

## Now is not the time for raises or tax increases

The governor has the Republicans running the Legislature this time, and they're going to have to admit it.

With a wry smile, Gov. Mark Parkinson, a Democrat, called on the leadership to cut its own budget the way some members are threatening to cut everyone else's.

What else can the GOP members do? The Associated Press reported this week that proposals submitted to Gov. Parkinson's office by the legislative leadership projected spending up 4 percent this year and 3 percent next year.

The leadership sent up a howl. They said the figures represent projected needs, a wish list, not what they planned to spend — just like every other state agency.

One House leader noted that the governor's budget has been growing, too, but his office has taken over grant programs from other agencies in the last couple of years. It may not be able to cut back to 2006 levels, as public schools have been forced to do.

The governor changed course this fall and came out in favor of a tax increase to keep schools and other programs from suffering further cuts next year. Basically, he said, the fat is gone from state spending. Further cuts will hurt.

Legislators have been cutting their own spending along with schools, colleges and prisons. Leaders say they are prepared to do again what they did in fiscal 2009, when they slashed spending below 2008 levels.

Still, there's no room in the budget for any increases. The budget hawks on the Republican side should know they have to lead by example. It was poor form to even submit a wish list.

And there certainly is no excuse for even considering any increase in pay, either for state employees or the Legislature itself. With thousands of Kansans unable to find jobs, how can families afford a tax increase to pay for raises?

The governor appears to favor an increase in the tobacco tax, the Associated Press reported, though there's been talk of hiking the sales tax or at least eliminating some "loopholes."

School and colleges are important. So are prisons and parole officers, highways and a host of other things the state does. But when Kansas families are having trouble making ends meet and Kansas businesses scrape just to meet payroll, can they afford to pay the state more?

Pressure for a tax increase from well-organized lobbies, including school boards and teachers, state employees and those who use state programs, will be tremendous.

But before the battle starts, let's rule out any increase for the Legislature, the governor's office and other elected officials. Any pay increases at all.

And do as Kansans everywhere are doing — do more with less.

— Steve Haynes

## Scrubber unravels in shower

Years later, we might refer to this as the Great Loofah Explosion of '09.

Might be funny by then. A loofah, you probably know, is a bath sponge. They take the place of a washcloth in the modern shower.

I'd never seen one until our much-younger and much-hipper children introduced us to them. They're supposed to "exfoliate" your skin, whatever that means. Make it healthier, shinier and younger looking by removing dead cells.

Whatever. They do make nice scrubbers, though, and they soap up faster than a washrag in our hard Oberlin water, so those first few gift loofahs sort of won us over. Pretty soon, that's all we used.

Usually, we get them at the grocery, but once, a daughter gifted us with a couple from Bath and Body Works, a chain store found in strip malls, in cities where we seldom visit and more seldom shop.

And these were fine loofahs indeed, long lasting and especially scrubby. Over the years, I might add, as the company sought to trim costs, they seemed to get less durable, but still, we use them now and then.

And as it happened, we got two last year. One lasted for nearly a year. But its time had come. I noted, when major portions of it seemed to become untucked. So I got out its twin.

Well, nearly its twin. The first one had been a nice blue, this one was a hideous chartreuse. It clashed with our bathroom decor, such as it is. With the towels. The floor. Our skin.



### Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes  
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Our eyes. Pretty much everything.

Yet, it seemed to scrub well for a couple of days. Until the day we were to leave, rather early, for the airport for our "Thanksgiving" trip to Georgia to see the girls.

(We were doing this in December, because after several bad trips by us and by the kids, we decreed that henceforth, our family would not travel at Thanksgiving or Christmas, but Some Other Time.)

And as I was rather late, I was scrubbing myself quickly when it happened.

The loofah sort of exploded. In slow motion, mind you. First a snag. One fold. Then two. Then yard after yard of scrubby nylon material, six inches wide, and forever long as it unraveled in my hands.

I kept trying to catch it. It kept coming. And coming. But I was in a hurry, so I kept trying to catch it and coral the ever-expanding coils.

If you have not tried to wash yourself with several yards of loose, soapy nylon mesh, then you may not understand what a mess I had on my hands. But try to imagine.

Eventually, I had to grab a washcloth, but don't tell the children, please. It's sooooo old fashioned.

And if you've ever wondered how

much material is in one of those little scrubby balls, it is exactly 16 feet, 4 inches. I measured.

I admit, I was a little traumatized by this accident, but not so much so that I won't take up a loofah again.

Loofah. Interesting word. Said to be arabic in origin. I did some research.

A loofah is actually a Eurasian vegetable or fruit, said to be edible. The bath sponge originates with a certain type which is treated by removing the seeds and flesh to leave a network for veins used as a sponge or scrubber.

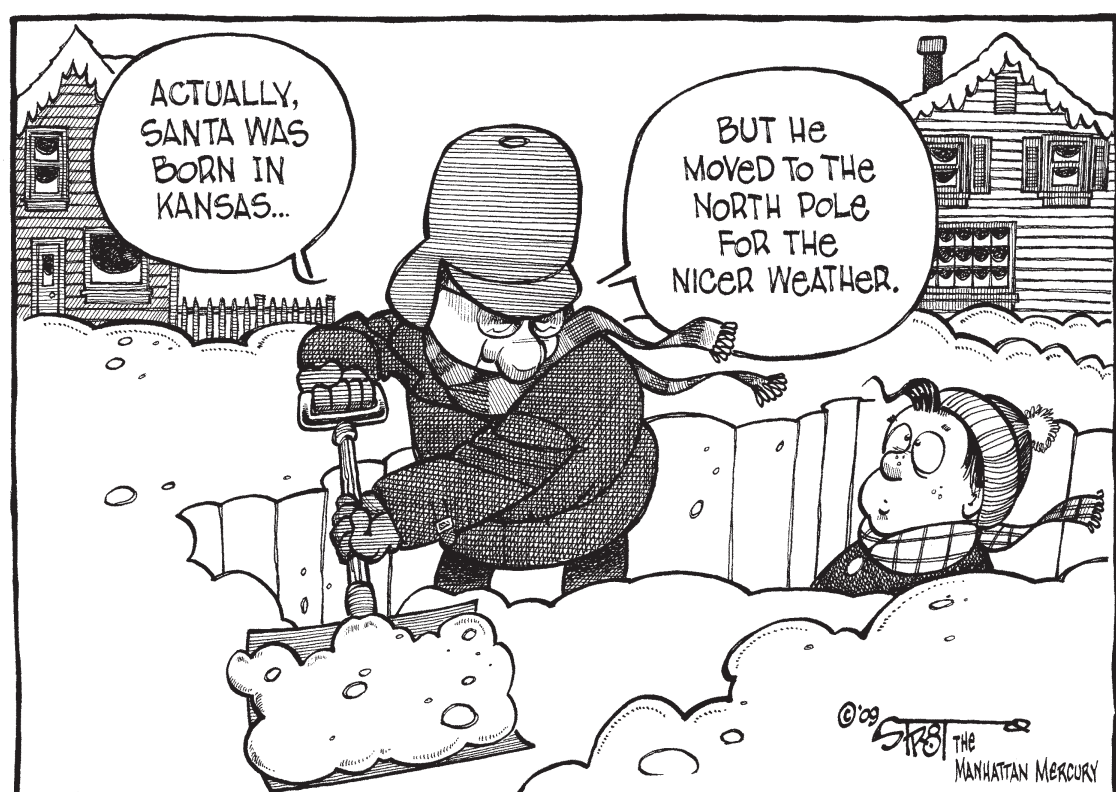
These organic loofahs are still sold in some shops — you can recognize them by the pattern of three seed holes that runs through the veins — but most bath sponges today are made of nylon mesh or similar materials. Less scrubby, perhaps, but usually more durable.

These days, though, manufacturing quality ain't what it used to be.

So, I have a new loofah, and I'm working up nerve enough to try it.

And if anyone out there has an industrial use for 16 feet, 4 inches of nylon mesh tubing, eight inches wide, just call. I have some.

And I don't need to know what you're going to use it for.



## New addition really cleans up



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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She whirred. She skidded. She ran into the wall.

Soon our new addition was running across the living room floor. Cats scattered, jumping for chairs and sofas. Ceramic shepherds in the nativity set on the floor by the fireplace went tumbling. Stray piles of newspapers, of which we have more than our share, got shoved aside and scattered.

Merry Christmas, darling. Meet Winky, the Roomba.

A Roomba is a vacuum-cleaning robot. It looks a lot like a bathroom scale, but when you push the button on top, it takes off on its tiny wheels, racing across the floor, sucking up dirt and pet hair — another thing of which we have more than our share.

They're made by a company called iRobot, which also makes robots for the military and for police bomb squads. And, closer to my heart, robots that scrub floors. And the one Steve wants, that cleans gutters by remote control from the ground.

As is our holiday tradition, we opened our presents right after church on Christmas Eve. This year, there weren't many to open, however.

Son came home for Christmas bringing us each a gift, and there was the box with Winky. Everything else was either a food product or a gift

that didn't require wrapping, like donations in our name to a charity. Son's present, we delivered to him in Lawrence a couple of weeks earlier, and his sisters' present to him was several rounds of golf at the country club there, a present that is also kinda hard to wrap.

We opened our packages and smiled at the 1968 KU yearbook he had gotten his Dad, and the photo box he got me. Yes, kid, we really did look that dorky. And that young.

Then we all opened the Roomba and started to figure her out.

Assembly was pretty easy, and before long we were looking for a spot to plug in her dock, the part that provides a home and food for the little machine.

By Christmas morning, she was charged up and charging around the kitchen, dining room and living room, where she had the unfortunate encounter with the shepherds. Her little dirt catcher was soon clogged with hair and sand, and the boys got

to figure out how to clean her out.

In the meantime, I was trying to come up with a name. Roombas just gotta have a name, because they're half machine and half pet.

After watching her antics for awhile, I knew who she was but I had to call my son-in-law in Georgia to come up with the name of the drunken little female house elf in the Harry Potter books. My new little pet was female and bounced around the house like a drunken elf. She was definitely a Winky.

On Saturday, we set her to work on the upstairs, where she picked up tons of hair and carpet lint, got stuck under the bed twice, the dresser once and just plain ran out of juice once. We emptied her bin, cleaned her brushes, let her feed at her dock and turned her loose — again and again.

The newness will wear off, I'm sure, but I love my Winky. The cats aren't nearly so sure about the noisy little invader, but at least she can't get onto the chairs and sofas.

Not yet, anyway.

## Quiet day forces her to cook

The good thing about being stormed in is there's nothing to do.

The bad thing about being stormed in is there's nothing to do.

Like everyone else, our Christmas plans were changed by the weather. The day before Christmas, when it was just starting to snow, we made a "run" to the store for some last-minute things. We made it home before the storm really hit and settled in for the night. Christmas morning revealed whirling winds and drifted snow that blocked every vehicle on the place. We decided we were staying put.

Nothing to do but cook and eat. Which we did. I thought I was really limiting the menu, with only three to cook for, but I still ended up making two pumpkin pies, a pan of cinnamon rolls, two dozen crescent rolls, a ham, stuffing, mashed potatoes, green-bean casserole, deviled eggs, dill dip and a layered gelatin salad.

When the meal was done, I announced to Jim and son James, "That's it. You two are on your own for the weekend. I'm not cooking again."

And I didn't. I took naps, I watched movies and I worked Sudoku puzzles. Until Saturday night, that is, when the thought of a big pot of beans with cornbread overwhelmed me. Christmas Day, I had cut the ham off the bone, leaving some meaty chunks. After soaking the beans overnight, like my mother taught me, I put them on to cook



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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Sunday morning.

James was anxious. He asked me every half hour from 5 p.m. on, "Are they ready yet?"

Finally, at 7 p.m., I declared, "Let's eat." They were worth the wait. The cornbread was just right, and with chopped onions and vinegar on the side, it was good eatin'.

— ob —

Sunday dawned much milder. As we were getting ready for church, friends called to invite us to lunch. I said we would love to come under one condition: I would bring leftover deviled eggs and molded gelatin salad. Deal. We packed into the van and headed to town.

After church, we drove to Bob and Ila's house. As we walked in the door, carrying our covered dishes, Bob asked, "Is this some of that 'moldy' gelatin salad?"

It did have green gelatin but it was far from moldy.

— ob —

I hope you got some of what you wanted for Christmas and some of what you needed. We should probably never have everything we

want. There wouldn't be anything to look forward to or to work for.

And, we are looking forward. The new year is only days away. No doubt, it will contain some sadness and struggles, but we know it will contain many joys, too.

My prayer is that we have the strength to accept whatever comes and to share ourselves with those around us.

Happy New Year!

### From the Bible

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

Revelation 21:4-5

## Woman wishes peace for everyone

To the Editor:

Peace among us is the first thing that comes to mind at this time of year.

Coming from a four-generation family of servicemen, that would be an understandable yearning. I've been listening to war stories most of my life, not just from my father's father and my husband, but all of their friends and neighbors.

I didn't have any brothers to continue these milestones, but what always struck me most were the silent moments in between, an unattended tear and then the sudden slap on the back and laughter — clamor that followed a way of recognition of a job well done by all. They knew, they served, they survived and remembered those who didn't.

They were honored, proud, significant and sometimes recognized (my husband served during Vietnam). There were no deceptions, dishonesty, no disregard for their enemies' dignity. Everyone was there for a purpose — to serve and honor. In life, God willing, we all do this no matter our purpose. Listening and always learning.

Having moved many times in my life, meeting different and wonderful people from all over the world, I would always have the hope for peace wherever we settled. Greed, hate, lies, deception and gos-

sip never solved wars or mended wounds.

Please turn to the person nearest to you and wish them peace for the New Year and have it come from your heart. I do to all.

Janet Rorick, Oberlin

### Letter to the Editor

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