

## Does government want to help or hinder U.S.?

Some days, we wonder if the Obama administration really wants the economy to recover.

Of course, the government has spent billions on bailouts, job programs and public works, but while the right hand gives stimulus, the left hand takes it way.

Example: The whole thing started with the mortgage scandal and the resulting bust in the homebuilding and resale markets. You'd think the administration, and the Democrats running Congress, would make restarting the housing market a prime concern.

Instead, they've got their foot on the industry's neck.

In the wake of the "subprime" lending scandal, the government ratcheted up controls on home lending. Though interest rates are at record lows — and one key Federal Reserve rate is at 0 — few banks are making home loans. It's tough to qualify and in the end, bankers are simply afraid to make loans.

The result: nothing. No one is building houses. No one is buying them. Because there isn't any money.

Or take consumer credit.

You'd think the government would want consumers to be spending more and saving less right now.

But most spending today involves credit cards. Most credit cards come from big nationwide or regional banks, outfits like Bank of America or Chase.

A couple of things came together to kill expansion of consumer credit. One was a bill passed by Congress tightening rules for credit-card issuers. Congress gave banks a year to get their houses in order, and they used it to purge

their lists of marginal or non-performing accounts, the ones many consumers had.

The bill threatened to increase the banks' costs by limiting fees and interest rate hikes. In response, banks got rid of their least desirable customers and made cards hard to get. Essentially, right now, you can get a credit card if you don't much need one and can afford to pay high interest.

While that wasn't the intent — Congress wanted to "protect" consumers from supposedly unconscionable rates and behavior by banks — it was the outcome.

Then there's business.

You'd think the government would want business to get growing, boost sales and hire more people. That's not happening, despite some new tax breaks designed to increase employment. Why?

Businesses are scared. They have no idea how a national health-care plan, once it passes Congress, if it passes Congress, will affect worker costs. They found that with the recession, their unemployment taxes took a steep jump. The tax breaks turned out not to be very attractive.

And no one knows when the recovery will really take hold. Until that happens, no one has any confidence and no one is hiring.

Maybe the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. Maybe the Democrats would rather have programs, like health care and the credit-card "protection" bill than jobs.

Maybe the jobless really aren't the priority.

But they should be. — *Steve Haynes*



## No easy answers on budget

Legislative Post Audit reports and other sources gives us a look at the state's current tax status.

Kansas currently has 99 sales tax exemptions costing the state an estimated \$4.2 billion last year. Thirteen of those account for \$4.1 billion, or 96 percent, of the forgone sales tax revenue.

Some of the costliest exemptions cover machinery and equipment for farms and businesses (\$231 million a year), educational and youth activities (\$58.5 million), labor services (\$182 million), utility bills (\$136 million) and health care (\$70 million). Although there may be good public policy reasons for having such exemptions, they do erode the state's tax base.

A report issued by the Department of Revenue says state tax exemptions have cost government billions of dollars in lost revenue over the last few years. Most of the exemptions on that list were implemented in the mid-1990s, when state revenues were exploding. In fact, State General Fund revenues increased 107 percent between 1987 and 1997.

That is much faster than was needed to sustain necessary spending, so the legislature responsibly granted some tax breaks. The beneficiaries were mostly those who probably needed it the most, as evidenced by some of the largest amounts on the Department of Revenue report: car tax reductions, single-income rate reductions, earned income tax credit, food sales tax rebate and increasing the personal exemption.

Some degree of government spending is necessary, but all government spending is a drag on the



### Letter from Topeka

By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer  
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economy. Government has no money of its own; it only has what it takes from taxpayers and redistributes.

Any money that government spends must first — or eventually — be taken out of the economy. And when businesses and individuals must spend more on taxes, they have less to spend on goods and services ... and on hiring people.

There are no easy answers to our current budget crisis. We must examine our policies and take action with clear, precise goals in mind that cause the least harm with the most benefit.

Here is an update on Senate activity last week.

**Smoking Ban Update:** On Thursday, the House concurred with the Senate on HB 2221, the Clean Indoor Air Act, 68-54. The bill now heads to Gov. Mark Parkinson.

**Appointments:** The Senate unanimously approved:

- John P. Smith as credit union administrator.
- Ed McKechnie to the Board of Regents.
- James Needham to the state Banking Board.
- Joanne M. Budler as state librarian.

**HB 2411, Schedule I Drugs, add K2:** HB 2411 amends the Kansas

Uniform Controlled Substances Act to expand the list of Schedule I controlled substances to include the chemical compounds HU-210, JWH-018, JWH-072, BZP and TFMPP. The bill is nearly identical to SB 348, which passed earlier this session, except that it includes TFMPP. Passed 37 to 1 on Thursday.

**SB 478, Kansas Cigarette and Tobacco Products Act:** SB 478 amends the Kansas Cigarette and Tobacco Products Act by redefining cigarettes and defining little cigars. The bill defines a little cigar as a roll of tobacco wrapped in leaf tobacco or material with tobacco that weighs no more than three pounds per 1,000 units and makes them subject to cigarette taxes. The measure also requires cigarette stamps to have legible characteristics with serial numbers and eliminates the requirement that packs have water-proof stamps or meter imprints. SB 478 failed 18-21 on Thursday.

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## Husband should learn to cook

My husband will probably be glad when my high school reunion is over and done with for another five years. It's having serious repercussions on his life.

The problem comes when an old classmate calls and I get so engrossed in our conversation that I totally lose track of time. Sunday night, Georgia called, and before I knew it, the clock said 8:30 p.m. and I had never even given a thought to supper for Jim and James.

When I saw James rummaging through the fridge looking for anything edible, remorse overcame me and I begged off the phone, promising to call her back soon.

James was an easy fix. He soon had himself some left over barbecue, mac and cheese and a piece of banana cake. Jim, on the other hand, was not so easy. He doesn't like to eat late and his idea of late is 6:30 p.m. I apologized; some leftover potato soup satisfied him.

—ob—  
Notice I said "apologized"? This is a new leaf for me. It's always been difficult for me to say, "I'm sorry." Usually, because I'm not. I have always tried to choose my words carefully and not say anything I'll have to take back.

Sometimes, though, you do things that need to be apologized for. Like the supper thing. Six weeks ago, Jim and I joined a marriage enrichment group in a study of "The Six Secrets



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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to a Lasting Relationship." In fact, our whole church family is studying this topic.

Lesson No. 1 was on "forgiving love"..." It's the cornerstone for any marriage. One of the key phrases I have learned and have actually used is: "I'm sorry what I said (or did) hurt you. I promise to try to not let it happen again. Will you forgive me?" That is a mouthful for me, but it's getting easier and easier to say. I don't choke on it anymore.

—ob—  
I hesitate to publicize a health issue my daughter Halley has, but I've already told all my friends and most of the family, so it's not really a secret. Besides, the more prayer warriors I can recruit, the better.

Halley called Friday to tell me she had been to a doctor recently and had just received the diagnosis of a large uterine tumor. She quickly added that she had been assured it was benign but would require surgery. We'll look on the positive side.

Like Halley said, "It's not great

news, but it could have been a whole lot worse."

Now comes the hard part. Waiting to set the date for surgery.

### From the Bible

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)



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## Ditching yeast may stop gas

I'm trying a new diet, and it's driving me nuts.

I've been suffering from an embarrassing gas problem and it has nothing to do with my car.

For some reason, I have had a problem with the sudden, unexpected release of noxious, noisy, smelly clouds of intestinal gas.

I've tried several remedies for this, and so far none has helped, so I'm trying to remove the problem at the source. I'm trying to get rid of all the yeast in my system so that I can repopulate my innards with "good" bugs that won't cause such embarrassment.

The first part of the process is to remove all yeast from my diet, and that's not as simple as it sounds.

Bread is the first thing that comes to mind. No bread for a month. No toast. No bagels. No sandwiches. No hamburgers. No nothing with bread. Even saltine crackers have some yeast in them. Tortillas, I've learned, don't, but I get tired of them.

Alcoholic drinks like beer, wine and whiskey are out. What makes alcohol? Right, yeast.



### Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes  
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Well, that one's not so hard. I prefer Diet Coke to Bud Light, and although I enjoy a glass of wine now and then. I can live without it.

The really hard one is vinegar. Remember what happens to wine when it's left out too long? It turns to vinegar. Yeast is integral in the manufacture of both wine and vinegar.

And what has vinegar in it — about two-thirds of the stuff I like to eat, that's all.

There's catsup, mustard, barbecue sauce, pickles, salad dressings and even mayonnaise.

So, let's try to enjoy a nice meal.

Have a salad but no dressing. Not even those spray-on ones. Steak is OK but no A1 or Worcestershire or 57 sauce. You can have a hamburger

but no bun or condiments. (I don't like pickles anyway.)

Want to go out for barbecue? No, thank you.

How about Chinese? Nope, I think soy sauce has yeast in it.

Mexican? OK. Hamburger, soft cheese, rice and beans on tortillas, lettuce and tomatoes — but no chips or salsa.

I finally found a book that gives you a list of things that people with yeast allergies shouldn't eat. It includes fruit.

Fruit! That's one of my favorite foods.

No fresh, frozen or canned fruit.

This is going to be a long month, but maybe I'll lose weight as well as that less dignified problem.

## To fix problem, fix cats, don't kill

To the Editor:

Nobody can know how deep my love for animals goes, or how far I will go to protect them. I have to say that I do understand how good it would be to be able to step out your door and smell fresh air and how disappointing it is to smell the stench of what tom cats leave behind when they mark their territory.

I asked Mom why God made it that way, and asked God why He didn't make their spray smell as sweet as flowers. I think there would always be somebody who would complain and say, "I hate the smell of lilacs!"

What I don't understand is why we can't come to a compromise on this matter. We need a humane society where these cats can be kept

### Letter to the Editor

safe and adopted out, hopefully, to loving families or placed on a farm to live. A place where low-income families can go to get their pets spayed or neutered so they won't bring unwanted animals into the world. Also, neutered tom cats don't spray.

What doesn't work is trapping and killing the cats. When you trap cats and "dispose" of them, others will come to take their place. This is not a solution. Keep the cats where they are, and they will protect their territory and keep strays from coming in.

I know that some of you hate cats, but that goes both ways. Somebody

may hate some of the things you do or have. We can work together to solve this problem peacefully. It can't continue the way it is: you hate something I love and you take it from me.

Is that really right? I think not. Like I said before, "Some day you will lose something you love."

Julie Cunningham, Oberlin

