

Does legislature need more chances to spend?

Full-time Legislature. There. That ought to scare the pants off of most Kansans.

If it doesn't, it should. As a group, if the legislators can't make a mess out of things in 90 days, how could we expect more in a full year? Minus time off for campaigns, of course.

Yet, faced with the growing complexity of the state budget, some members are talking about extending their time in Topeka. It's like a group of convicts getting together to extend their sentences.

Are we sure we're ready for that?

There's the old saw, purportedly written by a New York judge: "No man's life, liberty or property are safe while the legislature is in session."

Conservative Kansas lawmakers are frustrated by continued growth in the state budget, though. The budget has grown by a factor of 10 every generation since statehood. Still, the Associated Press reported, the budget didn't hit \$1 billion until 1974. It has doubled since 1993, when it was just \$6 billion.

Last week, House members revolted when asked to pass a \$304 million supplemental appropriation. Some claimed it would run state surpluses below the required 7.5 percent and threaten a cash crisis.

With spending already near \$12.5 billion and growth in the general fund estimated at more than 8 percent, killing the supplemental seems largely like closing the barn door after all the livestock have fled.

That's what bothers the anti-spenders. They feel helpless dealing with a budget that's too big and too complex to control. Mostly, the Legislature just takes what the governor has

sent over and quibbles about a few programs. Only the appropriations committees see the whole picture, if anyone does.

Adding time to the session won't help much, not when most major decisions are put off until the late hours of the last few nights. Budget bills are cobbled together in conference, then rolled out for the troops, tired and ready to go home, for a vote.

At that point, a lot of real bad legislation gets pushed through, but especially the big spending bills which wrap up the budget. Sure, they've been debated and examined since January, but when the whole ball of wax rolls out the final week, no one — save maybe a few conference members and some lobbyists — really knows what's in there.

That's one big reason the jackpot keeps growing at roughly 8 percent every year.

A lot of other bad bills come about that time — witness the one legalizing casino gambling this year, supposedly to raise revenue for still more state spending. The Legislature should have a rule that no bill can come to the floor without full and open committee hearings, but we digress. The issue here is spending.

What the Legislature should do is set a spending limit and trim the budget to fit that. Every program has its friends, though, making real cuts real tough.

What the Legislature probably will do is extend the session, study more and keep voting for bigger budgets every year.

Legislators talk about working "to curb the growth in spending." No one talks about cutting the budget.

And guess who gets to pay the bills?
— Steve Haynes

Town grows by leaps, bounds

Our little town is experiencing a population explosion. Well, with only about 130 people calling Norcat home, an increase of three constitutes an explosion.

First is Ruth, our neighbor to the north. She loves our little Sunflower Inn. It's just the right size for her and she's settled in nicely.

Across the street to the south, a young family has moved in. She is the granddaughter of a good friend of mine. In fact, she and my girls used to play together when we would visit the folks out on the farm. I'll bet Tia still has a scar from the time one of the horses stepped on her bare foot when she was at the farm playing with Halley and Kara.

I haven't been a very good neighbor yet. To either one of them. I see a Texas sheet cake or some crescent rolls in their futures. It's so nice to have people move to town; I sure want them to feel welcome and stay.

Jim just finished installing a built-in double oven, so now I can bake something anytime I want. Yes, I have not had an oven in the same house since we moved to the "new" house the first of November.

Not that big a deal, though. If I needed to bake a cake, I would just dash out the back door, run over to the Inn and pop it in the oven. Timing was the tricky thing. I would go back to the other house and get distracted, resulting in a few "overdone" recipes.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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I have never had a double oven before, but I can hardly wait until we have a dinner party and I get a chance to utilize both ovens. Let's see, I could have a pot roast finishing in the top oven while I bake rolls in the bottom. Or I could bake a pie in the top and broil steaks in the bottom — the possibilities are endless.

My nephew Kirk sent an e-mail titled, "Why a farmer needs a wife." I thought I would open the attachment and find a sweet tribute to the dedicated, hard-working women

who share their lives with men who make their living from the land.

But, no. What I saw was a picture of a grubby old guy in overalls driving down a city street on a Ford tractor with a missing front wheel. His overweight wife was seated on the fender over the rear tire, opposite the missing front one. She was leaning outward like a sailor on a catamaran, acting as a counterweight, keeping the tractor from tipping over.

Oh, you're gonna get it. Anybody have a picture showing why a woman would need a professor?

From the Bible

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up. For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

Psalm 5: 3, 4

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point.

They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansan.com.



Slaves in Kansas? Could've been

Did you know Kansas was supposed to be a slave state?

As Steve got ready to leave for a conference on rural journalism in Kentucky, he did a little homework to see what the weather would be like. While he was looking at the map, he noted something we all learned in school but most of us had forgotten.

Kansas is south of the infamous Mason-Dixon line, which was used to separate free and slave states.

Although Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon thought they were only settling a land dispute in 1763 when they surveyed and marked their famous line dividing Pennsylvania from Maryland and what was then Virginia (now West Virginia), their "line" became the boundary between North and South in the republic's struggle to grow and keep a balance between the free and slave states.

For many years the states came in one slave and one free so that the delicate balance would be maintained — Vermont, free in 1791; Kentucky, slave in 1792; Tennessee, slave in 1796; Ohio, free in 1803; Louisiana, slave in 1812; Indiana, free in 1816; Mississippi, slave in 1817; I

llinois, free in 1818; Alabama, slave in 1819; Maine, free in 1820; Missouri, slave in 1821; Arkansas, slave in 1836; Michigan, free in



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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1837; Florida and Texas, slave in 1945; Iowa, free in 1846; and Wisconsin, free in 1848.

Then gold was discovered in California and the country scrambled to bring it into the union in 1850 before some other country could claim the valuable territory. Minnesota was accepted in 1858 and Oregon in '59, both free states.

Despite this, many southerners thought Kansas would come in as a slave state — as envisioned in the great Missouri Compromise — and help restore the balance of power.

Abolitionists, many from New England, had other ideas. They flooded into the Kansas territory and set up shop before their pro-slavery brothers, mostly from Missouri, had a chance to move in.

Thus began the border wars, the era of "Bleeding Kansas" as pro- and anti-slavery forces fought for control of the territory and worked to shift the balance of power one way or another.

In late 1857, the territorial Legislature adopted the Lecompton constitution making Kansas a slave state. However, by January 1858 the constitution had been struck down by free staters and Lecompton not only didn't get to keep its constitution, it lost the capital to Topeka.

Kansas John Brown thought he could free the slaves by arming them and thus he and a band of followers attacked the U.S. arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Va., on Oct. 16, 1859, to take the weapons stored there.

Kansas gained statehood on January 29, 1861, and by April 12, Confederate forces attacked a U.S. military installation at Fort Sumter, S.C., guarding the mouth of Charleston harbor, and the Civil War began.

Kansas was never a slave state, but being south of the Mason-Dixon line, we can legitimately consider ourselves "southern."

Well, now I can use that southern accent I've been practicing.

Suffering stays with us always

Fellow Kansan Dwight Eisenhower served our country during a time when human dignity and human life needed defending.

After visiting a concentration camp at the end of World War II he said, "The things I saw beggar description ... the visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering."

Last week was "Days of Remembrance," a time designated by Congress to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. I visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington to see the collection of images and read the stories of death and dehumanization that took place 60 years ago.

I returned to hear President Bush speak about how the Jewish people suffered and about the importance of addressing genocide and death today in Darfur, Sudan.

As co-chair of the House Hunger Caucus, I recently joined the House majority leader in a visit to Darfur. While there, we met with government officials and relief workers and saw the conditions that human beings are living in today.

Since the beginning of this conflict in February 2003, 450,000 people have been killed and more than 2 million citizens displaced from their homes and villages.



On the Potomac

By U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran
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Thousands are without food and water and depend relief organizations for survival.

This trip made me aware of human suffering as no meeting, television news story or book could. One cannot visit Darfur and not be changed by seeing the results of a government that allows violence, hunger, disease and dislocation to be used as a weapon against its people.

It was an opportunity to see that we all have a cause to make sure that life prevails and justice endures. It is something that demands our attention. We as a country and we as a world must come together to bring death and destruction, inhumanity, hunger and violence to an end.

At the Holocaust Museum, I saw the quote from Isaiah 43:10 that says, "You are my witness."

Today we are witnessing a new genocide. As I reflected on the past and considered the future of Africans in Darfur, I have to ask — are we

going to wait until the proportion of death are similar to the Holocaust before we take action?

The exhibit that moved me the most was the list of 10,000 individuals who took action during the Holocaust. They have been identified by the Israelis as "the Righteous Among the Nations," those who risked their lives to save innocent Jews during Nazi rule.

When the conflict in Darfur has ended, everyone will feel sorrow for the unnecessary loss of life. But will we as individuals and we as a nation be among those who feel shame for inaction or pride for standing up for justice in Darfur?

Today, we must rise up to be a new righteous force so that our children and grandchildren remember us not as a generation that turned their heads, but one that banded together to bring an end to the senseless pain and suffering afflicted upon the people of Darfur.

Mental health important to us all

To the Editor: May is Mental Health Month. The Mental Health America website says that most people don't think much about their mental health, or even use that phrase, yet it is a common element in life.

Some people define mental health as a "state of mind," others as "being content with life" or "feeling good about yourself." Mental health may be best explained as how well a person copes with the challenges of life and daily living.

Mental Health America writes that strengthening our mental health is even more important today, considering the fast-paced, high-stress culture of daily life. People live with daily threats to good mental health. Many people work extended hours or multiple jobs and are chronically overworked. The line between work and home life is often blurred, and home is rarely a place of rest. People

sleep less and eat poorly.

Technology and the information age have also brought increased expectations and challenges. Communities are less engaged. Families are more disconnected. Parents and kids are in a constant race from one activity to another, without any downtime. Many people face additional challenges that put their mental health at risk such as major health problems, or an addiction to alcohol or drugs. Some deal with the stress of caregiving or the loss of a loved one. Divorce, job loss, single parenting, and abuse can add to the list. And then there are major mental illnesses such as depression or schizophrenia.

Most people take their mental

well-being for granted. It is such a basic, yet unseen, part of who we are, that it doesn't seem to merit a lot of thought compared to everything else. But mental health is a major factor in all aspects of life. It influences relationships, work performance, school and physical health. When mental health is good, a person can deal well with daily challenges and problems. When it is not so good, it can be difficult to function. Help is available from many resources including a family physician, pastor or priest, school counselor and mental health professionals.

Karen Schueler, manager
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Letter to the Editor

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