

Legislature needs to get together on income tax

When the dust clears from Tuesday's election, and we know for sure who won, it'll be time for Kansas government to get back to work.

A couple of things must be done next spring, before our citizen-legislators go home to their jobs and farms and businesses.

One is to fix the income tax system, which the last Legislature left badly broken. It's fashionable to blame Gov. Sam Brownback for this, since he's the one who proposed eliminating or slashing the state's income tax.

In truth, however, what passed wasn't the governor's program at all. It included most of the cuts he wanted, it's true, but none of the balancing changes, including closing many popular "loopholes," or tax breaks.

The result was a mishmash of cuts without balancing revenue "enhancements" that would have made the changes more or less "revenue neutral," as the governor had proposed.

Instead, the liberal-dominated Senate passed drastic cuts on the premise that the conservative-controlled House would negotiate later. Instead, the House slam-dunked them to the governor, who signed them. Senate leaders said they'd been double-crossed, but House leaders claim they'd made no promises.

Afterward, the nonpartisan Legislative Research Council estimated they could leave the state \$2.5 billion short over the next 10 years, the source of many statements about "the governor's tax cuts." So far, however, the biggest cuts to Kansas schools and other state programs have come under the former Democratic governor, Mark Parkinson, and not on Mr. Brownback's watch.

Of course, that \$2.5 billion estimate assumes

the cuts won't have the projected impact of boosting the state's economy, as the governor claims. It's hard to blame him for a rogue tax plan shoved through the Legislature by opposing forces in the Senate. He did sign it, however, and for that, he'll have to bear part of the burden.

None of the supposed dire consequences need happen, however, if men and women of good will take their seats in the new Legislature two months from now. The tax plan can and should be fixed both to make it closer to what the governor proposed to stimulate the economy, and to avoid any future shortfall. Many legislative leaders agree.

And now that the battle for control of both houses is over, or nearly so, maybe everyone can get busy and make the tax code more sensible. It will take the entire session, the way our Legislature works, to make a decision on this divisive question, but it must be done.

Before anything else, however, the parties will have to caucus and organize for the session. The betting is the conservative Republicans will hang onto control of the House, electing a new speaker, while their compatriots form a new majority in the Senate. Voters still have a say on that, of course, and it's doubtful the governor will be able to summon a majority at will. Kansas Legislators are too independent for that.

But perhaps, with the fight behind us, those who are elected this fall will find ways to work together for the common good of the state, unlike the last session, where partisanship was everything.

Then maybe we won't have a repeat of the tax mess this time. — Steve Haynes

Time change just sneaks up

I just about forgot to turn my clock back an hour before I went to bed Saturday night. And Sunday morning, I really did forget to tell Jim we had an extra hour to get ready for church. So I had to laugh when he came charging into the family room, where I was casually having some toast and milk.

"Look at the time!" he said. "We have 15 minutes before we have to leave. You know how I hate to be late."

"Don't worry," I said. "Calm down. It's the time-change week-end." He calmed down all right. He sat down, we got to watching the news and before we knew it, our extra hour had evaporated. In the end, we still had to hurry.

The last thing in this world I need is another cat. We have three, and sometimes that is two too many. So I should have had my defenses up when Jim called me outside and said, "Hey, have you ever seen this cat before? Does he belong to somebody? Do you think he looks OK?"

Instead, I took a look. No, I had never seen it before. No, I didn't know if it belonged to somebody. And, no again, I didn't think it looked very good. That was just for starters. Now I would have been willing to feed it and let it visit, but my husband is so crazy about cats he insisted I take it to the vet to be



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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checked out.

It was late Saturday afternoon, but since we practically have the veterinarian on retainer, he said to bring our feline friend in. Sure enough, it had an upper respiratory infection, was malnourished and probably had worms. Great. All this for a cat I don't know, and quite frankly, didn't want to know.

But gee, he is kinda cute. And he is awfully friendly. Isn't that cute how he puts his paw through the carrier cage, trying to reach my hand? Now, stop that! I don't want to like you. Too late. Jim has named him Thomas. Since I'm back listening to my "Learn Spanish" CDs, I opted for Tomas.

Anyway, we're taking turns feeding him and administering his antibiotics. Mostly, he was ravenously hungry. We're trying to feed him small amounts at frequent intervals. He literally gobbles everything we put in front of him. At the moment, he is isolated in the dining room. One of the female cats caught sight of him when we were setting up the cat hospital. Judging from the

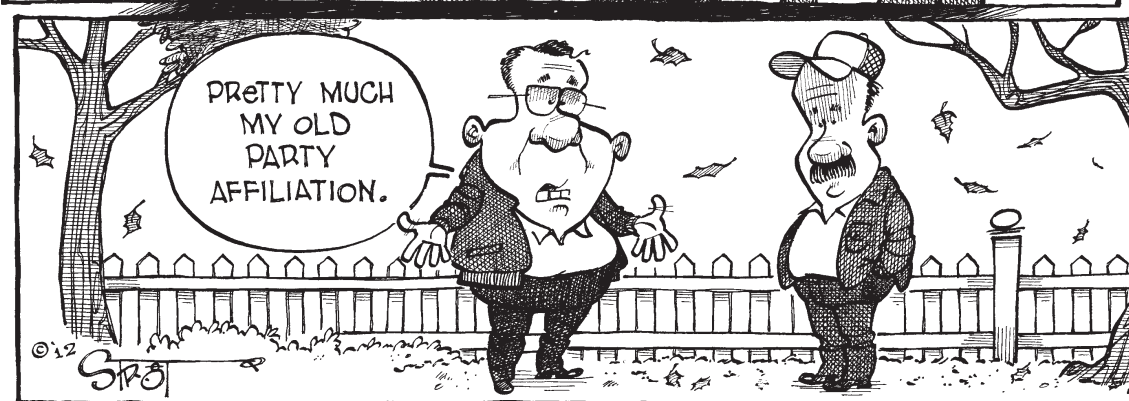
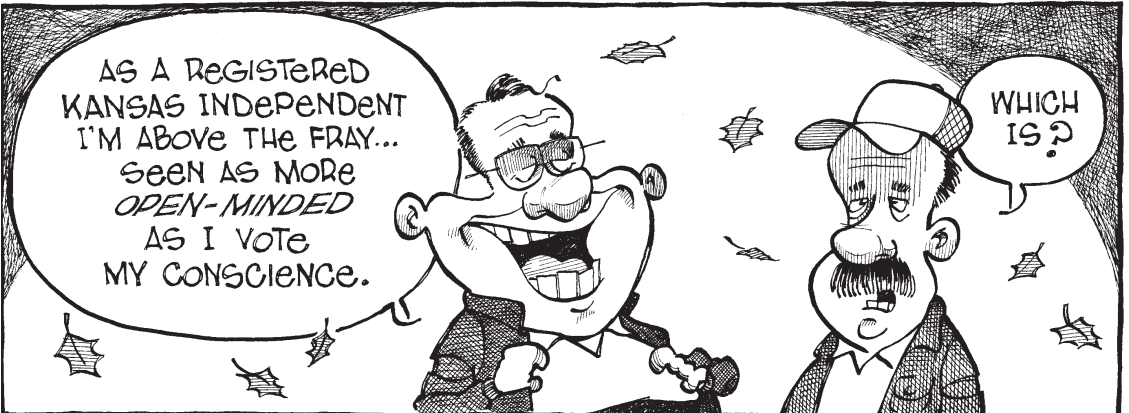
hissing and growling, Tomas is not going to get a warm reception if he does stay.

During the praise portion of Sunday worship services, prayers for safe travel were requested for a woman in the congregation. Her husband said, "Yeah, I hope they get home. They went to Denver, but I gave them a Utah map."

By the time you read this, the elections will be over. The sun will have come up and whether our candidates won or lost, we will face the day. Life will go on; the world will not end.

This country of ours is unique. We can keep our leaders or we can change them, all with the power of our vote—not the power of a sword. The transition of leadership will continue, uninterrupted. All very civil. All very American.

America is not perfect. It's made up of imperfect people. But it's still the best there is. God bless the U.S.A.



Squash turns into flat bread

I love to cook, and when I get the chance, I cook up a storm.

I especially love to bake, but with just two of us in the house and both of us on kind of a permanent diet, I don't get much opportunity.

Still, when Steve brought home eight enormous yellow squash and zucchinis this summer, I accepted the challenge.

I packed the squash up and took it to Colorado, where I have (or at least I take) more time to enjoy working in my kitchen.

While I normally leave the peel on when fixing a stir fry or sauté with my small squash, these babies had skin as thick as paint on a 100-year-old house. They had to be peeled. They also had to be seeded. But after peeling, halving, seeding and chopping them into reasonable size pieces, I still had a lot of squash.

I grabbed a Salad Shooter. You remember Salad Shooters. They were all the rage about 20 years ago. You just put your carrots, cucumbers, radishes or whatever in the tube, push the on button and point the gun-like appliance at your salad and neat slices or strips of vegetable would cover your lettuce.

I've never tried that, but this little gizmo is great for grating carrots, onions and celery for spaghetti sauce. It's also good for grating



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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zucchini and yellow squash that has been cut up into strips that will fit into its little chute.

Before long, I had a bowl full of shredded zucchini. Six squash later (I gave one to a neighbor), I had 10 bags of squash, all measured out in two-cup increments.

This week, I grabbed two of those bags out of the freezer, let them thaw on the counter and prepared to make zucchini bread for friends. I was also going to make a low-sugar loaf for Steve.

I'm not sure what I did wrong, since I've made this recipe dozens of times without mishap. I think I mismeasured the flour in the first batch. When I opened the oven door, the two loaves had fallen. Each one had a crater in the middle.

I had all the ingredients for the low-sugar variety measured out, so I went ahead and made the next two loaves with great misgivings and an

additional two tablespoons of flour. They came out great.

Now, I had a dilemma. I ended up taking one of each loaf to friends we were going to dinner with. Steve and I ate the second low-sugar loaf, but I still had one rather misshapen loaf left. It was cooked through, but it looked weird. I finally cut it into squares and took it to a church social. Everyone thought it was great.

I think I've given the recipe in this column before, so I won't repeat it. However, if anyone wants to try it, e-mail me at c.haynes@nwkansas.com and I'll send it to you. The amount of flour you put in is up to you.

The low-sugar version is made by substituting Splenda-sugar blend for half the sugar and adding a bit more flour to make up for the lack of bulk, since sugar blend only takes up half as much space as real sugar.

Is hobby bird or cat feeding?

Those of you who read these pages know, probably, that Cynthia has taken to feeding the birds the last couple of years.

I find this hobby to be mildly amusing. Birds are interesting, and while she has bought a lot of seed and a whole forest of double-shepherd's-crook bird-feeder holders—empty ones dot our yards—it's on the whole less expensive than, say, shopping.

Even our cats seem to tolerate, or at best, ignore, her new pursuits. But to be fair, we lost our two "best" hunters this year. Of the two we have left, Jez is too paranoid to spend much time outside, and Molly mostly just sleeps these days.

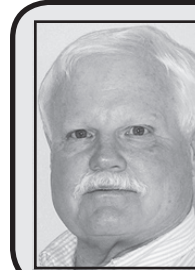
One positive result of this new pursuit is that Cynthia writes more about the birds today than she does the cats. This has resulted in a 99 percent reduction in letters to the editor from angry old men who hate cats without loss of support for her column from women who adore them.

One group that has wildly endorsed her efforts should not be overlooked, however. That would be the two young cats that just moved into our neighborhood. One is black, the other a dark tabby. Both fancy themselves as mighty hunters.

At least, they've taken to lurking under the bird feeders enough that I'd say they, at least, have reclassified them as cat feeders.

There is no record of a kill for either of these two in the four or five days they've been hanging out in our yard, but that does not keep them from trying.

Both seem fascinated, entranced, even, by the multitude of feathered



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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friends that flock to the seed site. So there they crouch, ready to pounce on the first sparrow that touches the ground or swoops a hair too low on his approach.

The bird population this time of year seems to be equally made up of assorted sparrows, red-wing blackbirds and a whole flock of Stellar's jays.

And while the first two species might be a tasty snack for an admittedly well-fed cat, those Jays are big. They'd put up a fight. And there is a mighty gang of them, half a dozen at least.

I keep waiting to see what will happen, but so far, nary a pounce.

These might be nice cats. I'm not sure we'll ever get to know them, though, because they are not the type to just come up and purr at strangers, even while hanging out in your yard for hours on end.

They're pretty little things, to be sure, but hunters? We'll see.

They don't seem to be giving up the hunt, anyway. Maybe for them, it's more the thought of birds than the catching.

I know their presence has cut down on the bird-seed bill, because the flock has gotten mighty careful about when and where they peck. They hang out in flocks, 20 or 30 sparrows and finches, half a dozen

jays, whole families of redwings. Which makes this hobby all that much cheaper, and makes me happier, and watching the cats watching the birds is kinda entertaining in its own way.

I'm just not sure how this story ends. Badly for some sparrow, I'm sure, but you never know. Those jays might just get a cat.

From the Bible

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

— Mark 12:41-44

Senator worried, upset by attack

To the Editor:
Many Kansans are outraged with the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2012 in Benghazi, Libya. They believe the president has not been straight with them and is now avoiding the issue.

Many, especially veterans and those in the military, have expressed the fear that the sacred bond of never leaving a comrade in distress or danger may be worthless as of the date of this disgrace.

As the most senior U.S. Marine in Congress, I could not agree more. We cannot allow this to fester and infect the bond of taking care of

our own.

I wrote the president an open letter urging him to set the record straight. The letter can be viewed on my website at roberts.senate.gov

Until the president, as commander in chief, informs Americans of what happened and why, that bond, which has existed as long as the United States of America has fielded armies, is breaking. We must know why American assets nearby were not used to save American lives.

Letter to the Editor

This request for the president to set the record straight and restore the bond of "sacrifice for each other" is made with the deepest sincerity. The future morale and effectiveness of our military services may be at stake, and the consequences of this broken bond will be a burden for whoever is in the White House this coming year.

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts,
Dodge City

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