

Tax burden keeps rising until we all cry 'enough'

It probably comes as no surprise that 49 states collected more from their taxpayers in 2004 than they had a decade earlier.

The only real surprise was that one state — Alaska — saw a decline of 1 percent, but don't mark Alaska down as thrifty, just rich. Most of the state budget comes from oil revenue and Alaska spends more per citizen at \$12,294 than any other state.

Kansas fell in the middle of the pack, 28th in per capita state taxes at \$1,933 per person, up about \$500 for the decade. Neighboring Colorado, on the other hand, is in the bottom five in collections per taxpayer.

Colorado is one of the few states with strict constitutional limits on state and local spending. Kansas, having abandoned its tax lid law, has none, and it shows.

State tax rates have been frozen in recent years, but spending keeps on going up. With conservatives losing ground in the Legislature this year, there's great pressure to raise taxes and spend even more.

Increases for schools and just to keep the state running have taken every extra cent Kansas brings in. Schools, colleges and other programs say they need more.

In Colorado, by contrast, officials had to get voter approval just to keep the "extra" money that came in when the economy warmed up.

In Kansas, property taxes on homes now are roughly double those in Colorado, despite

years of "tax relief" efforts in Topeka. City and county governments, even those that try to be careful, just keep raising the levies.

And the Kansas economy is not growing, possibly because of the high tax burden here compared to surrounding states.

In Kansas, only the government is growing. A state report last month showed just 6,000 new jobs created in the state over the past year, all in state and local government. Private non-farm employers actually cut 2,400 jobs over that period.

It doesn't take an economic genius to see that this can't continue. Fewer working taxpayers can't be asked to support an ever-growing government apparatus.

That's apparently what our leaders believe, however. They keep hiring people and raising public salaries, raising taxes and squeezing more out of the long-suffering middle class.

Around here, for instance, the City of Goodland plans to cut taxes slightly but give its workers raises averaging 5 percent and boosted spending by 8.5 percent when property valuation rose. That in a time when most private employers can't manage any raises at all.

You'd think someone would complain. Maybe someone will, but until taxpayers rise up in revolt, taxes and spending are bound to keep on going up. And up. And up.

— Steve Haynes

Ferrets won't stop prairie dog

Another legislative session is underway in Topeka. As usual, many topics are slated for discussion.

Currently, there is debate in the 40th Senatorial District concerning the introduction of the black-footed ferret on property infested with prairie dogs.

Kansas Wildlife and Parks expert Michael LeValley admits that the ferret introduction is not intended to control the population of prairie dogs. The ferret needs a densely populated colony of prairie dogs for food. I will begin my newspaper articles this year by sharing my views on the introduction of the black-footed ferret.

Please read this article, but do your own research concerning the introduction of the black-footed ferret to control established colonies of prairie dogs in Logan County. My main concern is that we have a 100-year-old law in place to help control prairie rodents, and this law has worked quite well to protect adjacent landowners.

It is my opinion that none of us will live long enough to see the day when the prairie dog population will be completely eradicated. As I understand it, in order for the ferret species to survive the prairie dog population will have to be dense. I think we agree that a "dense" prairie dog population will allow a greater chance of these rodents spreading out to adjacent land.

We proudly live in a land where the majority has always ruled. We respect personal property rights, but also must respect our neighbors.

An elderly gentleman once told me that "good fences make good neighbors." I would extend this to say "controlling prairie dogs also

makes good neighbors."

I admit that my knowledge of the black-footed ferret is limited.

I can only speak from my experience of how prairie dogs became a problem for me in the 1970s. In a matter of a few years, these rodents spread out over a 90-acre pasture that I own. Out of respect for my neighbors, I eradicated the two colonies. Just this last summer, 30 years later, I have located evidence of reinfestation.

My point being that we will never get rid of this rodent because each landowner places a different level of priority on controlling them. I have found that eradication is time-consuming and expensive.

As long as Wildlife and Parks encourages and protects colonies of prairie dogs by introducing the ferrets, neighbors will have a constant vigil to keep.

Kansas Wildlife and Parks has mentioned that they will control adjacent property infestation using the boundary method. Will this treatment continue, or be just a one-time deal for neighbors of the properties on which they intend to release the black-footed ferret? Please consider the consequences to these neighbors, because they will be faced constantly with possible infestation of prairie dogs on their property.

Letter from Topeka

By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer
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I realize that my stand may seem one-sided, but this issue is important to the constituents of my district. We must respect the property rights of everyone, especially the people who are directly affected by this decision. We need to make sure the laws of Kansas protect the property rights of everyone, as well.

From the Bible

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.
Galatians 2:20

What's legal for circus?

To the Editor:
In the City of Oberlin, it is not legal to have a farm animal, but there is no law against having a circus animal.

Is a 22-inch-tall horse a farm animal or a circus animal?
Art Shelton, Oberlin



Now it's equal time for canines

Most people know that I'm more of a cat person than a dog person, but over the years, we've had three dogs, and we have Annie now.

So, for those dog lovers out there, I worked extra hard — and made Steve come up with a couple — and did a canine version of last week's column.

I even asked my sister-in-law Barb for her help. Barb does dog rescue and last time I visited her she had five dogs — three of her own, one rescued puppy and an older dog that no one would adopt.

Of course, since dogs are more varied than cats, this won't apply quite as universally.

- So —
- You might be a dog if:
 - Your ears flap when you run.
 - There are two dozen tennis balls in your house but no rackets.
 - You eat it first and try to figure out what it was later.
 - You love to travel by car, preferably with your head out the window.
 - Water is wonderful. You like to jump in it, then lay in it, then drink it, then shake it all over everyone.
 - You are in love with the world.



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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People are wonderful, dinner is wonderful, even the vet is great.

- You get to go (almost) everywhere with your two-legged friends.
- You're not sure why, but when you try to cross that spot in the yard, your neck hurts.
- If it's dead, roll in it; if it's a cat, annoy it; if it squeaks, go get it.
- If it runs, chase it. If it doesn't run, come to a screeching halt and look worried.
- People know where you are by listening to the jingle of your collar.
- You offer lots of kisses, but don't find a lot of takers.
- People aren't being mean when they call you a bit**.
- You're the warmest thing around but your nose is cold.
- You find your way home by

smell.

- Your place is in the back of the pickup.
 - Your bark is worse than your bite.
 - You warn the family of the approach of everyone — friend or foe.
 - If you can reach it, you lick it.
 - You head outside each morning and evening to do your "job."
 - If it has two legs, think about it. If it has four legs, it's fair game.
 - If it has fur, feathers or felt, it's a toy and it's yours.
- I'm sure there are plenty more and if I get enough good suggestions, I'll try to put together a dog and cat column from other people's ideas. Send them to me at: cahaynes@nwkansas.com

Could we change weather?

I am just about sick of winter. Don't get me wrong; I love the four seasons. I look forward to all the changes in the weather.

In fact, I'd like to see a change. Right now!

I'd like to see it change to sunny and warm. I'd like to see dirt again. I'd like to walk outside without wearing cleated shoes.

We have had nothing but ice, cold and snow for the last three weeks. And, quite frankly, I want it to stop! I'm tired of wearing a sweatshirt, sweat pants, socks and Jim's snopac liners to bed.

Several friends have fallen on the ice and broken bones. It's more than "not fun." It is downright dangerous.

I don't feel too bad, though. Jennifer, our daughter in San Antonio, said that it was 31 degrees there and they were expecting sleet and snow tonight. So much for global warming.

-ob-

Our granddaughter Alexandria had her 12th birthday Sunday. She was so excited to tell us about the "laser tag" party she had. My girls used to play laser tag 20 years ago. I had no idea there still were such



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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places. For those of you who don't know, laser tag is a combination of hide-and-seek, cops and robbers and "Gunfight at the OK Corral." Usually found at a mall, a laser-tag arena supplies the players with a laser gun and a vest with receptors that signal when a player has been "shot" and keeps track of points.

During a play period, the players enter the arena — which has tunnels, corners, doorways and slides. The timer is set and the lights are turned off. Players sneak around the arena "shooting" others. When a player is shot, their laser gun is inoperable for a set amount of time. When a player shoots another player, they rack up points on the tote board. Whoever has the most points at the end of the play period wins.

Anyway, Alex said she and her

friends had a grand time. She said they all went out for pizza and then had a sleep over at her house. I'm sorry I missed it. I used to be a pretty good shot.

-ob-

Oh, to be 12 again. It was 1959 when I turned 12.

In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the Union; Barbie, with her out-of-proportion measurements, was introduced; Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and "The Big Bopper" were all killed in a plane crash; "Ben Hur" was playing in theaters; and "Rawhide" and "Dennis the Menace" were on television. It was pretty innocent stuff back then.

I remember being embarrassed when I heard someone say "pregnant" on television. Now, I'm afraid, children not only know pregnant, they know how, too.

Linemen's wives send a 'thanks'

To the Editor:
For several weeks now, our husbands have been up and out in the elements before sunrise and well after sunset, working on getting power to many of you who lost it due to the recent storms.

They have missed out on holiday activities with their families and a few good meals, but that is just one of the perks of their job. It still baffles us how they can work with electricity in the dark.

We have both heard it over and over, the great appreciation that many of you have for your linemen, how you are all grateful that they are willing to be out there in the weather working to get the power back on.

We are very grateful to all of you,

with your patience, your kind words and compassion that you have shown our husbands. We cannot thank you all enough.

We know that some of you have seen Dennis, Spencer and the rest of the linemen out working and have been generous enough to make them cookies and bring them coffee or hot chocolate to warm them up. A few have even offered their homes to let them warm up awhile.

To you all, we thank you and so do they.

We know that these past few

storms have seen a lot of people out scrambling to clean up. Many have gone with only a few hours of sleep since Dec. 21.

We want to thank you. We appreciate it, and know all the sacrifices you made to ensure that we all have power and can drive to and from work.

With the greatest thanks! May the New Year be a blessed one for you.

Kaylene Thomas and family
Anita Ketterl and family
Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

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Kaylene Thomas and family
Anita Ketterl and family
Oberlin

Angel Tree recipients value your support

To the Editor:
As the holiday season draws to a close, I feel it's important that we reflect on what a wonderful community and county we live in.

The Jaycees' Angel Tree has served kids with needed clothing and items for Christmas for many years. Once again this year, Decatur County people and clubs have

served the needs of over 70 children with either gifts of clothing or small toys, or a donation to the Angel Tree to help buy those items.

Decatur Professional Women helped make Sunflower Cinema tickets, which we give to the children, a reality again this year.

Without the help of these people, the area media and Fredrickson In-

surance this would not be nearly the blessing that it truly is to the children of our county.

We are truly blessed to live in an area that cares about each other. What a wonderful feeling to know that a child's Christmas is a little bit brighter with your help.

Abby Hissong, Oberlin
Angel Tree Coordinator

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