

from our viewpoint...

# Who will lose their tax exemption?

A Kansas House committee took up part of the plan to “close loopholes” in the state sales tax last week, a bill that would raise \$182 million for the cash-strapped state and maybe stave off further cuts in the coming year.

And what loophole would the bill close to work its wonders? Yours, of course.

Most of the money would come from eliminating the exemption for residential utility bills – water, sewer, electric and gas – now enjoyed by Kansas citizens. That means every time you get that irritatingly high January gas bill, or the soaring July electric charge, you’d get to pay 5.3 per cent more to help pay the state’s bills.

Does anyone think this will fly?

But the Legislature has already been beaten up by the Girl Scouts and the Cancer Society, who complained bitterly when someone suggested they should lose the exemptions they got from the Legislature in better times. The Cancer Society said it would lose thousands now spent on research and aid if it has to pay sales tax on its purchases.

Rep. John Faber pointed out in Oberlin last week, the state probably could solve all its money problems by ending one huge tax exemption – the one farmers get on equipment they buy. With a combine priced at well over \$300,000 these days, that’s about \$16,000 of hurt a whack, maybe more.

Quickly, you might ask yourself, who has better lobbyists in Topeka, the Farm Bureau, or you?

Then, you know who will win if push comes to shove.

“Besides, I don’t think I could vote for that,” said Rep. Faber, a farmer, with a grin.

Tax law is largely a matter of whose ox is being gored, it seems, and who has the bigger stick when the infighting starts. And every tax break has someone who reaps its rewards.

The farmers have their tax breaks, to be sure. Businesses have theirs, an exemption on machinery and equipment. You even have yours, on utilities.

That may be why Gov. Mark Parkinson suggested a temporary 1 percent increase in the sales tax. That way, at least everybody (but the Girl Scouts, the Cancer Society and your church) gets to share the pain.

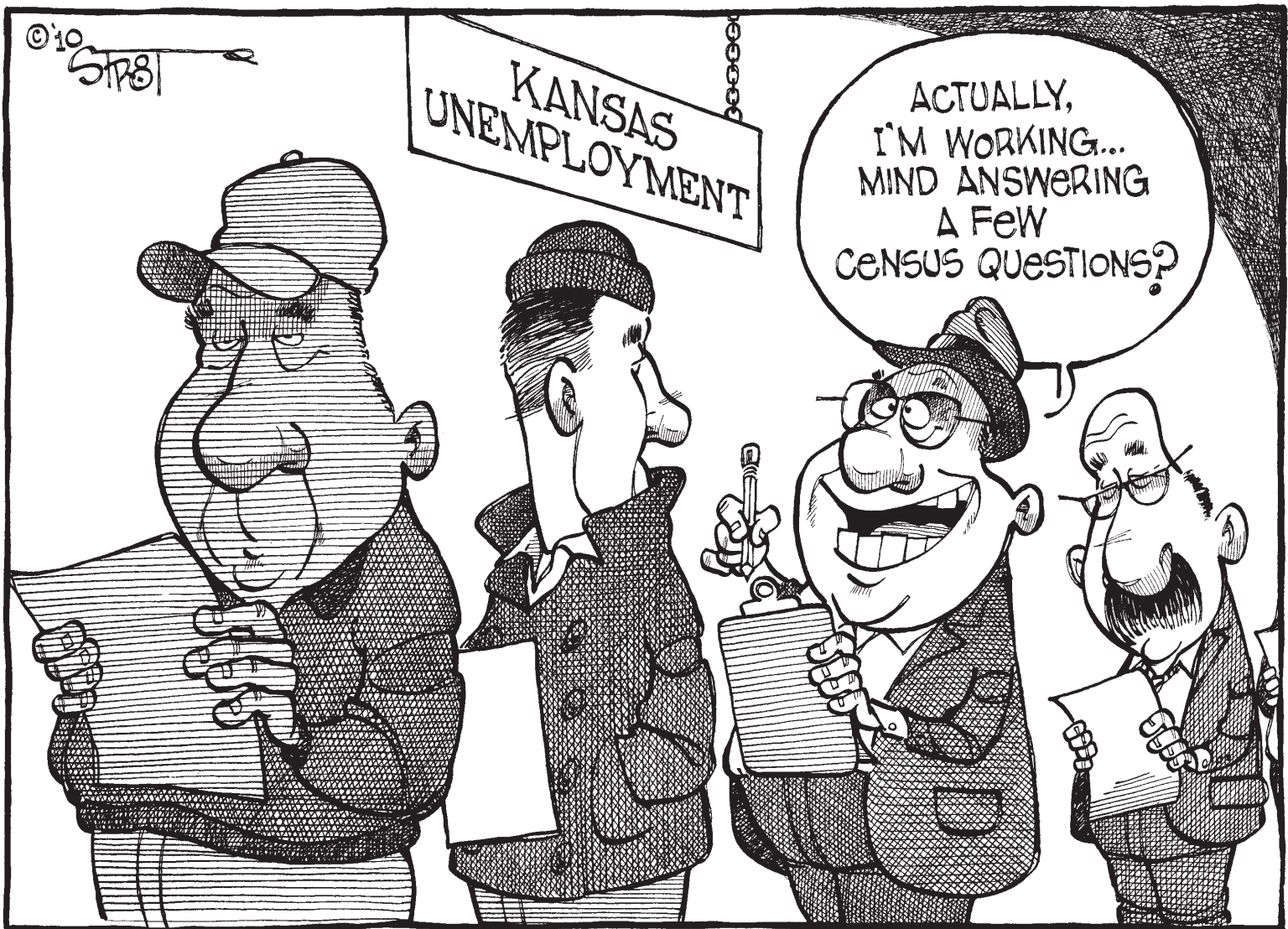
But with record numbers of Kansans out of work, with layoffs common and many families making less every year, can people afford any tax increase this year?

It’s a good question. By and large, those who spend tax money feel we can. Many who pay taxes are not so sure.

Schools, services for the handicapped, medical care, hospitals and doctors, roads, colleges, all are important. All have suffered unreasonable cuts. But so has the average Kansas family.

The budget will get worked out. Life will go on. Kansas will have both schools and farms 10 years from now.

But not before the big fighting coming up next month on whose ox will be gored and whose exemptions will live to see another day. We all need to pay close attention, because we all have a stake in this game. — *Steve Haynes*



# Scholars bowl team warrants thumbs up

**Thumbs up** to our Scholars Bowl Team, on your first appearance in the state tournament.-(e-mail); to Mary Kratky, on the honor accorded as a former player for the K-State Lady Wildcats. I never knew that.-(td); to Northwest Tech, on you upcoming *Women In Technology Day*. Good luck!-(e-mail); to the Goodland Masons, on your ham and bean feed and the cause for which it will benefit.-(2 e-mails); and an unusual request by telephone which the caller simply asked, “Could you give a thumbs up to North School’s Principal Mr. Mull? He deserves it! Thank you on behalf of a lot of people.” *(To render a thumbs up, simply e-mail tad1@st-tel.net, call 785-890-2475, mail to 516 E. 6th, Apt. 212, Goodland 67735, or drop it off at the Star-News office. Thanks for your continuing input; no charge.)*

-td-

Correction: How embarrassing that I gave the wrong ages for my sons in my last column. Lance is 39 (will be 40 March 31), and Todd is 37 (will be 38 April 28). It’s bad enough not knowing your own age, but your kids?!

-td-

I had occasion to watch C-SPAN for several hours the other day when President Obama held a summit with Republican and Democrat Senate and House leaders about health care reform. It was interesting and engaging, and I think, really, that both sides have more in common on this issue than we are being told by the so-called big boys in the media mix. You know



## tom dreiling

- time out with td

who the know-it-alls are that I’m referring to. But to focus on those commonalities would wreck their script because they thrive and survive on the negative. We are all much smarter than they give us credit for. I don’t know if the summit will result in a greatly watered down health care reform bill, but it wouldn’t surprise me to see that happen. We’ll see.

-td-

The little kid asked his dad if he got his intelligence from him. His dad said he must have gotten it from his mother, because he still had his. (What? Do I hear boooos?)

-td-

“Yes I do,” is my response when people ask if I also write a column for The Hays Daily News. I do that every other Wednesday, with the latest column being last Wednesday, Feb. 24 and the next one March 10. The Hays columns pretty much deal with Hays as I knew it when I was growing up there, plus a few other items unrelated. I’ve been getting a lot of responses from that circulation area and have gained some new friends in the process. My tag line at the end of the Hays column always reminds those readers that I also write for The Goodland Star-News.

-td-

I envy those people who have the patience to garden. It’s something I tried doing so many years ago when the kids were growing up and we’d dig up a patch in the backyard, prepare it for seeding, water it down, spread the seed and then check it an hour later to see if anything had grown. Of course the instructions on the seed packets didn’t say anything about the contents being “instant growth,” but try explaining that to two energetic would-be gardeners. However, every now and then something would begin to grow beyond description. But it was something to talk about. Not long after that I got into plastic flowers and plastic things that looked like corn or watermelon or cabbage or cucumbers, etc. — you get the picture. But as my luck would have it, even the plastic stuff died. So that ended gardening at my place. Now what I do is read Kay Melia’s “The Gardener” column each week and pretend it’s me doing all that stuff.

-td-

Remember, Goodlanders, what you have to do yet before you call it a day? Come on, you know. . .

-td-

Have a good evening! And remember that part of a successful weight loss program also includes getting eight hours of sleep each night. And if you ask me how that helps, I simply reply, that’s eight hours you won’t be eating! *(tad1@st-tel.net)*

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# Change and adapt



## Insight this week

- john schlageck

I’d be interested in knowing how you do so.

As we move into the 21st Century, newspapers and magazines continue to battle radio, television and video for a few minutes of our ever-shrinking time. Cellular phones, e-mail, Twitter and Facebook are taking their slice of the communications pie.

Used to be when driving your car, windshield time was spent thinking, dreaming and planning future work projects or events with the family. Today, most people conduct business by phone, or even hand-held computers — some while speeding along at 75 mph. The phone, computer and e-mail are effective tools and they’re here to stay.

Farmers and ranchers should be willing to use social media because it is the way many, especially those under 35, prefer to communicate and learn. Like some of the other communications’ tools, it can be a powerful tool for building influence. An example of this was the 2008 presidential race where candidates used it to attract supporters and campaign contributions.

The power of social media continues to grow. According to one source, in one year, the

micro-blogging service Twitter grew 1,382-percent. Facebook grew 228-percent and now has more than 350 million users.

There’s no question using social media is another way to connect with others, especially the younger generations. Even though Twitter and Facebook ask users to tell what they’re doing at any given moment, most of their online friends or followers don’t really want to know. The key is to be interesting, be helpful — or be quiet.

Share information, ask and answer questions and build connections. Information may be text, photos, videos or audio files. Today’s technology allows users to post or tweet from anywhere. Smart phones are simply computers that take calls.

Social media provides farmers and ranchers with one more avenue to tell their story to the non-farm public. It’s important to commit to learning new social media tools.

Yes, today there are countless ways to deliver the message about farmers and ranchers who supply the healthiest food in the world — and the ways continue to grow. Some people prefer to read newspapers, others like to surf the net and still others watch their news on television in the comfort of their easy chair.

Regardless of the way we wind up delivering our message, we will all have to figure change into the communications equation. Change affects most people in one of three ways — it excites them, scares them or fills them with hope. Regardless of how it makes us feel, change is ongoing. Always has been, always will be.

To be successful, we must anticipate change and adapt quickly. We must be wise enough to incorporate change that will help us and continue to use tried and true methods.

*John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of “Kansas Living,” a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.*

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