

from our viewpoint...

## Tax plans leave much to be desired

Tax plans by all comers – the governor, House Republicans, the Democrats – leave a lot to be desired.

The governor starts from the premise that reducing or eliminating the state's income tax will attract new businesses and spur those already in the state to make new investments. And while that might be true, the devil, as they say, is in the details.

One problem with the governor's proposal is that it would reduce taxes on higher-income Kansans, but raise them for the poorest taxpayer. The principal issue is that it would eliminate many tax deductions and credits taken from federal law, including the "earned income credit," which can generate refunds for people who owe no taxes.

You can argue that this credit is poor public policy, unfair to others who earn money, but raising taxes on only the lowest earners just does not look good. It's too good a gift to give the Democrats.

The governor also would end the highly popular deduction for home-mortgage interest. That should be a winner.

Another issue with the governor's plan is that he would keep the one-cent increase in the state sales tax signed by Gov. Mark Parkinson two years ago to pay for reduced income taxes. But while income taxes are termed progressive because they lean more heavily on the rich than the poor, the sales tax burden falls most heavily on those who earn less.

The House plan avoids some of the pitfalls of the governor's, but it has issues of its own. It would allow six-tenths of a cent of the sales tax increase to expire next year, as the Legislature promised two years ago. But it still would raise taxes on the poor while lowering them for the rich.

The House also would steal \$320 million from the T-Works transportation plan, diverting sales-tax money promised to the road fund and "promising" to pay it back later. Such promises aren't worth the reams and reams of paper they are printed on. If the state is in a financial bind "later," the road fund will suffer.

Transportation is too important to this state to be endangered by politics.

The Democrats, meanwhile, want to commit \$45 million of state tax money to cities and counties for property-tax reduction. The state used to do that, but gave up when the budget crisis forced across-the-board cuts. We doubt the state can afford to get back into this "revenue-sharing" scheme. Cities and counties should raise their own money – or cut their budgets.

A little-mentioned drawback to any of these plans is that whatever is done to make state deductions and credits different from federal law will make Kansas tax returns far more complicated than they are today. At present, the state return is calculated with very few changes from federal practice.

Tinkering with the tax code could cost taxpayers a lot of headaches – and money – as they try to figure the difference. Many changes simply won't be worth the trouble.

We're sure some brand of "tax reform" will come out of this session. Lowering income taxes is a laudable goal, but selling the change will require an overall impression of fairness. No plan out there so far has that, but whatever the Legislature comes up with has to appear fair and workable for all concerned, or it'll be a tough sell.

Taxing the poor to help the rich won't do that. It's just a way to let the Democrats make gains in the fall elections. – Steve Haynes



## Beware of new software

Being an early adopter can be frustrating, especially with software.

Last week Microsoft released a beta version of its new Windows 8 operating system. They call it the Consumer Preview, and its out there for anyone to download and try out for free.

So I thought, why not? And it works pretty well, except for one constant and irritating issue.

A couple years ago I upgraded by video card to an AMD Radeon HD 6950. As a gamer I have to keep upgrading components or get left behind, so I saved up some cash and got a new card. It works great, but there's an odd bug.

I use a two-monitor setup, and one of the minor connectors on the card doesn't work. I looked online and pretty much everyone has this problem with this particular card. Fortunately, it has an HDMI port so you can connect an HD television if you wanted to use it as a monitor. I looked on my monitor and low and behold it has an HDMI port as well. Problem solved. I can use two monitors again.

Not quite. Fire up that monitor on the HDMI and you get a shrunken image. A black border runs around the screen, taking up about an inch of space. And the picture looks shrunk as well, it doesn't look as good or as sharp as it should.

A Google search told me this is what's called underscan and is a common problem when using HDMI devices as a monitor.

Fortunately, there's a solution. Using AMD's Catalyst Control Center software, you can get rid of the underscan and expand your picture to edges of the monitor screen like it's supposed to. So, using that I've been able to use my monitor normally for years.

Now with the Windows 8 beta, the underscan is back!

AMD put out a new set of drivers compatible with the Windows 8 beta the first day, and those installed just fine. However, the Catalyst Control Center isn't working. Won't even open. Google tells me there is no other way to get rid of the underscan. None at all! So I'm stuck with it for now.

It is a beta, you can't expect everything to work properly, but it is still frustrating, mostly because the underscan and resulting poor picture quality on the main screen is distracting me



### kevin bottrell

• simple tricks and nonsense

from really enjoying the new operating system and fully testing out its features.

That frustration aside, I like it so far. The new Metro interface is pretty cool. It uses simple-looking tiles for all your various programs, and you can add whatever tiles you want and arrange them how you want. It pretty much takes anything you'd need to do and puts it all in menu screen. The performance is good, there are no noticeable slowdowns. Startup time, a common complaint with Windows, is on par with the Apple setup I have in the office.

It does some things I don't like, however. One is getting rid of the start menu – that handy pop-up menu on your taskbar. After decades of using that start menu, its difficult to get out of the habit. The taskbar is still there when you are on the desktop and not in the Metro screen.

I'm sure that eventually AMD will get its act together and release a new Windows 8-optimized version of Catalyst, but until then I'm stuck with black bars marring an otherwise excellent operating system.

The Windows 8 beta isn't the only piece of new software that I'm currently having problems with.

Everything in tech these days – that isn't about tablets or smartphones – is about the "cloud." Put in basic terms, the cloud is the concept of all-digital media, which is to say "no disc required." You simply download everything, sometimes you download media on to your hard-drive, and sometimes you just stream it in on-demand, and it never takes up any space on your system.

It's no surprise that game companies want to get in on this. After all they can save on the costs of manufacturing DVDs if everyone just downloads games. Several big game-downloading services have cropped up, such as Steam, and I'm having trouble with one of them.

Tuesday was the release of Mass Effect 3. Mass Effect – a science fiction epic – is one of the best game series, period. It's one of those that transcends its genre, in the same way that "The Dark Knight" rises above being "just a comic book movie." The graphics are spectacular, the voice acting is superb – a lot of famous folks in it like Martin Sheen, Keith David, Seth Green, Lance Henriksen and Adam Baldwin. The story is epic and it's all put together in a fashion that immerses you for hours on end.

So naturally I tried to hop on board the first day. I got the download through Amazon, who has a pretty reliable and safe service. I downloaded it the day before it went live. At 10 gigabytes, that's a good five or six hours of download time. Then I tried to install it. It fired up a program called Origin, the cloud gaming platform of Electronic Arts, the parent company of the studio that makes Mass Effect.

I've had Origin on my system since probably November when it first came out, and I've never been impressed with it. One game that worked fine for months wouldn't update when a new patch was released, and I've never been able to solve that. I've mostly avoided it like the plague, and until now I was able to, since the one Electronic Arts game I've gotten since then didn't require Origin to play.

But Mass Effect does. So I tried to install it, it said "installation failed." Looked it up online and unsurprisingly I'm not the only one with that problem. Fortunately there's a workaround to manually copy the files into the Origin directory. So I did that, but it wouldn't play, and it said it needed to update and wouldn't even do that. No matter what I try, I can't get it to work.

I'm still waiting for a response on the Electronic Arts technical support forum – which I'm having trouble even viewing, I suspect because of the volume of support requests – but I'm close to asking Amazon for a refund.

I'm all for new technologies. I think advancement is great, but when it gets down to the consumer level, it should just work with a minimum of effort. When your forums don't work because they are so flooded with people needing tech support, you've got a problem.

## The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: [star-news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star-news@nwkansas.com). Advertising questions can be sent to: [goodlandads@nwkansas.com](mailto:goodlandads@nwkansas.com)

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

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## Dad reunited with best friends in Heaven

"I wouldn't take any amount of money for that dog," were my dad's most often spoken words when referring to our family dog, Lady.

He and my younger sister, Sandy, picked up the young German shepherd pup from our veterinarian in Colby. Lady was a replacement for our Irish setter, Red. This old gal retrieved her last pheasant during the fall of '62, shortly after my 13th birthday.

Lady spent many years on our farm and became a major part of our family. We all loved her.

True to her name, she conducted herself like a lady around our family but this sleek silver and black canine struck fear into the hearts of anyone who drove up to our home. She was a guard that protected us from door-to-door salesmen and other unwanted guests.

I remember a particularly pesky Fuller brush man who Mother couldn't persuade to leave. Once he finally did, I sicked Lady on him and she chased him for nearly 30 yards before he jumped into his car with her ripping at his drawers.

One of Dad's best friends never stepped foot out of his pickup while Lady patrolled our property. This neighbor cursed Lady, swore he'd shoot her but he never messed with her.

This dog was a constant companion throughout our childhood and played many different roles. She was the scout that trotted out front



### Insight this week

• john schlageck

as we explored the western Kansas countryside. She was the horse that pulled Sandy in the wagon. She was the vigilant lookout that waited patiently for us to return from school. She was also that "silly creature" who slept in our wheelbarrow filled with fall leaves.

But most of all, Lady was the dog that worshiped my dad. My father couldn't drive his pickup anywhere without this four-legged passenger seated to his right.

"She got so she could almost drive," Dad used to tell us with a smile.

This dog would do anything for my father – and she was a joy to watch working cattle.

"She could tell if there was cow out (of the fenced in pasture) a half mile away," Dad said. "She'd put her head out the window and when I'd stop the pickup she'd round them up and head 'em into the (open) gate."

We enjoyed many happy years with Lady before she became old, tired and feeble. When that day came, we took her to our vet to have her put to sleep.

This was particularly painful. Lady wasn't just our dog – she was a member of our family. Dad gathered her in his arms, placed her on

the seat to his right one last time, and drove her home.

We buried Lady near mom's garden in the back yard. She often played in that garden and it was there she buried her bones.

Yes, we all missed that dog and while it's been a long time ago, I still remember my dad reaching down beside his easy chair to pet the head that was no longer there.

Dad couldn't be without a dog for long and within a few months he brought home another silver and black German shepherd. We called her Lady too.

Whenever we used to visit my folks, we'd bring our little Sheltie, Lorna Doone, home with us. Seeing her race through the grass today takes me back to western Kansas and memories for my father and his dogs. Dad enjoyed the company of his dogs until a few years ago when he passed into the "Great Beyond" as he called it.

And if wishes come true, I know my dad is sitting in his easy chair in heaven with one, or all of his "Ladies," next to him. I can see a smile spread across his face as he pets each and every one of them and listens to the thump, thump, thump of their tails.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.