

Making tax increases hard would protect pocketbooks

A couple of proposals ready to hit the Kansas Legislature make a lot of sense.

One, by Rep. Brenda Landwehr of Wichita, would require a public vote on any proposal to increase taxes or government fees.

Tagged as the "Kansas Taxpayers Bill of Rights," it also would attempt to limit growth in government spending.

Meanwhile, Rep. Patricia Lightner of Overland Park has submitted a proposal requiring a two-thirds majority in the Legislature to approve a tax increase rather than the 50 percent plus one now needed.

Both women are conservative Republicans, and their measures are proposed as constitutional amendments which require a two-thirds majority in the Legislature, then a vote of the people, to become law.

Presented that way, it's not too likely that either will be passed this year. Many in government are loath to give up the power to tax and spend.

But limiting state and local spending does make sense. Rep. Landwehr says she's worried that government spending continues to outpace inflation, wages and salaries. In other words, state government is growing faster than our paychecks.

Over the past 10 years, the state budget has grown 42 percent, from \$7.2 billion in 1995 to \$10.2 billion this year. That is a huge jump during a time that included a recession, drought and high unemployment.

"Kansans have a right for government to live

within its means," Rep. Landwehr says. Imagine that.

Over the last three years, though, as the recession has squeezed state revenues, spending has continued to grow, eating up all the state's reserves. Schools, welfare and other state programs cry for more money, though there isn't any, and pressure has been great for a tax increase.

While taxpayers are looking for jobs and businesses are cutting back, apparently, there are many who see no need for state and local government to do likewise.

The fact is, right now, neither the state nor its taxpayers can afford more spending. As the rest of us cut back, so should the state.

That makes both of these proposals appealing. For the "Bill of Rights," we have no details yet, but requiring a vote on tax increase should put a cap on government. People usually are willing to tax themselves when they see a real need, but they don't often get the choice.

And requiring a "super majority" for tax increases in the Legislature should ensure that only the most necessary ever get through.

There will be no tax increase this year — it's an election year, after all — but next year the pressure will mount as schools, special interests and the courts put pressure on the Legislature.

That's when these measure might look real good.

— Steve Haynes

Audio books great for commute

I love to read. I have dozens of paperbacks ready and waiting to be read that I will probably not get to this year or next.

In my younger days, I liked science fiction. I had a friend with a collection of Edgar Rice Burroughs Mars and Venus books. Now old Edgar is renowned for his Tarzan books, but he was also into science fiction. He wrote dozens of books about the people who live on Mars and Venus and their adventures.

I was probably 9 or 10 when I was borrowing these books. The boy I was getting them from was only a year or so older than me. Our fathers had been childhood buddies and our parents went to dinner and dances together. The boy, Rick, and I weren't exactly pals, but we had a common bond, a love of reading and a taste for science fiction.

Rick was a large boy and eventually played lineman on his high school football team, but in grade school and junior high there was no football in those days, so he got a lot of teasing.

Someone teased him about liking girls and having a girlfriend because I was over at his house so much.

He replied that he didn't like girls and that the person over at his house was just Cynthia. I liked that answer because he was just Rick, the guy with all the great books.

After flings with romances and westerns, I went back to science fiction and read mostly that well into college. About the time I graduated and got married, I discovered fantasy. I collected a lot of "The Sword



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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and the Sorceress" books and became a fan of Mercedes Lackey and other fantasy writers.

Then somewhere along the way, I started reading mysteries, specifically historical mysteries or mysteries set in interesting places, such as the Southwest.

Now I read tales of medieval England by Margaret Frazer, Kate Sedley and Ellis Peters, Peter Tremayne's books of ancient Ireland, Laren Haney's and Lynda Robinson's books of ancient Egypt and, of course, Tony Hillerman's Navajo novels.

But lately it has taken me forever to get through a book. I started reading "The Golden One" by Elizabeth Peters in August and just finished it last week. By the time I was done with the book I had forgotten what the first part was all about.

My problem — commuting.

I love working in Norton. It's a nice place full of great people, as are all the other towns I've worked in, including Oberlin, Colby, Goodland and St. Francis. Still, the 35-minute drive to work and another one home again eats into my spare time. By the time I get home and fix supper and Steve gets in from his 90-

minute drive from Goodland, it's usually after 10 p.m. We try to take a walk and then sort of collapse.

Since I don't get much chance to read, I've been doing two things. First, I'm spending the time I have reading newspapers. This is my way of keeping up with what's happening around here and in the world, since I don't watch television.

The second thing is a marvelous invention called books on tape. I listen to a book while driving. The libraries have been expanding their audio books over the last few years, and I'm working my way through them.

If you pass my house about 9 p.m. some night and see me sitting motionless in my car in the driveway, there's nothing wrong. I'm just trying to find out who-did-it because my drive ended before the story did.



Kansas Predictions for 2004...

GOV. SEBELIUS SHOCKS G.O.P. LAWMAKERS AND AVOIDS A TAX INCREASE IN 2004...



BY BORROWING AGAINST THE TAX INCREASE SHE'LL PROPOSE IN 2005.

THE POSSIBILITY OF ANOTHER FINANCIAL SCANDAL IN THE KANSAS PRESS ASSOC. IS ELIMINATED...



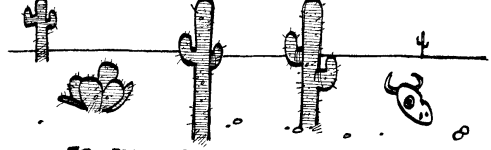
THANKS TO CAREFUL MONITORING.

TO PROMOTE COMPANY INTEGRITY, WESTAR ENERGY ISSUES NEW '04 CALENDARS TO EMPLOYEES.

JANUARY PEN-PAL OF THE MONTH



DUE TO DROUGHT CONDITIONS, KANSAS FARMERS EXPAND THEIR LINE OF FARM PRODUCT ENDORSEMENTS...



TO INCLUDE CACTUS ETHANOL AND TEQUILA.

Find a cause, commit your love

"Feliz nuevo año!" Or is it "Feliz año nuevo?"

We're not sure how to say it, but either way it means "happy new year" in Spanish. Since we're going to be spending New Year's Eve in Juarez, Mexico, we thought we should be able to offer greetings in the language of the area.

At this writing, Jim and I are in El Paso, Texas. In the morning, we meet the volunteers we'll be taking across the border to help build a house (in three days) for a Mexican family. So far, we know there are about 30 people, so they will be split into two teams. We also know they are Mennonites from Fairview, Okla. Other than that, we just know they are a lot like us — they want to help someone else to a better life.

Someone recently asked me, "Why don't we help people in this country first?"

That's a good question, one I had to consider seriously. Perhaps it's because you need to get out of your comfort zone to become more aware of people's needs. And believe me, there is nothing comfortable about life in Juarez. We're only there three to four days, but during that time you will have slept on the floor, gotten dirty, and been hot or cold (depending on the time of year). But then, you're so tired you don't care if you're hot or cold or dirty.

Perhaps it's because you and I, as taxpayers, help support the welfare system in this country. To my



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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knowledge, Mexico does not have such a luxury. The poor in America live a grand life compared to the poor in Juarez.

But mostly, we go because we have come to love the young people at Casas por Cristo, who have committed their lives to doing this work. And we have come to love the Mexican people. Despite the crushing poverty so many of them live in, on the whole, they are content with their lives, their children are happy and always smiling, and the family unit is all-important.

Yes, there are many deserving causes in this country, and I hope you have picked one to support with your time, talent or money. We have. But, if you ever get a chance to cross another country's border, I urge you to do it. You'll never be sorry.

—ob—

Taylor is only 4, but she thinks far beyond her years. Kara had to call and share this gem.

She and Taylor were riding in the car when Taylor pipes up.

"Mom," she began, "When you get old, like Grandma, I'll drive you around and you can have the best seat, OK?"

I want to remind Kara that the day Taylor starts driving is only 12 years away, and it will be here in a snap. I'll only be 68, but she will be 43!

—ob—
A friend's father lies gravely ill. She sits by his side. Waiting. Her daughter was there, also, and relayed what a nurse said: "He was there when you came into this world. Now, you're here when he leaves it."

To everything there is a season.

From the Bible

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:34

Human rights lost in Iraq?

In Iraq, television is taking us inside war as never before.

The invasion was swift and easy, if sometimes scary. Most of our fears melted away in the swift advance on Baghdad.

But the occupation may well wear us down. And that is something we cannot afford.

A CNN crew went with an American unit on patrol, raiding homes of suspected resistance members. They found few of the wanted men as they barged in, breaking down iron gates and beating on doors.

The troops were met mostly by grandmothers, women and children. All claimed to know nothing about fighters.

But there are no Miranda Rights in Iraq. The American troops seemed almost proud of using fear and intimidation, shaking down the Iraqi women in their own living rooms.

Troopers take the grandmother outside for a chat, and the other women begin to talk. Now they remember the men the soldiers are seeking. Crying, they say they don't know where they are.

The grandmother is released, the soldiers leave the home. Next, the troops stop and pay for a door they broke on a raid the day before. They buy back an American antitank mis-



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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sile from two Iraqi men. They share cigarettes and make friends.

It's a strange dichotomy.

On the street, troops set up a roadblock and stop motorists, questioning them about suspects and suspicious activities. Some are cooperative, some are not.

"Ask him," an American captain says, "if he gets five years in prison, would he remember then?"

Shadowy figures, identified as "civilian agents," are shown only as depixelated faces. They apparently are CIA or defense intelligence agents working with the Army, but they let the troops do the talking.

Watching, my daughter and I are disturbed.

"If we are fighting to keep this kind of thing from happening here," she says, "then why are we doing it there?"

I have no answer.

It wasn't about weapons of mass destruction, though the government

and the military clearly believed the Iraqis had and would use poison gas and maybe other weapons when cornered.

Ousting a cruel and hideous dictator has not been a bad thing. We can take righteous credit for that.

The mass graves and buildings full of chemical suits attest to the basis of our cause.

Installing a new and lasting government that will provide at least some moderate level of human rights for all Iraqis may be an elusive goal.

The mantle of superpower does not rest easily on a nation that traditionally disbanded its army between wars, but we are that.

We need to remember that while we are on the side of right, we need to do things the right way.

But in the living rooms of Iraqi women, looking for supposed terrorists, right and wrong may be hard to come by.

Let a soldier know that we still care

To the Editor:
The AdoptaPlatoon Soldier Support Effort is a nonprofit organization managed nationwide by volunteer moms and dads to ensure that U.S. service members deployed around the world in all branches of the military are not forgotten and to

Letter to the Editor

promote patriotism in our schools and communities.

To keep our military personnel a

bit safer, the effort has created projects that meet military requests, establishes special projects for holidays and assigns individual morale-lifting mail support to soldiers deployed around the world.

We desperately need Americans who will step forward to support a U.S. service member deployed overseas.

If you are ready to count yourself as one who defends the freedoms of our country, please visit our website at: www.adoptaplatoon.org, or you may contact me directly.

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