

Don't increase taxes to give people raises

The nation remains in the grip of a three-year recession. Unemployment hovers near 10 percent, growth is stagnant, recovery slow. Economists talk about a possible "double dip."

In business, many have lost their jobs. Those lucky enough to have one probably haven't had a raise in three years. Many would like to have those jobs.

Times are hard, yes, but across Kansas, perhaps across the country, public employees are demanding — and getting — raises. Many times, city councils and county commissions are raising taxes to get the money.

In the middle of the worse economy, many say, since the Great Depression, who has money to pay higher taxes? Well, everyone, if you listen to the public employees demanding raises, budget increases, guaranteed jobs.

How did these people become so entitled? And where do they think the money to pay them will come from? The unemployed?

Public employees have it pretty good. They may not make as much as factory workers or others with good unions, but then a lot of those jobs have gone overseas. Public jobs, for the most part, can't be exported.

Public employees, by and large, have better insurance and get more holidays than anyone else. We wonder how many of our readers in private business get a full 12 days off each year — other than bank employees, whose workplaces must be closed by federal regulation on holidays.

How many of you out there have full Blue Cross coverage? Have a state-funded retirement plan that allows you to retire early and take another job, while collecting a full pension?

(Forget for now the fact that many state

pension funds, which cover city, county and school workers also, are badly underfunded and in danger of collapse. It'll just take another tax increase to fix that.)

Public employees have more job security, under civil service rules, than most in private business, especially at the small businesses that pay much of the tax load.

Public employees have it pretty good — but they're not satisfied with that, apparently. They want more. Whether anyone else can afford to pay is not their concern.

In Kansas, for instance, when schools faced layoffs, teachers and others banded together to force the state to raise taxes. Can't blame them. But who can afford to pay a 19 percent increase in the sales tax?

In a situation like this, a crisis of major proportion, that any government body would consider money for raises seems absurd. Still, most are. Most will approve raises and push them through, raising taxes to pay the bill.

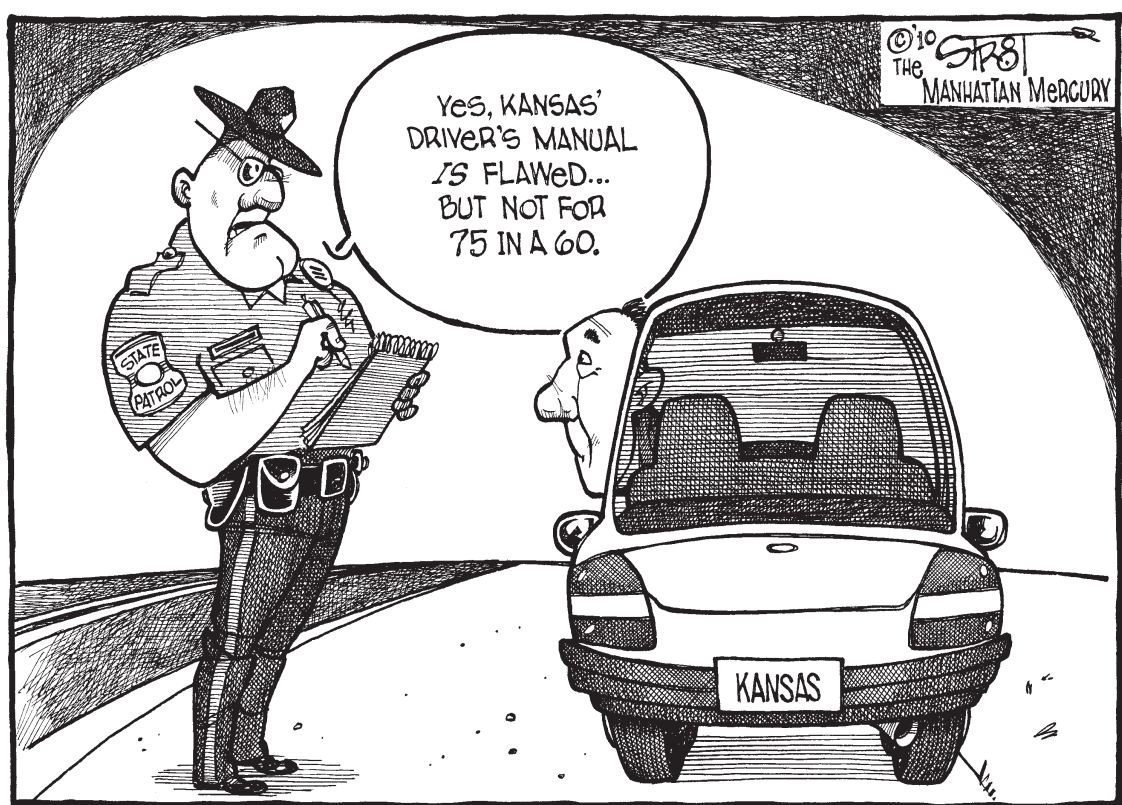
Voters ought to call for an accounting. We're not saying public salaries should be cut, but raises ought to be out of the question right now. Tax increases, especially the property tax, should not even be considered.

But until voters get mad, this will keep happening. Voters seldom go to budget hearings where these things are discussed. They don't get mad until the tax bills come out at the end of the year, and by then, the decisions have been made.

If you're happy with all that, fine. If not, maybe it's time to find out if your city council, your county, your school district plans to raise spending, wages or taxes this year.

If enough people ask, things might change. But it has to start with voters and taxpayers.

— Steve Haynes



She'll go first class, thank you

I may never want to fly coach again. How could I be satisfied back there with "the little people" after I've tasted the fruits of first class.

Last week, my brother Bob and I flew together to Orlando, Fla., to visit our sister Kathryn. As a former United Airlines pilot, Bob gets several passes each year and he shared one with me. Plus, with his seniority, he was able to upgrade our tickets from Chicago to Orlando.

I had never flown first class, but I quickly got accustomed to my cushy leather seat with its own telephone and the cutest little lap tray that pulled out of one of the arm rests. Each passenger also had their own headphones with a selection of music ranging from jazz to country.

We were barely airborne when the steward came down the aisle with a tray of hot washcloths. He handed one to each passenger with a pair of silver tongs. After you daintily washed your fingers and tapped around your mouth, he retrieved them the same way.

When flying coach, I was used to the stewardess tossing you a bag of peanuts like one of the vendors at a major-league baseball game. In first class, we were served a gourmet breakfast, an omelet with perfect hash browns, a croissant, a pat of real butter, a fruit cup and Starbucks coffee.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Yes. I could get used to first class.

But, honestly, I don't think I would make a very good world traveler. We only crossed one time zone and it still took me two days in Florida to get caught up. And now I've been home for four days and still feel tired.

We didn't do too many touristy things. Mostly, we looked at pictures, talked and ate. I made my stuffed jalapeños and chicken enchiladas. One sight we did see, however, was the oldest cypress tree in the world.

Aptly named "The General," this monster tree towered over all the others in a state park dedicated to "Wild Florida." The undergrowth was so dense you could barely see past the wooden walkway built through the forest. The heat and humidity kept us from doing too many things outdoors.

Kathryn is well and settled into her home. She was an apartment

dweller in New York for about 40 years, so she had some adjusting to do, though even in the city she had a green thumb. She lived on the top floor of her apartment building and always had a container garden on the roof. Now, she has a big yard to dig in and she proudly named off all the trees and flowers she has planted, with promises of more to come.

One thing about visiting my sister: you always come home with more than you brought. Generous to a fault, she had gifts: Chicken plates, a nightgown and a pair of bejeweled sandals for me; a huge crossword puzzle book and a stack of magnetized stainless steel balls for Bob. He uses them to hold his grandkids' pictures on his fridge.

As much as I like to go places, the best thing is coming home.

"There's no place like home. There's no place like home."

She wants to keep summer

I want summer back.

I know my rights! Summer is supposed to last a whole lot longer than this.

I demand it get its sunny little rear end back here.

Not that I don't appreciate fall, mind you. Why, some of my favorite seasons are autumns. But you just can't trust fall.

Fall starts out all cool, crisp, sleep with the window open and before you know it, the furnace is on and you're up to your hubcaps in snow.

Disgusting! Fall provides us with all these beautiful, colorful leaves. Then it kills them all off, and we end up with a brown, rustling carpet all over the lawn and a bunch of bare branches.

Disgusting! Pumpkins and fresh apple cider appear in the fall. Then it freezes, and you end up with a garden full of dead tomato and squash vines. By the time you get around to removing the nasty things, they're a slimy mess.

Disgusting! There's bonfires and football and wiener roasts. Nice, but I prefer sunshine, baseball and picnics.

Let's face it. Fall only has one purpose. It's a bait-and-switch game



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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to lead you into winter.

Winter is heating bills, snow to shovel, short and dreary days, wet feet, cold fingers and chapped faces.

Summer is gardens, flowers, sunshine, children playing outside, swimming, vacations and long and lazy days.

OK, so it's also air conditioning, sunburn and bugs.

I can live with that. As I look back over the last three months, I realize I didn't get to go fishing, never went swimming, rarely used our hammock and never ran through the sprinkler.

I did plant, weed, water and harvest our garden.

Steve and I did take the dog for walks at midnight, enjoy many lunchtime picnics and ate our dinner on the porch.

All things I'd like to continue doing for three or four more months.

I've always liked summer best. Even when I had three children at

home, I always hated to see school start each August. Summer vacation always seemed too short for all the things we wanted to do — go camping, visit the lake, take long walks in the woods and enjoy cooking outside.

So, please, if anyone out there has any influence with Mother Nature, could you ask her to be an old dear and not be in such a hurry to send summer on its way and bring on fall.

After all, you just can't trust fall. It's a sneaky season.

From the Bible

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

1 Peter 3:8 NIV

Take me out to the ball game

It was a touching moment.

A crowd of more than 37,000 fans at Denver's Coors Field stood and applauded, made noise and waved for two to three minutes Friday as veteran first baseman Todd Helton stood at third.

Helton had to wave his cap twice before the fans would sit down.

The announcer had just told them the Helton's first-inning double was No. 525 in his long career, putting him in a tie for 35th all-time among major league players. That brought him even with some guy named Ted Williams, who used to play in Boston.

After the game, Helton was typically humble, though reporters said he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Ted Williams? Come on. That's crazy. I don't comprehend it. It's hard to believe, but it's true."

At 38, Helton is no longer the everyday player who led the Rockies to so many memorable triumphs. He has platooned all year with 39-year-old Jason Giambi at first base and spent weeks on the disabled list with back problems.

Though Helton already has put up Hall-of-Fame numbers over the years, he may have another good season or two in him. He certainly wants to help push the Rocks to yet another September playoff run this year.

But for an aging superstar, and



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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37,265 of his friends, Friday night was pretty special.

And Sunday, when Giambi came off the bench to win the game with a two-run "walkoff" homer, wasn't bad either. The team had come from behind to tie the game, leaving a 2-2 score in the bottom of the ninth.

Giambi, as he has all year, was Manger Jim Tracey's choice to pinch hit "in the clutch."

It was his 39th birthday. Later, he seemed to think that it had been a good one.

As for the Rockies, it seems as though they can always find a way to win in September. The rest of the season, they get behind, forget it.

To understand this one, you have to know that in baseball, a game is "a save situation" when a team is leading by three or fewer runs in the ninth inning. The team usually calls on its "closer," a relief pitcher who specializes in ending games, to pitch the ninth then.

It's not just that the pitcher, if

successful, records a "save" in the record books, but closers are not to be wasted on big leads.

And out front, at 20th and Blake Street, there is a street preacher who tries to talk to the crowd after most every game. An associate holds up a big hand-lettered sign that says "Jesus Saves."

The guy talks and talks as the crowd sweeps by, headed home or perhaps intent on the dozens of bars and sin-holes down the street in the area they call LoDo. You have to admire his dedication.

Anyway, we were sweeping by, headed for our favorite bar, when the guy behind me asked his buddy, "What does that mean, Jesus Saves? That wasn't a save situation." (The Rocks had won 13-4.)

I suppose Jesus plays a different game, had souls to save that night, not a baseball game. The "save" would have gone to Rockies closer Huston Street — if there had been one. I think.

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