

from our viewpoint...

## Property tax idea is long overdue

Gov. Sam Brownback proposed a long-overdue reform last week, putting forth a bill that would bar local governments from spending any windfall they get when property valuations take a big jump.

The governor's proposal would require a city or county, or other taxing district, to lower its levy when total property valuation goes up, rather than keeping taxes the same and reaping a windfall of uncontrolled spending.

The alternative – in case, say, real growth was pushing valuation higher and creating the need for a lot of new spending – taking the increase to a vote of the people.

This bill may not be popular with city and county officials, who often like to have more money to spend. But it should make Kansas taxpayers – burdened with high and rising property-tax bills, happy.

Officials told us a few years ago, when the Legislature eliminated the old "tax lid" law, that they would be responsible. The result has been continued growth in city and county spending across the state.

In our area, the responsibility shown by county commissioners and city councils varies. Nearly all budgets have grown with or faster than the rate of inflation. A study by Nor'West Newspapers a couple of years ago showed that some had remarkably high increases, while others were far lower.

Temptation to spend a "windfall" is great, because the money is almost "free." Tax rates do not have to be increases, and for the most part, individual taxpayers see no increase the first year.

However, most windfalls are temporary. When the underlying cause goes away, so does the newfound wealth. This happened in Decatur County a few years ago when a boom in oil production caused the county's valuation to shoot up. The commissioners spent the money, but when valuation dropped the next year, had to make some painful cuts.

This year, in a similar situation, they were more cautious, but still spent some of the money.

We see nothing wrong with putting an increase in spending in such a situation to a vote. If the need is as great as commissioners or council members sometimes feel, then they should have no trouble convincing citizens of that.

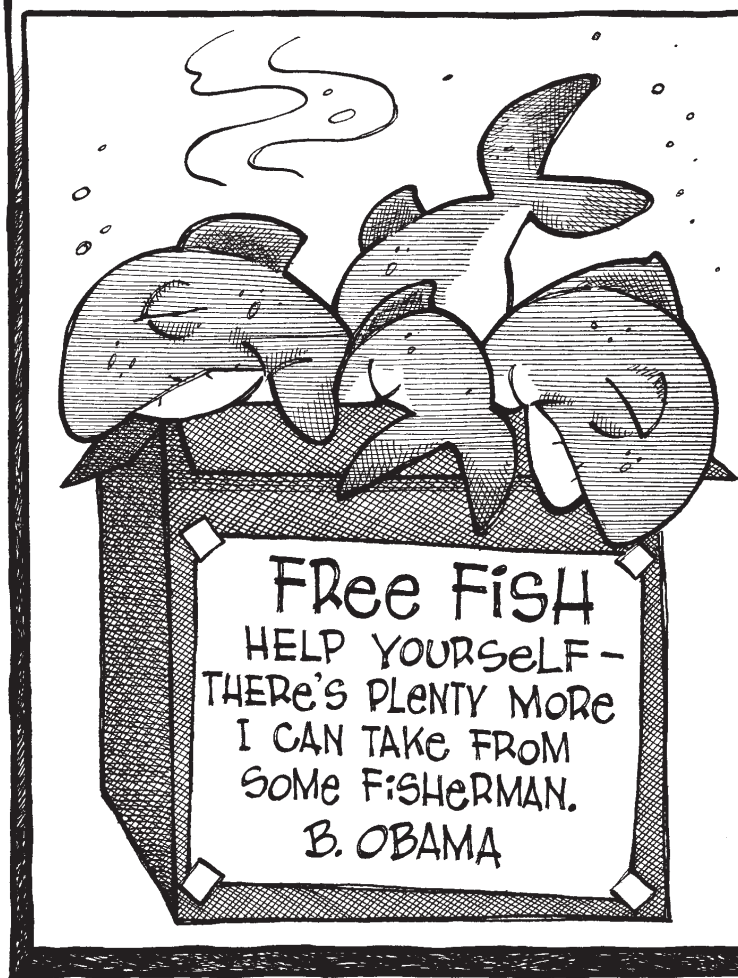
If, on the other hand, they see public employees with better insurance and higher pay than they have, it may be a hard sell.

Either way, it's democracy at work, a reminder to everyone that the taxpayers support government, but only as much as they want and need – and that may be less than those spending the money would like.

The cap on property tax collections would be flexible enough to exempt new construction, the governor said, protecting cities and counties from being squeezed by actual growth.

Good for the governor, we say. Now, let's see if the Legislature, which includes a lot of former local officials, will keep the people's needs in mind when it gets its hands on this bill. – Steve Haynes

## AMERICA'S 2012 ELECTION CHOICE



## Good crop of Senate candidates

One thing that really impressed me while putting together this week were the candidates running for state Senate.

Sen. Allen Schmidt, the Democrat, and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, the Republican, have different approaches toward finance and the role of the state, but what struck me most was a question that they both answered the same way – "What are your future political ambitions?"

Both candidates answered that they had none. Neither one wants to climb the political ladder to a more powerful office or make more than they do today. Granted, a state senator probably makes more than I do, but all the same, I saw real value in this response.

Today, more than ever, most of us believe that a politician without a desire for power is an oxymoron, and it's refreshing to hear the two men vying to maintain such a powerful position acknowledge that they want nothing more. Of course, they could be lying, but I don't think they are. Both men told me they



### stephanie decamp

• newcomer's view

had been encouraged to run for office because others believed in them, and that they saw their jobs as a public service, not unlike serving in the armed forces.

It's hard, even for a person as sunny and positive as me, not to be jaded about politics. When I watched the presidential debates, I walked away feeling even less informed and more frustrated than I already was. On top of that, you have an all-time high of party bickering, which in unregulated forums like Facebook and Twitter, can take incredibly harsh and tactless swings for the worse.

Where is the dignity in serving your country, I've wondered? Where is the respect for the office, such as I hear people had when John

F. Kennedy was president? I've never seen that respect. I've grown up with comedians defiling every president, and talk radio tearing them to pieces.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, there can't be any compromise without mutual respect and a firm commitment to each other and our communities, instead of our pocketbooks and influence. If our leaders don't quit seeking to get ahead of the other guy, stonewalling legislation because it comes from someone we don't like, and throwing mud at each other's personal politics and reputations, then we'll never make it.

It's time we – and especially our politicians – rise above the muck, and start doing our jobs like the adults we are, instead of the petty, greedy children we've become.

Stephanie DeCamp is a reporter for The Oberlin Herald. A graduate of Metro State College in Denver, she originally is from Johnson County, Kansas.

## Vote yes on watercraft amendment

To the Editor:

Vote yes on the watercraft constitutional amendment Nov. 6. The airwaves and our mail boxes are full of information about the candidates in the upcoming election, but this is an important constitutional amendment that – if passed – will allow for fairer taxation of watercraft (boats) and make Kansas watercraft taxation competitive with surrounding states. Some voters may ask, "Why should I care?"

Property taxes on watercraft in Kansas are so high that they discourage boat ownership, limiting families' opportunity for wholesome water recreation. Compared to surrounding states, Kansas watercraft taxes are so high that



### from our readers

• to the editor

many Kansans register their boats illegally in neighboring states, so Kansas counties lose property-tax revenue. The high tax rates also reduce in-state boat sales, affecting our marinas and boat dealers and reducing state sales tax revenue.

The Legislature showed bipartisan, overwhelming support – 121 to 2 in the House and 40 to 0 in the Senate – for placing this

amendment on the ballot. The amendment may be difficult to understand because the ballot includes the entire article of the constitution that is affected, not just the change. The only change is the addition of the words "and watercraft." Adding just those two words will give the Legislature the opportunity to create a fairer tax treatment of watercraft. You can give them that opportunity by voting yes.

This change is good for Kansas and Kansas families, and we encourage you to vote yes on the amendment.

Robin Jennison, Topeka  
Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

## Move toward affordable energy policies

Domestic energy production is at the center of the national political debate. A number of groups come out in strong opposition to oil and natural gas production. What is the real underlying reason for this? Let's put a framework around the true underlying context here; in other words why oil and gas matters to the economy and national energy security, and why folks on the other side are fighting so hard to attack both those things at every turn. There is a view out there held by some folks that the reason these groups come out so strongly against oil and gas production is that they are trying to protect the environment and public health/safety. However, this thing is about so much more than that.

What it's about is a broader recognition among those who oppose American energy development that now, all of a sudden, and really for the first time in our lifetime, we no longer live in a world of energy scarcity. Literally from the moment oil was discovered more than 150 years ago, right up through today, people in positions of power and influence have been telling us time and again the world is running out of energy, and in particular oil and natural gas.

In 1980, government analysts estimated that the total proved reserves for North America were 67 billion barrels. Thirty years later, more than 240 billion barrels have been consumed by the U.S., Canada, and Mexico – and yet today, according to those same government agencies – North America's proved reserves now exceed 210 billion barrels.

Unfortunately, even as our supply horizon continues to change for the better, one of the applause lines President Obama continues to use frequently is that since America only has 2 percent of the world's oil we can't drill our way to energy independence. Obviously, that's not a talking point that gets very far because we all know what the U.S. Geological Survey confirmed earlier this year that the U.S. actually in fact has 26 percent of the world's technically recoverable oil and 30 percent of the world's



### from other pens

• edward cross

technically recoverable natural gas, and that does not include unconventional reserves. Folks who oppose American energy development have only recently begun to wake up to the realities that we no longer live in a world of energy scarcity.

But even as they curse the science, technology, and laws of physics that have conspired to allow producers to boost their yields and delay indefinitely that which they once thought to be imminent and inevitable – namely the end of oil – they've also come to realize that they may be able to manufacture the same outcome (the end of oil) by advocating environmental, regulatory, and tax proposals that disrupt orderly oil and gas development. They often manufacture debate and offer ideas about oil and natural gas production that are contradictory or otherwise separated from reality.

The Obama Administration has embraced the energy scarcity theory and is finding it difficult to come to grips with the destruction of that narrative. We have enough fossil fuel energy resources right here in America to provide reliable and affordable energy for decades, even centuries to come. So, the Obama Administration looks for every opportunity to attack, weaken, or destroy domestic oil and natural gas production to justify their academic notions of energy scarcity and to promote their "clean energy" and climate change agenda. American oil and natural gas producers are under siege from agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others.

And though our president speaks eloquently about the importance of energy security, in the end it comes down to a raw political calculation.

He speaks about supporting 225,000 clean energy jobs and doubling electricity output from wind and solar even though the reality of his Administration's policies have resulted in the worst economic recovery in a generation.

As president Obama continues his charade on the campaign trail calling oil the "fuel of the past", the choices for the American people are becoming clear. To the American worker who doesn't commute by government motorcade, oil seems very much a fuel of the present and of the foreseeable future. President Obama seems to believe that Americans who vote in elections and who might end up being hurt by his decisions probably won't notice.

In the end, I think a compelling case can be made that the president has been proven wrong in his assessment of the American people. At a time when the two most important issues facing everyday citizens are jobs and the price of energy, Americans are realizing that we are moving in the wrong direction on energy policy.

We have the resources to meet our energy challenges – of that we can now be assured. With the right leadership and vision, we can turn these challenges into great opportunities for economic growth and energy security. Policies that encourage the development of America's vast oil and natural gas resources combined with measures to strengthen our partnerships with Canada and Mexico could rebalance energy geopolitics making North America energy independent. This is not a vision of America at the mercy of other oil-producing regions, or an America threatened by scarce resources. It is a vision of America holding the reins of her energy security and future prosperity.

We need to get to work doing the right things for a better energy future. Most Americans understand this. They want more jobs. They want more affordable and reliable energy. It's time to move policy in that direction.

Edward Cross is the president of the Kansas Independent Oil and Gas Association.

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