

Kansas needs to work on long-term solutions

Call it sustainable government.

That's what this country, heck, what all the "developed" nations, including most of Europe and certainly the U.S., need to learn.

Just as we need to learn to live within our energy means, the world needs to learn to live within its income, trimming government spending and "entitlement" programs to fit revenue and sustainable growth.

Most U.S. states could be added to the list, Kansas among them, though Kansas certainly is no California in terms of debt or spending or excess growth.

Still, our state has seen its budget grow far faster than the economy in recent years, driven by those federal "entitlements" that everyone likes to blame things on.

After coming into office with the state treasury literally empty after years of budget cuts and revenue shortages, Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback claims to have turned things around.

Under his leadership, the Legislature produced a balanced budget with a \$700 million ending balance, or surplus, giving the state a cushion to fall back on.

That in itself was an accomplishment.

However, the governor has more far-reaching ambitions. He wants to make the state more friendly to businesses that could bring in new jobs. A big part of his plan was to lower taxes and eventually, to eliminate the state income tax.

He and the legislature made a big start on that plan this year, eliminating state taxes on most small-business income and slashing tax rates for most Kansans. The Legislature, without a doubt, botched up this plan when it got to the Senate. Senators agreed to pass a version that included all the cuts the governor proposed, but none of the revenue-producing changes he wanted.

The result could be a budget gap of up to \$700 million a year over the next few years, state experts predicted, though that gap keeps shrinking as the state's economy improves.

The governor's enemies were quick to claim the tax cuts would lead to massive cuts in schools and other state programs, and big hikes in local property taxes. That hasn't happened yet, of course, and it might not, but everyone agrees the tax bill passed last year is badly flawed.

The governor launched a campaign this week to re-establish some balance in the revenue picture, where he had proposed ending some popular deductions, including the one on home mortgage interest, to offset his tax cuts.

Another alternative is to keep a "temporary" sales-tax increase passed a few years ago in place of the higher income tax. Many argue that this would hurt low-income Kansans, but another argument is that a sales tax actually hits the wealthy hardest because they buy a lot more than the rest of us.

There are ways to get out of the income tax if you're rich, but the sales tax applies to everyone.

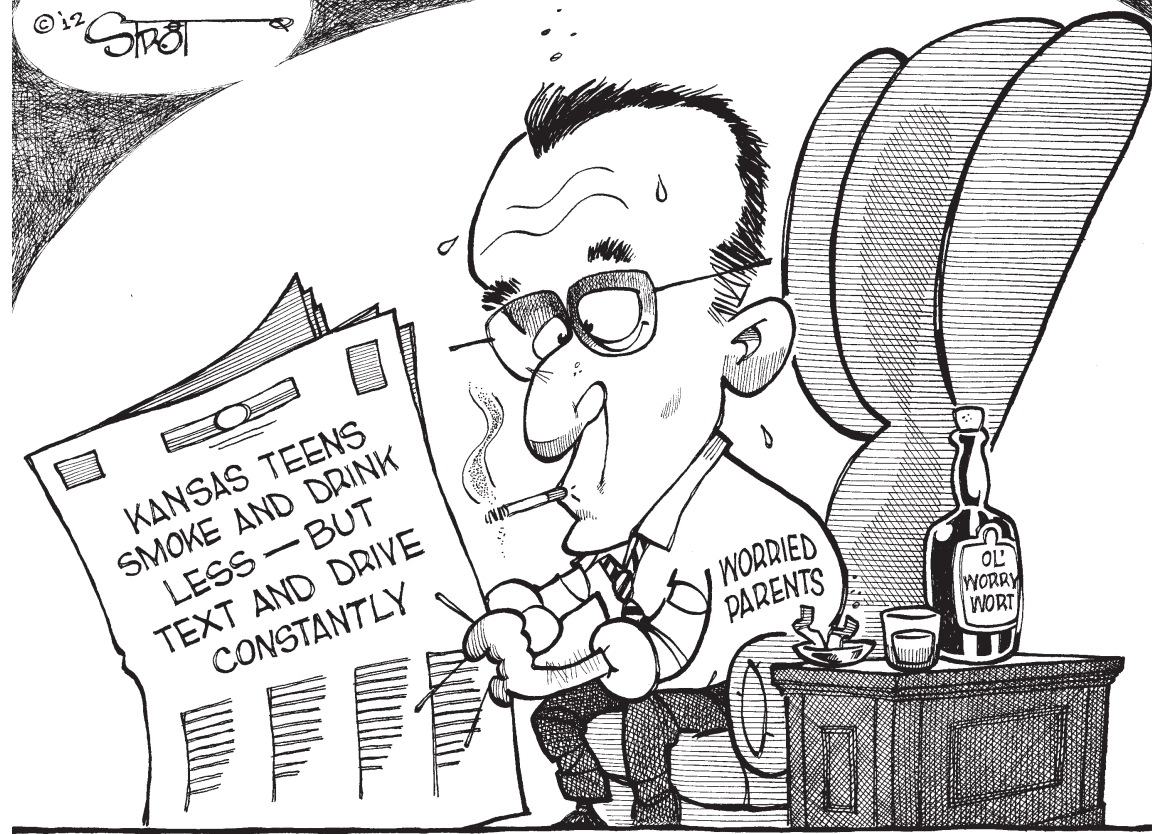
There'll be opposition to any solution. The very conservative will oppose any tax or revenue increase, hoping to slash government even more. But the state does need good schools, colleges, roads and services, and it must have prisons, regulations and the like. While the administration promises to root out excess spending, there's only so much you can cut or save.

In the end, we need a solid compromise that makes the state run the way people want it to. That's critical to the governor if he wants to run for higher office again — and many believe he still wants to be president.

To do that, he needs to make a success of his fiscal program. Budget Director Steve Anderson says he believes it could be a model for other states, and it might, but only if it works.

A solution is important to the rest of us, too. And as in Washington, a reasonable approach that will work is what we need in Topeka.

— Steve Haynes



Missing 'gator decorates tree

As I put up the Christmas tree last week, I came face to face with a head with beady little eyes and lots of sharp teeth.

Nope, it wasn't one of the cats. They were both decorating the furniture.

It was the alligator. The alligator that went missing three years ago.

I guess I should backtrack a little on this one.

I'm not sure where I got him. He's about 18 inches long and looks just like the small alligators they let you hold at animal preserves. Since he's plastic, he doesn't eat much and shouldn't be able to get away.

But he did — get away that is.

Three years ago, Barbara was helping me clean. She would come in, clean the house and hide the alligators — the one that went missing and his much smaller little brother.

I'd find one or the other of them in the pocket of my robe, made into the bed, hiding in the bathtub or crouching in a large potted plant.

Sometimes it would take several weeks to discover where the gators were hiding.

Then Barbara got a full-time job with benefits at the state prison in Norton. I found the small alligator in a pot in the kitchen, but the larger one was AWOL.

This wasn't a big deal. It was, after all, a plastic alligator. It had no great emotional or monetary value,



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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but we would wonder now and then where it was. I searched a few times, but to no avail.

Now, each year since Steve's mother died, I've dragged her artificial Christmas tree from the basement to the living room. It's starting to show its age, but it's also a family heirloom. Each year, at the end of the season, I remove the tinsel and ornaments and drag the tree, with its contingent of lights, back to the basement.

There it sits in a corner with odds and ends of furniture destined to go to the repairman.

Two years ago, a friend brought us a real piñon pine from Colorado. We were thrilled and got out the old tree stand. We had always had real trees when we lived in the mountains, cutting our own each year.

Last year, the friend brought another tree and again there was great rejoicing and the old artificial tree stayed in the basement another year.

Well, you guessed it. Barbara hid the alligator in Grandmother Barb's tree. It was sort of fitting, I thought.

Now, the old faithful tree is trimmed and sitting in the living room. The alligator and a cat are under the tree and I'm keeping my distance.

There's a lot of beady eyes and teeth under that evergreen.

In the U.S.A.

"We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.
Jan. 15, 1929-April 4, 1968
Civil Rights activist and clergyman

Time's a moving too fast

It's true. The older you get, the faster time flies.

Here's another truth: newspaper work puts time on steroids.

Working only one day a week doesn't sound like much, but it seems to roll around faster and faster. In the newspaper biz, you're always working on the future. You know coming events, celebrations, the community calendar. Then — boom — that issue is here and immediately you're on to the next week's paper.

I swear, it seems like just a couple of weeks ago we were working on Christmas 2011. Now, it's almost 2013, and I'll be saying the same thing next December.

—ob—

Since I'm on the subject of newspapers, I think it's OK to poke a little fun at ourselves. I don't like writing headlines, probably because I'm not very good at it. But after a friend sent me their collection of really dumb headlines, I don't feel so bad.

This one could have been written here:

Hospitals resort to hiring doctors



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts65@gmail.com

Physician shortage prompting move, administrators say

Here's one that would set our editor off:

Meeting on open meetings is closed

Love this one:

Parents keep kids home to protest school closure

OK, just one more:

Rally against apathy draws small crowd

—ob—

I'm torn. Everyone, and I mean

everyone, in my family is on a diet of one kind or another. My heart wants to make candy like I do every year, but my mind says I'm not doing them any favors. I know that all that sugar, fat and chocolate is not good for any of us, so why do I do it?

I tell myself it's because I love them. Well, duh, if I love them, I should do what's best for them. Shouldn't I?

I could use artificial sweeteners, but we all know what that stuff tastes like.

My compromise is going to be sending small amounts to each family instead of an entire boxload to each kid.

They might not like it, but they'll thank me later. Won't they?

Cliff will likely turn into ledge

So, are we going to fall off the fiscal cliff at the end of the year?

You can hear about any opinion you want these days, and the signs from Washington are anything but encouraging. The president glowers at the Republicans in Congress, and they glower back. No one smiles.

And this hand is being played closed to the vest. Neither Speaker John Boehner nor Mr. Obama will say much about what might happen. Neither wants to give an inch before actually sitting down to the table.

Jim Kuhnhehn, an Associated Press White House correspondent, speaking to AP publishers in Kansas City last week, said he thinks there'll be a deal.

"Not a big deal," he said, no overall solution to the entire budget-debt-economy problems, but maybe a step toward a solution.

"It'll be a small deal, he said, "with a player to be named.

"What they'll probably do is set up another 'fiscal cliff,' maybe in August."

And while the head of the International Monetary Fund spoke out Sunday against just that kind of solution, it seems more and more likely that Congress and the president will go for a small deal again.

Christine Lagarde, managing director of the fund, was on CNN's *State of the Union*.

"If the U.S. economy was to suffer the downside risk of not reaching a comprehensive deal," she said, "then growth would be zero. It would be much better to actually have a more comprehensive approach and to deal with all the issues."

Lagarde, a former finance minister of France who grew up, oddly enough, in Washington, went on to say she thought the uncertainty of not having a deal could put the U.S. back into a recession.

But while you have to believe



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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in miracles, they're not common. And this problem is so big and so persistent that it's hard to see how the opposing sides can solve it all at once.

Like the proverbial eating of an elephant, it'll have to be done one bite at a time.

What we've been hearing from the parties so far has been mostly posturing. Speaker Boehner said another week had been wasted. President Obama said he had to have a tax increase on the rich.

And then the two met Sunday behind closed doors at the White House. No one would say what transpired, which seemed oddly reassuring. Instead of blasting each other, it at least looked like they were talking.

A growing consensus seemed to point toward a deal that would let the president have the tax hike for "the top 2 percent" he campaigned for in return for some serious reforms of entitlement programs such as welfare, Social Security and Medicare. That might include raising the retirement age some and backing down the formula for automatic increases to payments.

One Republican said he might agree to trade a symbolic tax hike "for something that might really save the country."

For Republicans who've vowed there'd never be a tax increase, that might be tough to swallow, but most observers agree the increase would be mostly symbolic. The rich sim-

ply don't make enough to pay off the deficit, and any hike would be relatively small.

But Democrats have trouble backing away from cherished New Deal and Great Society programs, even when it's obvious the country can't afford continual increases. No one is arguing that a 40 percent deficit can be sustained.

And no one wants another recession so soon.

So, we're betting on a deal at the edge, not a leap off the cliff. Cross your fingers and keep watching. And write your congressman.

From the Bible

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.
— 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-24

Family congratulates brother

To the Editor:

We wish to send our heartfelt congratulations to our brother and uncle Bob on receiving the Charles E. Taylor Master Mechanic Award from the FAA. This is a wonderful accomplishment and well deserved honor, and we, as part of the Fraker family, are so proud of him.

Letter to the Editor

This prestigious award indicates a very successful career. As much as Oberlin has been blessed to have him as part of the community, our family also has been blessed. We

thank him for passing on so many important values and cherish our time with him over the years. Sent with all of our love.

The "Colorado" Fraker Family

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