

from our viewpoint...

# Argument calls for raising taxes

Elsewhere on the page, you'll find an argument for a tax increase to keep Kansas government growing.

The esteemed Emerson Lynn Jr. of the Iola Register argues that Kansas wouldn't have the financial fix it's in today if only the Legislature hadn't cut taxes all through the 1990s.

Lynn is the dean of Kansas editors and perhaps the state's finest editorialist. He makes his point with eloquence. A reader asked if we would reprint his piece, and we have. He does not reach the same conclusions we do, but then, the right answer to any question often depends on your viewpoint.

There is little doubt the Legislature will put more money into schools this year, maybe as much as the \$455 million Senate proposal, in an effort to appease the courts and school districts that feel slighted by the state financing formula.

There is a limit to how much the state can pay, though, without raising taxes, and there is no sign Kansas taxpayers want or would approve that.

Times are tough in this state. After five years of drought and recession, small businesses are on their knees. The economic "recovery" moves at a snail's pace.

State government has felt the recession as hard as anyone. Income hasn't met expectations for years, and budgets have been tight. Schools know they can expect little help from a strapped state.

In our view, the state, and Kansas schools, need to make do with what they have, just as Kansas businesses and taxpayers have been doing.

There is no sign of a crisis in education, other than the artificial crisis created by a lawsuit challenging the state's school funding formula. In that case, the plaintiffs were school districts that failed to get what they wanted from the Legislature, and so turned to the courts.

But across the state, test scores are high. Kansas students are learning and schools are improving, despite the budget crunch.

It's true, in the 1990s, the state did slash taxes. It did what government should do when it gets too much money: give some back to the people who earned it.

Cries to boost the school budget belie the fact that state spending has increased every year for 40 years except one. Over that time, the budget has grown from \$526.5 million in 1966 to a projected \$11.268 billion next year, an astounding 21 times growth.

Adjusted for inflation, today's budget is nearly four times the 1966 version. Why?

Schools. Welfare. New programs and agencies. But mostly schools and welfare.

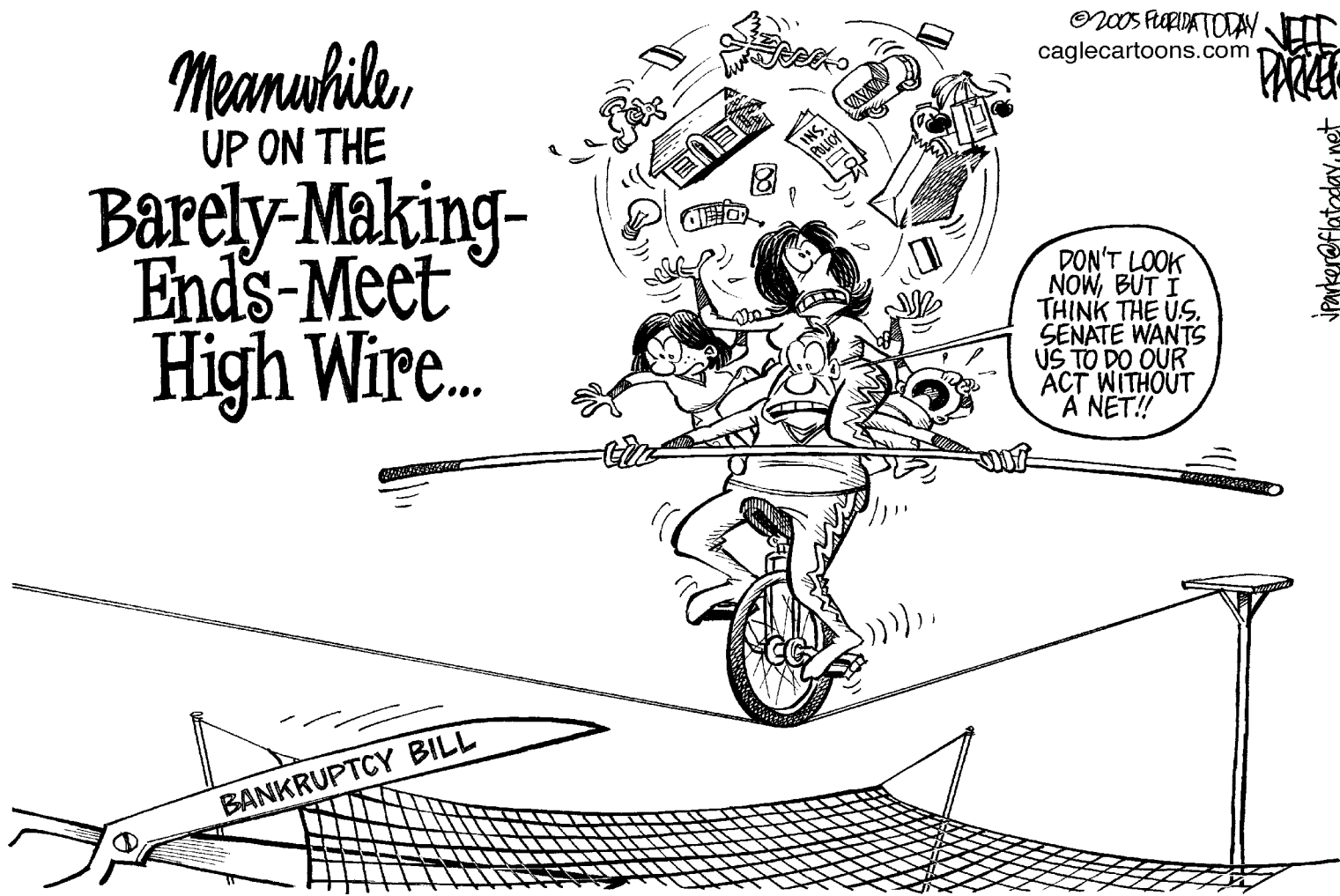
The dreams of 1966 are today's entitlements, and if you listen to some people, the growth will continue.

The voters, though, are fed up. They elected more conservatives to the Legislature last year, not more spenders. They have no use for a tax increase. They don't see a crisis in education, only a crisis in the courts.

And it's their money. Let's see if they are convinced schools really need a tax increase.

— Steve Haynes

Meanwhile,  
UP ON THE  
Barely-Making-  
Ends-Meet  
High Wire...



# The earth is springing to life

I don't know about you, but I've noticed the earth is springing to life.

God is obviously creating, as the bulbs shoot their tender sprouts through the still cool earth.

We have had a lot of moisture this winter, so things will probably be lush this spring. It can't come too soon for me.

As I sit here thinking about how wonderful life is, I realize that much of that comes from the fact that I am happy and content.

"Life is worth the living" — as a wonderful Easter hymn tells us. So here are some thoughts about life and living. Think about them:

1) "A good conscience is a sweet perfume that spreads its fragrance over everything near it without exhausting the supply of it." Luce St. Clair Robson, Walk in My Soul.

2) "When your life is in balance, your soul will be light." "I'm back with Camille. Things are good between us. I can laugh about everything now, which is certain proof that time is the greatest of all comedians." Richard Paul Evans, A Perfect Day.

3) "Every man desires to live long, but no man would be old." Luce St. Clair Robson, Walk in My Soul.

4) "Just wait, Billy; always hasten slowly." Day of Reckoning, Jack Higgins.

5) "You sometimes don't get accolades for the good things you do," writes zine editor Leslie Powell in The Interesting Times, "because the universe is balancing out the bad things you got away with." (That's a good thing to remember. LGT)

6) "Follow your faith, as weak as it is, rather



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than your doubts, as strong as they seem to you right now. You do that, and leave the rest up to God. He'll make sure everything goes according to plan." Francine Rivers, And the Shofar Blew.

7) "Youth and skill are no match for old age and treachery." Francine Rivers, And the Shofar Blew.

8) "Home is where you can say anything you like 'cause nobody listens to you anyway." Unknown.

9) "Regular naps prevent old age, especially if you take them while driving." Unknown.

10) "Was the word sin even in the dictionary anymore? What used to be called self-indulgence was now called self-fulfillment. What was once called moral irresponsibility was now considered freedom to find oneself. What was once considered disgusting and obscene was now tolerated — and even taught in schools as 'alternative lifestyles.'" Temporary fixes. Feel-good religion. Discipline was considered repression; depravity, creative self-expression; murder, a matter of choice; and adultery, sex between consenting adults. What was wrong was called right, and what was right was called wrong!" Francine Rivers, And the Shofar Blew. (Something we all need to consider — and correct. LGT)

11) "A woman cannot argue with you if you do not stand and argue." Morgan Llywelyn, Druids.

12) "Something suspiciously like moisture sparked in his eyes. My own were stinging. I hate farewells. Nature offers a better model. Animals greet one another with the rituals appropriate to their species, but they part without ceremony. No painful moments. They just go. That is what I wanted to do then; just go." Morgan Llywelyn, Druids.

13) "After all is said and done, usually more is said than done." Unknown. (This is much, much too true. LGT)

14) "Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened." Unknown, from an e-mail.

15) "Man is born broken. He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue." Eugene O'Neill.

16) "The most precious thing we have is life. Yet it has absolutely no trade-in value." Unknown.

Yes, I believe life is worth the living. And today is a beautiful day to be alive. Yet, we all know there are times when we are discouraged, depressing and wondering why. At those times, I hope you will remember this quote:

"And when life wounds you, I hope it's because you loved people, not because you mistreated them. I know that although we may never understand it, there is a plan, and though it may be traced in pain, in the end there will be joy, and it will be beautiful." Donna VanLiere, The Christmas Blessing.

Why not have a happy life?

It's the only one you get, and it goes by very quickly.

# Republicans focus on Sebelius; ignore kids

By EMERSON LYNN JR.  
The Iola Register

Last Tuesday, the Kansas Senate Education Committee produced a plan to raise spending on the state's public schools by \$455 million over the next three years, which would include hikes for bilingual, special education and poor children.

If passed, it would become the largest increase since the state took over school finance in 1992.

The Senate plan appears to be an earnest effort to meet demands made by the Supreme Court to spend more on K-12 and distribute the funds more fairly.

As it stands, however, it doesn't pass muster because the money isn't there. Perhaps the first year could be funded from existing money by stripping the treasury of its reserves and ripping funds away from other areas that don't have enough political clout to protect their budgets.

Sponsors say privately they know that tax increases would be necessary for years two and three — and maybe this year, too. They aren't ready, however, to say which taxes should be increased or by how much.

The Senate plan is even richer than the one Gov. Kathleen Sebelius proposed last year. She asked for \$310 million over three years. The difference, however, is she recognized that increased spending required increased income and proposed higher sales, income and property taxes



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to pay for it. The plan was rejected by the Legislature without serious debate, not because it was a bad idea, but because it was a Sebelius idea.

This sequence of events leads to only one conclusion: This year's Republican-dominated Legislature is trying every trick in the book to avoid raising taxes for schools because doing so would benefit the governor politically.

Republican leaders seem to believe that raising the revenue needed to provide Kansas students with an adequate education would be seen by voters as an admission that Gov. Sebelius was right and they were wrong. To do so would help her win re-election next year, they tell themselves.

THEY ARE WRONG in every way they could be on this issue.

The reason Kansas is short of the money it needs for its public schools is that the Legislature cut taxes sharply under Gov. Bill Graves when the treasury was flush during the boom years of the 1990s. The statewide property tax, for example, was slashed from 35 mills to 20 mills. More property tax was lost when the homestead exemption was increased. Still

other exemptions reduced state income from the sales tax. Steps to stimulate business added further tax exemptions and reductions.

The overall impact of tax cuts in the 90s by now amounts to billions. The primary reason why state funding falls short of today's public school needs is that the state's tax structure was severely weakened during those eight years. It is unrealistic to argue those needs can now be met without restoring at least some of the income that they, themselves, stripped away.

Republicans may be aiming at Gov. Sebelius with their no-tax-hike rhetoric but the shots backfire. The lawmakers in control come across as Scrooges willing to short-change Kansas youngsters to make political points. They give ammunition to critics who point to skyrocketing local taxes and blame the Republicans for beggaring school districts, cities and counties so they can take credit with voters for holding down state taxes.

Kansans are brighter than that. They know their schools are underfunded. They know the property tax increases they face at home are being forced on them by state government's refusal to meet state responsibilities.

The best strategy Kansas Republicans could follow for 2006 would be to forget the opposition and focus on doing the best job they can to fulfill the responsibilities the state has to its citizens. Providing a top-notch education to every Kansas child remains at the top of that list.

# garfield



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