, 28th in per capita state taxes at \$1,933 per person, up about \$500 for the decade. Neighboring Colorado, on the other hand, is in the bottom five in collections per taxpayer.

Colorado is one of the few states with strict constitutional limits on state and local spending. Kansas, having abandoned its tax lid law, has none, and it shows.

State tax rates have been frozen in recent years, but spending keeps on going up. With conservatives losing ground in the Legislature this year, there's great pressure to raise taxes and spend even more.

Increases for schools and just to keep the state running have taken every extra cent Kansas brings in. Schools, colleges and other programs say they need more.

In Colorado, by contrast, officials had to get voter approval just to keep the "extra" money that came in when the economy warmed up.

In Kansas, property taxes on homes now are roughly double those in Colorado, despite years of "tax relief" efforts in Topeka. City and county governments, even those that try to be careful, just keep raising the levies.

And the Kansas economy is not growing, possibly because of the high tax burden here compared to surrounding states.

In Kansas, only the government is growing. A state report last month showed just 6,000 new jobs created in the state over the past year, all in state and local government. Private nonfarm employers actually cut 2,400 jobs over that period.

It doesn't take an economic genius to see that this can't continue. Fewer working taxpayers can't be asked to support an ever-growing government apparatus.

That's apparently what our leaders believe, however. They keep hiring people and raising public salaries, raising taxes and squeezing more out of the long-suffering middle class.

Around here, for instance, the City of Goodland plans to cut taxes slightly but give it's workers raises averaging 5 percent and boosted spending by 8.5 percent when property valuation rose. That in a time when most private employers can't manage any raises at all.

You'd think someone would complain. Maybe someone will, but until taxpayers rise up in revolt, taxes and spending are bound to keep on going up. And up. And up. — *Steve Haynes*

Letter Policy

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Death does wonders for legacy



michael reagan

● making sense

Saddam Hussein is a lucky man — in no time at all he can expect to have his reputation vastly improved. And he can thank the hangman who awaits him on the gallows.

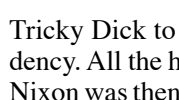
Prior to that moment when he breathes his last, his reputation will be in shreds. He has, rightly, been seen as a monster. The mere act of his dying, however, will enable his supporters to smooth over his role in those troublesome times when he was slaughtering his own people by the hundreds of thousands.

If you doubt that scenario, consider what we are now witnessing with the death of former President Gerald R. Ford. After his pardon of Richard Nixon in September 1974, you would have had to hire a private detective to find anyone who did not consider him a scoundrel for pardoning the hated Nixon, whose foes would have been satisfied only if Nixon had been utterly humiliated, tried, found guilty and sent to prison for life.

Ford robbed them of that satisfaction and they never forgave him, but his foes did take great pleasure out of observing that the pardon was the reason why Gerald Ford lost the presidency in 1976.

His name was mud, yet by dying he rehabilitated himself. All those hypocrites who cast him out into the outer darkness for daring to show compassion to his predecessor — thereby saving the nation from the years-long ordeal prosecution of Nixon would have involved — now heap praise on him.

Ford's pardon was greeted by a firestorm of criticism, threats were leveled against him, and he was accused of making a shady deal with



Tricky Dick to swap a pardon for the presidency. All the hatred and bile the left had for Nixon was then aimed at Ford.

His popularity ratings, sky-high when he took the oath of office, plummeted. He never recovered from the debacle he unleashed with the pardon. And he was driven out of the White House to be replaced by Jimmy Carter, who would become arguably the worst president in American history yet go himself into the honored retirement denied Gerald Ford.

Like most of his Democratic colleagues, Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy was appalled by the pardon, calling it "a betrayal of the public trust."

Unlike most of his Democratic colleagues, however, Kennedy softened and didn't wait until Ford was dead to praise him for what the pardon had done for the nation. At the 2001 Profile of Courage award ceremony honoring Ford, Kennedy said: "We now recognize that Ford was there when the country needed him. He was calm and steady at a time of emotional upheaval and disillusionment. When he said our long national nightmare was over, the country breathed a sigh of relief. He was an uncommonly good and decent man."

In dying, Ford erased all those negative comments and the people who slandered and re-

viled him came rushing to the microphones to heap praise on him for issuing the pardon they had so vigorously condemned.

Think about the lesson Ford's death teaches. Once a pariah, he now gets the "de mortuis nil nisi bonum" treatment (of the dead speak only good).

Moreover, he is to be further honored by a book by Bob Woodward who, contrary to his usual practice, interviewed him while he was still alive and conscious. Ford, he is said to be ready to reveal, opposed the Iraq war but didn't want anybody to know it until he was gone.

Getting back to what all this means to the soon-to-be-dead Saddam Hussein, if the obits are anything like the ones Gerald Ford earned by passing away, we can expect to be told that after all, Saddam did clean up the mess he inherited in Iraq, and keep order and prevent the population from butchering each other by taking on that job himself.

He introduced law and order, and kept the peace, although in not quite the same way Rudy Giuliani cleaned up New York City. Giuliani, after all, left no unmarked mass graves scattered around New York.

But hey, Saddam got results even we haven't been able to achieve, and as a result the Iraqis have now taken on the job of reducing the population without any help from the government.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to mereagan@hotmail.com.

Crocodile tears



will durst

● raging moderate

The latest form of political theater descending on DC is the crying of crocodile tears.

This season's nominations for biggest mock drops are destined to be swept by Beltway players in their demonstration of their fake concern for South Dakota Sen. Tim Johnson. Phony sanctimony has long been a staple of the American way of life. Each of us had an aunt whose major talent was feigning fawning sympathy. Usually she had a mole.

Mine was Aunt Hoogolah, who loved to amplify the distress of other family members, hoping to drop her daughter's ranking on the screw-up chart indelibly chalked on relatives' minds. Sorry for the convoluted syntax there, but trying to adhere to the embargo on use of the term "black sheep" until the Michael Richards on-stage flip-out has been superseded by another celebrity meltdown. Once the Mel Gibson torch has been passed, in other words.

Right now our newspapers and televisions are witnessing such a flurry of fake solicitude they should be handing out snow blowers. Mostly I'm talking about the excruciating sympathy leaking out of the mouths of political pundits everywhere, expressing commiseration for Tim Johnson's medical situation in their most grave and sincere voice. For 10 seconds. Then high pitched squeals as they excitedly speculate for the rest of the show on possible ramifications resulting from his imminent demise.

"Our prayers go out to him and his family. (Short pause — turn to center camera) But if, God forbid, he does die, we trust Gov. Mike Rounds will do the right thing. And appoint a Republican to fill his seat bringing the Senate back to dead even. No pun intended. Then when Vice President Dick Cheney breaks the 50-50 tie, the America-loving GOP will retain control of the senior branch of Congress and the sun will shine and birds will fly, but not a single George Bush-directed subpoena will."

Of course, short of dying — which Senator Johnson undoubtedly prefers avoiding — it's unlikely he will abdicate his Senate seat. His-

torically, physical or mental incapacitation has never been a big handicap to the normal operating procedures of the Most Deliberative Body in the World. Let's not forget Sen. Strom Thurmond, whose major accomplishment the last four years of his life was to keep the drool from pooling in his lap. C'mon, are you really serving the government when Willard Scott is wishing you happy birthday?

As to suspicions of some sort of hanky panky going on with the sudden onset of Sen. Johnson's malady, I'm of the opinion that Republicans will do anything to hang onto power. Whatever it takes. And if similarities to the

Vladimir Putin/Alexander Litvinenko scene do show up, you know — with the whole radioactive sushi deal, I semi-seriously propose we zero in on a Republican senator in a Democratic state and attempt to retrieve the status quo.

A twist on the old Sean Connery "Untouchable" philosophy: "If they pull polonium-210 on you, you pull americium-241 on them. If they put one of yours under the knife of a neurosurgeon, you put one of theirs under the wheels of a Peterbilt; that's the Democratic Way and that's how you get Trent Lott." This also applies to independent senators. From Connecticut. Who suddenly decide to become Republican. For any reason. At all. Mister Joementum.

Comic, actor, writer, former radio talk show host and sod farmer Will Durst wonders who would eat South Dakota sushi anyway? E-mail Will at durst@willdurst.com.

