

Changed tax-cut plan may cause ills in future

There is much wailing and gnashing of teeth over the state budget, centered on a flawed tax-cut plan that no one expected to actually pass.

The result could be a \$2 billion hole in state revenues down the line if something isn't done.

This is not Gov. Sam Brownback's tax-cut plan, though the basic idea came from the governor and he did sign the bill. The governor presented a carefully crafted package of tax cuts and changes that would not have created such a big hole in the budget.

The governor's plan itself was pure in theory and practice. He proposed ending several popular tax breaks, starting with the one for home mortgages, that could have caused a rebellion among voters.

This plan stayed true to the theory of a low, flat, fair income tax that many conservative economists have touted for decades, but it wasn't about to fly that way.

The Legislature stripped most of the income-raising ideas out, leaving mostly the cuts. The House and Senate passed different versions, the House bill containing the most drastic cuts.

Later, the Senate passed the House bill with changes senators thought would send it to a conference committee, where a compromise could be made. Instead, the House passed the Senate-amended version as is.

Ideas differ on whether that was a double cross of the Senate or just good parliamentary maneuvering. Whatever you call it, though, it left the state with budget issues. The carefully preserved 6.5 percent ending balance this year could disappear as quickly as it was created, leaving the state facing drastic cuts.

That's not likely to happen, though, since neither the Senate nor many House members, not even the governor, wanted such big cuts without any matching changes in to stabilize revenue.

Hard-core conservatives may actually want to force more cuts in state programs and agencies, and there probably is room in some areas. For all the cutting of recent years, few agencies actually have disappeared. Programs seem to have a life of their own; witness the resurrection of state money for an arts program.

But the truth is, there's already been a lot of cutting. This governor and this Legislature have taken control of the budget and actually turned it around. State spending will go down this year for the first time in decades; most "cuts" in previous years were from proposed budgets, not from actual spending.

And that is at the root of much of the wailing. The spenders, the big-government forces, are no longer in control in Topeka. Government is shrinking, and they don't like it.

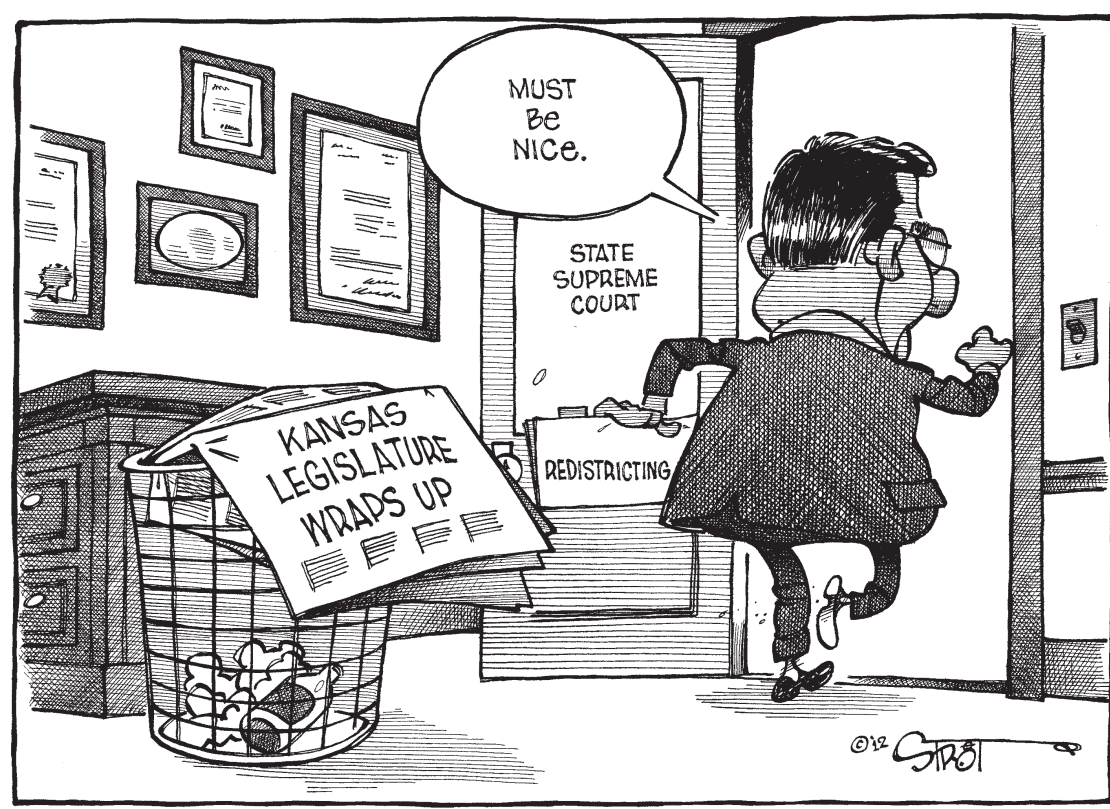
The tax law will have to be changed, yes, but it's unlikely the state government will turn around soon. The die has been cast for a smaller budget, and most Kansans probably approve.

Those behind higher spending — mostly those who benefit and "entitlements," people who believe that government can and should solve every problem — don't like that, but it's a done deal now.

The next Legislature has time to avert a budget disaster. And perhaps, some of the economic growth the governor promises will come along in time to save the day.

He just might be right, you know.

— Steve Haynes



Harvest is fast approaching

Harvest is just around the corner. I am writing a friend who lives in Rhode Island and perhaps has never seen a wheat harvest. I told her I would try to send a picture.

Unless you've seen a beautiful, golden wheat field stretching to the horizon and beyond, you can't understand how impressive it is. Perhaps the picture will describe it better than mere words ever could.

My daughter Halley was going to come this week but the closing on a house she sold was moved ahead, so her plans changed. I told her it would be better if she came a few days later anyway. That way she could get in on harvest, too.

I know my girls remember the year we "helped" their Aunt Donna cut wheat. It was one of the years my brother Dick was in Saudi Arabia, and it fell on Donna's shoulders to bring in the harvest. They didn't have a huge amount to cut, but still, it was their cash crop. It was important. So, with the help of Dick and Donna's three boys, and my two girls, we got the job done. Granted, Donna did all the work, but she was a great supervisor and managed not to kill anyone.

—ob—

I have a young friend who has two children, a boy, 8, and a little girl, about 20 months. The mom had to be away from her home for a few hours, and she couldn't take the children. Since the kids already think of me as a surrogate grandmother, I volunteered to keep them.

Car seats properly installed, the kids were loaded into the van and away we headed to our house. They



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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marveled at the tiny puff balls of baby chicks and wondered about the eggs in the incubator. In fact, the little boy, who is very bright asked, "Which came first: the chicken or the egg?" Immediately, he answered his own question. "I know. The chicken did. Because it had to lay the egg."

Good boy. He's well on his way to understanding Creation.

The kids helped with chores. They picked the eggs and fed the calves and chickens.

We were walking in the back yard where our mulberry tree is heavy-laden with ripe fruit. I suggested we try some of it and popped a juicy berry into the little girl's mouth. She loved it and that must have given her brother (who is a notorious picky eater) the courage to try it himself. He loved it too, and soon his fingers were purple with juice.

Emboldened by this success, he reached for a ripe cherry. I tried to stop him by saying, "Better not. The cherries are very sour. You won't like it."

Perhaps it was the reverse psychology, but he said he loved it and ate a few more to prove it. He promised to help me pick cherries,

so looks like I will owe one little boy a cherry pie.

Supper time rolled around, and I knew I would be safe if I fixed spaghetti. There's not a kid in the world who doesn't like spaghetti, is there?

I still haven't restored the use of my dining room, so we were eating in the family room. The baby would open her mouth like a little bird and I would poke in spaghetti and sauce. If a piece slipped out, she knew how to "slurp" it back in. We had spaghetti everywhere.

About that time one of our three cats decided to sidle up to this pint-sized person and see if she couldn't get a good petting. The baby didn't see the cat coming and when the cat rubbed against her she screamed and jumped. That made the cat jump and head to safety upstairs. I had a good laugh, but the baby didn't think it was too funny.

It was nothing that another bite of spaghetti couldn't cure, though.

Moral of the story: I really miss having little kids around. They are lots of fun and bring a curiosity about everything to life.

Maybe my friend will let me "Rent-A-Kid" once in awhile.

Visit great; trip home quiet

The trip out of the mountains and through southern Colorado to home last week was fun and blessedly uneventful.

We had been to Creede, a little mountain town we lived in for several years back in the 1980s, for a few days to visit friends and attend the opening of the repertory theater.

The visit had been great and the opening play, a comedy with lots of singing and dancing, maybe not the best show of the season, but energetic and fun.

In the mountains, we enjoyed a second taste of spring. The lilacs in front of the courthouse were in full, gloriously scented bloom.

Here and there, in people's yards, irises in a rainbow of colors made bright splashes of color. The temperatures tumbled to freezing at night and got up in the 70s during the day.

Too soon, it was time to head home as storm clouds gathered and fat raindrops started to fall.

It didn't rain much, but there were clouds with lightning and thunder on the horizon as we set out from Creede into the San Luis Valley, the largest of the mountain parks in the state.

We grabbed lunch at one of our favorite Mexican restaurants and a big bag of popcorn, and we were ready to leave the Valley, go over La Veta Pass and onto the plains of



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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southern Colorado.

Anyone who thinks Kansas is wide open and treeless should visit the area down between Walsenburg and La Junta, Colo. You can see 50 to 60 miles, and there is nothing to block your view but sagebrush, cactus and yucca plants. You can get lost just looking out over the landscape, and I would hate to try to cover it in a horse-drawn wagon. The land seems to stretch on forever.

But we like that sort of country. We love seeing the yucca and cactus in bloom and watching for antelope. We saw several of the speedy pronghorns. Mostly, they were standing by themselves, but in one case, we saw four together.

I called it a herd. Steve said that was a group; a herd had to have more animals.

(Well, that's the silliest thing I ever heard, er heard.)

We continued to chase the rain across the plains and we could see where it had been. It doesn't take

much water to turn that desert area green and blooming. But where it hadn't come down, the grass was yellow and the ground dusty.

We never really caught up with the storms. I thought we had at one time when we were almost to Oakley and it was dark. It turned out to be a few drops of rain mixed with lots of bugs.

Welcome home to summer in Kansas.

From the Bible

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

— Romans 8:12-14

Smoke and movie roll along

I'm sitting here on the deck, watching the winds battle over the smoke.

It's kind of interesting, and besides, I can't go fishing. More about that later.

We had a couple of days and drove to Colorado to open our house for the year. We turned the water on — no leaks, thank goodness — and got the place straightened up.

We also installed the new oven, which of course was twice as difficult and three times as time consuming as it should have been. We ordered the same size, but in 30 years, a few things had changed.

Nevertheless, the oven works, as does the water, and the house is ready for guests. Next time, we'll get the oven level, something the old one never was.

But the smoke. It seems they are burning large parts of New Mexico and a chunk of Colorado right over the Continental Divide, near Pagosa Springs. Each afternoon, the warm southwest monsoons drive the smoke over the Divide. It pours through the passes and creeps over the peaks.

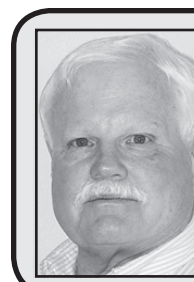
But it is not monsoon season yet, and the last couple of days, high pressure driving a north wind has driven the smoke back. The winds met a couple of miles to the west, smoke boiled up out of a side canyon — you'd have thought it was a fire on this side — and pretty soon it was in full retreat.

Within half an hour, the smoke had fled eight or nine miles up the river. The air around us was crystal clear once more.

It was a perfect day to go fishing, but I can't get to my favorite place just above town. It seems Disney has taken over the canyon. They are shooting a remake of "The Lone Ranger" up there, or will be if the set ever gets built.

Dozens and dozens of workers crawl all over the set. From the guard shack which blocks the county road, you can almost see it. Word is they are building, among other things, a railroad tunnel up there.

Cynthia points out that there are plenty of real railroad tunnels in Colorado they could use, some



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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of which the railroads don't need anymore. But that is not the point. What Hollywood wants, apparently, Hollywood builds, even on location.

Each day, workers descend on town to scavenge a lunch. Trucks haul lights and equipment up the canyon. They are building the tunnel, buildings, the whole set in Albuquerque and trucking it up. The set has its own power plant.

The whole area is closed, and cameras are barred. Don't bother trying to get in; Disney has goons, er, security guards.

It's hard to imagine what it will be like when they start busing dozens of extras in each day to the big wardrobe tent across from the community center, some hired in the area, in Alamosa, even in Denver.

No actors are there yet. Someone named Arnie Hammer will play the Lone Ranger. I never heard of him, but I figure they couldn't afford a star, what with what they'll be paying Johnny Depp to play Tonto.

Advance publicity stills show Mr. Depp wearing a dead bird on

his head, supposedly a Crow warrior's getup. And lots of makeup, some of it undoubtedly left over from all those pirate movies. Hammer has had roles in recent movies, by the way, playing twins in "The Social Network," and lists himself as a great-grandson of oil tycoon Armand Hammer. Really.

Rumor has it the film is already as much as \$30 million over budget, and union crews are being held to 10 hours a day. They figure that'll change when they get behind, since shooting is to be done by June 29.

By the time I return, Johnny and Arnie should be gone, along with the tunnel and the rest of the set. I'll be able to go fishing, if they haven't built anything in my creek. The road should be open, anyway.

We'll have to wait until 2013 to find out if any of this gets into the movie. (There is another location set in Utah.)

The town should have calmed down by then, unless, of course, they decide to have a big premier up in the mountains.

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