

State needs to tighten belt instead of raising our taxes

News that the state's income will be \$201 million short of projected spending next year has everyone at the Statehouse in a tither.

Legislators are trying to figure out how to raise taxes without actually raising taxes, and the education lobby continues to demand more, not less, state money. A conference committee, at last report, had thrown out everything done all year and was ready to start over, trying to find an agreeable way to close the gap.

At first, thoughts turned to smoke and mirrors. The governor thinks the state can raise another \$40 million by spending \$3 million on extra revenue agents. But you can only squeeze the turnip so much.

The slot machine lobby saw one last hope for its dead horse. Slots might bring the state \$45 million, supporters said.

Democrats immediately called for a tax increase, which they've been certain is needed all along. One proposal is to hike the state inheritance tax just as the federal government is about to do away with the national tax it is based on. That makes sense.

Education plans put forth by the governor and the Senate leadership both proposed tax increase, sales, income, sin and other, depending on who you were talking to. The Senate even proposed an innovative tax on soda pop, though it was never clear why. Maybe soda pop is a sin now.

In the meantime, the House passed a tax cut plan, trimming the rate for the statewide property tax levy used to help pay for schools. That apparently was meant as a message to the tax-loving Senate, not a serious tax cut.

In a state where the Legislature cut taxes four years in a row and skated the fifth, the "I" word

has received more work than it has in a decade. State finances are in a bind, the Cassandras cry. A crisis looms. Cuts must be made.

The truth is a little different. Even with the "shortfall" at \$201 million, as they call it, state spending is liable to rise about 1 percent, with total spending a record nearly \$4.7 billion in the general fund. That's nearly double the budget of just 10 years ago.

Does the state have to spend that much? Most of it goes for schools, highways, higher education and social services.

Highways operate under a transportation plan approved last year, though collections for the plan are now projected to run short over its 10-year life. Schools are clamoring for more, and receiving a great deal of attention.

Higher education has been told to tighten its belt. Even promised raises for professors may be canceled.

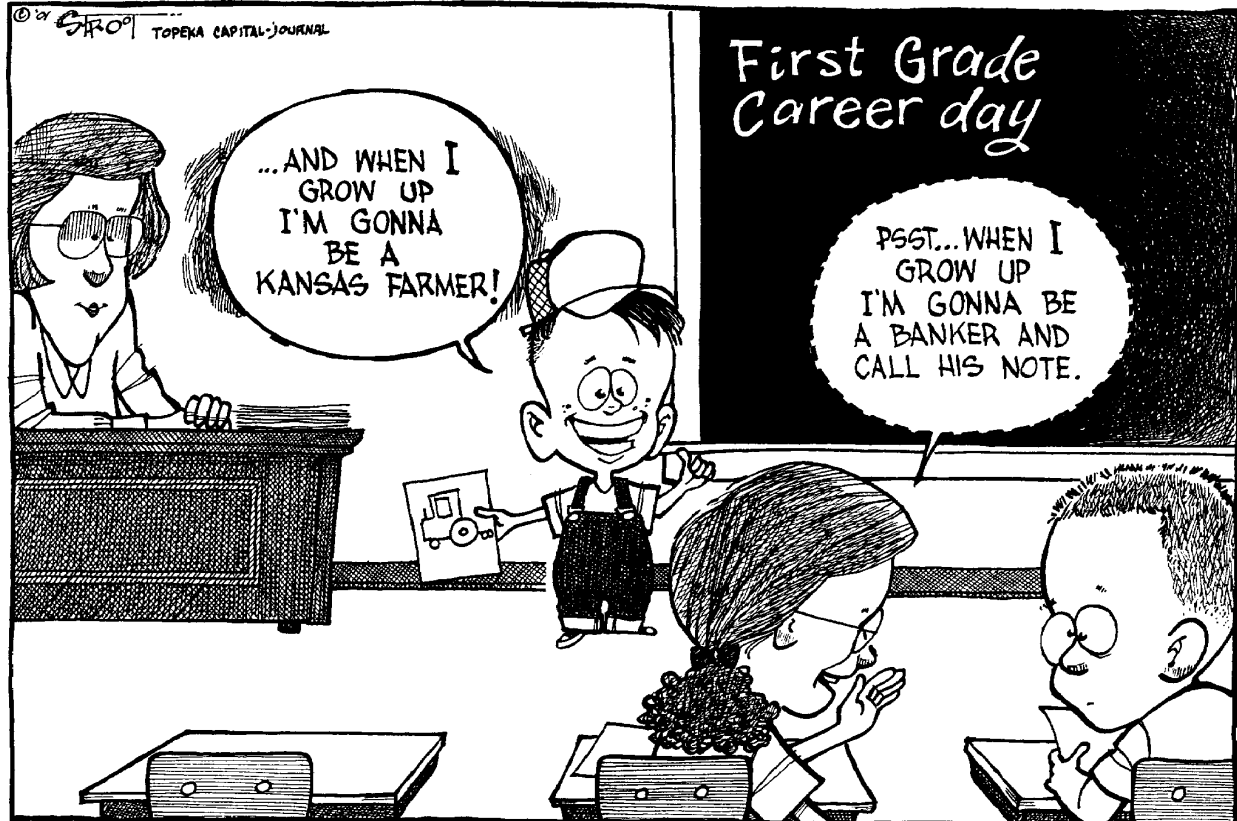
Faced with the shortfall, liberal commentators, Senate leaders, Democrats and even the governor are screaming for a tax increase so the Legislature can boost spending. Almost no one is calling for the state to do what any family or business would do, facing similar circumstances:

Tighten the ol' pursestrings, reduce spending and weather the storm.

If the average family could raise taxes on someone else and keep on living high, we might try it. The state is tempted to raise taxes now because it can.

But the history of Kansas politics is littered with the bodies of tax-raisers. Better, we think, to hold the line.

Can't the state tighten its belt the way the rest of us have to? — Steve Haynes



They can find you using phone

Here's a scary thought. As our society shifts from traditional land-line telephones to mobile telephones, computers track our every move by keeping tabs on our phones.

When the government — or the gas company, for that matter — wants to know where we are, where we have been, and what we were up to, it checks the phone logs.

Your cellular phone is in constant contact with the telephone company's computer, telling where it is. If anyone started keeping tabs on these signals, they could track half the people in the country today. The rest of us by tomorrow.

The day is not far off when everyone will just carry their phone with them, day and night.

Unless, of course, people start to switch them off just to baffle the government.

It could come to that.

It's always been hard for the government to track us. There's not much record of the average American's travel, especially by car.

Of course, credit card purchases leave a trail. And if you're on public transportation, your name likely has been recorded. Under new security



Along the Sappa

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regulations, airlines are required to verify your identity. Amtrak even has to take your name before letting you travel on its trains, supposedly so it knows who was on board in a crash.

And your phone could be telling about your travels today. Tomorrow, it will be tracking you right down to the lot and block you are parked on.

The government is pushing hard to make phone companies come up with a way to triangulate any phone user as part of improvements to 911 emergency systems.

Phones will be required to give a precise location using either tower triangulation or satellite global positioning. The idea is to allow a police dispatcher to know the exact location of emergency calls, but the effect will be to make it possible to know where people go day in and day out, even if the user

avoids giving other clues away.

You might just say that it's no big deal, since you're not out breaking the law and have nothing to worry about. You might even be right.

But what if the government just takes a shine to you? Would you want them tracking you?

Technology is a wonderful thing, but you have to wonder how deeply the government's hand ought to be involved in shaping it.

No one has to carry a cell phone, of course. It's purely voluntary. But half the world has one, and soon we all will.

No one has to let the computers track them. You could just turn your phone off. But then, you wouldn't get any calls.

Big brother, it seems, isn't just watching us. He is listening — and tracking — too.

Spring comes with the asparagus

The flowers are in bloom. The robins have returned. There's perfume from fruit trees in the air.

All the signs of spring were here, but I still wasn't convinced until last week.

It rained, hailed and snowed in one day.

Well that looked like spring (or fall) but, I wasn't convinced.

Teen-agers appeared in shorts and sandals.

Not good enough. I've seen my children wear shorts when it was 10 below zero and sandals in two-foot of snow.

The asparagus started to appear in the garden.

Now, I know it's spring.

Asparagus spears peeking out of the barren ground make me sure spring has arrived.

A knife to cut and a steamer to cook and I'm ready to get out my summer apparel and enjoy the sunshine.

When we lived in Colorado, we used to stalk the wild asparagus. The bushes would grow up along the fence rows and canals, which carried water to the



Open Season

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thirsty potato and barley fields.

We would send the children out each evening to bring back our supper vegetable.

They hated it.

It's not that they don't like asparagus. They just hated having to go anywhere without television or video games.

The asparagus wasn't free. We had to put up with the kids whining, and they lost a couple of good knives in irrigation ditches.

Now we grow the tender shoots in our own back yard and in the spring when we are in Colorado, Steve and I go along the fence rows and the canals with knives and sack to pick our sup-

per vegetables.

The children will not join us in this pursuit.

In fact, they think we are crazy.

Oh well, just wait until they are on their own and have to pay \$2.19 a pound for asparagus. They may take knife and sack in hand.

Or more likely, they will hand them to their children and tell them that when their parents made them go out and cut asparagus spring came in March and they had to dig down through the snow to find the tasty shoots and they had to walk — from Kansas — to get to where they could find the wild asparagus.

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Nebraska man writes against check off

To the Editor:

If the cheat-off crowd kept \$80 million, returned it on a rotating 30-day basis, that's a lot of free interest! The cheat-off is a violation of everyone's right to own and be secure in their property! Slavery of those forced to seize the fees is a violation of the Constitution, which forbids a state religion, hath no grounds for mandatory unions against anyone's conscience.

Taxing any animal more than once is unfair and illegal, as is allowing those to vote who know they would be exempt from paying tax (traders). Hath no proven merit!

Letters to the Editor

If they promoted beef in Japan (who bought beef from Australia), what good doeth it for those who want to spend their advertising on a niche (natural or branded beef market)?

Is it a crime to believe "U" can spend your money more profitably than the cheat-off crowd (who can't survive on voluntary support)?

The cheat-off crowd should be audited and subpoenaed to show how

many they have in the non-compliance department, what it hath spent? How many and who they have persecuted. (The constitution forbideth excessive fines and cruel and unusual punishment.)

"Consider what I say: and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." II Timothy 2:7.

Frank Sowers
Benkelman, Neb.

Social workers dislike expelling students

To the Editor:

Schools must be safe, orderly environments in which children can learn. No one disagrees with this.

Many years ago, in order to assist schools in maintaining safe, orderly environments, our state Legislature passed laws allowing schools to expel students for 186 school days, a full school year, for violations of student conduct. Which violations may cause a student to be expelled vary from district to district. However, most often, expulsions occur because of acts intended to harm others, weapons possession and drugs. These are awful events which should not occur in our schools.

However, we are not convinced that expelling students for 186 days is the best solution. If a student is not in school, they are most likely not learning. Many may be unsupervised during expulsion due to both parents working. Many may pass time during their "punishment" watching television,

playing video games or roaming around unsupervised. So often, the best interests of the student are not being served by expulsion.

We know that most juvenile crime is committed between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. The theory is that this is when juveniles are most likely to be restless and unsupervised. Why would we want to give them eight more hours a day in which to be restless and unsupervised?

Is expulsion in the best interest of the community? We think not. When a student experiences learning problems or disruptions from school, they are less likely to succeed and graduate from high school. A large percentage of criminals are persons who experienced school problems or did not graduate. They have no way to make a decent living, so they turn to crime. We believe expulsions set students up for failure, and make criminal activity more likely. Some schools have developed alter-

natives in which students suspended or expelled can attend classes. Unfortunately, not all expelled students are served in these settings. Some are sent home. Other school districts are not obligated to take these students during their expulsion.

We believe that the Legislature should work with school districts to ensure that all students, when suspended or expelled, are not "rewarded" by being sent home. We believe it should be mandatory that all districts provide an alternative school for those suspended or expelled. School districts will need assistance, financial and technical, to make this happen. We believe the Legislature has it in their power to make this happen.

We are all professional social workers in Kansas.

Pat Morgan, Wellington
Elina Cain Sorrick, Arkansas City
Frank Rodriguez, Wichita

Woman hopes for peace in schools

To the Editor:

In writing, my hope is that we will all unite in taking action to bring peace to our communities. I, like you, have seen the effects of a world at unrest. We have seen wars, hatred and much death. This death is not only upon foreign lands, but also right in our schools and homes.

On April 20, 1999, the tragedy of Columbine High School occurred. On March 6, 2001, we had another horror in a school in Santee, Calif. This shows that we have done nothing to change the hearts and minds of the students to make sure this does not occur again. Unless we get to the cause of these, we will continue to mourn without hope of change. My hope is that you will see there is a peaceful solution and a positive way to change the way our society is heading.

On Feb. 23-25, the Third Global

Conference on Peace was hosted by the House of Yahweh in Abilene, Texas. It was co-convened by Dr. Yisrayl Hawkins, from Abilene, and Dr. Oryema Johnson from Canada. There were 16 countries represented there, including men and women from China, Russia, Israel and Nigeria, to name just a few. Representatives from various peace organizations across the United States were also in attendance.

Though the people came from many nations, the problems all stemmed from the same cause: a lack of education in the laws of moral principles. It was agreed by all, that with proper education, starting at a very young age, all forms of the negative effects that we see in modern day society would be eliminated.

"The only way to stop hate and killing is through education, taught

through the laws in the peaceful solution," said the representative from Israel.

The representative from Armenia agreed with this. These men have seen the devastating effects of war. Now they will be taking back with them hope through the teaching of the peaceful solution.

What is the peace solution? It is a set of moral principles that can be taught to all people. Everyone who is taught and practices the peaceful solution will greatly benefit from these principles.

I urge you to obtain and consider this information. Free samples of this program are being offered. To receive your free copy, call (888) 613-9494, or write to the Peaceful Solution, Box 2442, Abilene, Texas 79604; or e-mail: info@peacefulsolution.com.

Lisa Thornton, Kansas City, Kan.