

Legislature needs to fix tax mess it left for itself

As the Kansas Legislature opens this week, with the first day of the session Monday and the governor's State of the State speech on Tuesday, we hope the members get down to the business at hand and write a budget that makes some sense of the tax mess left from last year.

As it stands, the Legislature faces a revenue gap in the fiscal year beginning July 1 now estimated at \$267 million. Somehow, it has to fill the gap or whittle down state spending. One idea is to keep the current sales tax rate, which is set to go down in July. That alone wouldn't fill the gap, but it'd take care of most of it.

The Legislature also could end some of the state's tax breaks, allowing more revenue at the lower income tax rates passed last year. We were talking about canceling the deduction on home-mortgage interest, among others, however, that's no sure thing.

We're all in favor of shrinking the size of government, but there is a lot of pressure on the budget. The Legislature already is borrowing from the highway fund, even though good roads are vital to the state.

And last week, a three-judge panel in the Shawnee County District Court ordered the state to come up with \$440 million more for schools to at least partly replace cuts made during the recession. Judges were critical of the Legislature's tax-cutting ways.

And while the conservative Republican leadership vowed to fight to keep control of spending and tax rates, it's far from certain how this battle will come out. One tactic will be to attempt a constitutional amendment giving the Legislature some say in appointment of judges.

In short, the Legislature, turned upside down by reapportionment and a battle which saw more-liberal Republican leaders ousted from the Senate, will have its hands full. We're willing to bet the "solid" majority many expect will soon show signs of stress.

But if the members apply themselves to the task and try to define what the state's most important duties are, they should have little trouble adopting a budget, fixing the income-tax package and providing enough money for the state to make it through the year.

And we hope, as some leaders are predicting, they'll get all that done in well under the 90-day "limit" on Kansas sessions. (Last year's Legislature extended itself to 99 days, however.)

One member predicted a 70-day session. We'll believe that when we see it. However, 80 to 90 days does not seem out of line if you're an optimist.

As long as the new bunch doesn't leave another mess like last year, most people will be pretty happy. — Steve Haynes

Oven element dies on duty

I'm at war with my appliances ... and they're winning.

It started Christmas Eve when I was baking a two-layer, homemade carrot cake. My digital timer said the cake should be done, so I opened the oven door to check. The cake was not done, but the heating element was. The only thing baked inside that oven was a two-inch section of the element which was glowing and throwing off a shower of sparks like a welding torch. Shutting the door I hoped there would be enough heat to finish baking the cake.

Twenty minutes later, I called the cake done. It came out of the pans in chunks, but I glued it together with cream cheese frosting and no one seemed to mind. However, that is not the rest of the story.

I'm not complaining, mind you. The oven was given to us and it has served us well, but it is something of an antique. It's not digital; just dials. When I called the model number into the repairman, he had me repeat it several times. He couldn't find the number in any parts book. The oven is so old no parts are in stock. We were told it might take quite awhile to find them. So, here I am, three weeks later, still waiting on parts.

But necessity is the mother of invention, and I have discovered a roaster can be converted into a makeshift oven.

Have a small, eight-quart roaster with a wire rack. It's not very wide and I only have two pans that will fit inside, but so far I have baked biscuits, cinnamon rolls and a small batch of cookies.

Try not to worry about us. I doubt we'll starve.

-ob-

Dentures and partial plates are appliances, aren't they? A week or



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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two before Christmas, a large chunk broke off one of my teeth. Since it's an anchor tooth for my upper partial plate, I knew I had to save it. Crowns were not in the budget that close to the holidays, so a make-do fix held me over 'til the first of the year.

Last week, I went in to begin the process. An impression was made and a temporary crown was attached to the stump of my tooth. My dentist admonished me to "take it easy" on that side, and I thought I had. The next day, however, my tongue found its way to the hole where my tooth had been. Nothing! The temporary crown was gone. I knew I hadn't "crunched" on it while eating, nor had it fallen out during the day. I can only surmise it came off during the night and I (gulp) swallowed it.

Oh, dear. I'm two weeks away from having the permanent crown installed. It could be a long two weeks of chicken noodle soup and milk toast.

-ob-

This whole gun control controversy has me worried. Especially when I hear words like "confiscation." I'm pretty dovish, turn-the-other-cheek, and all that until I hear talk about taking away our guns. It's an old cliché but true: guns don't kill people; people kill people. When guns are taken out of the hands of decent, law-abiding citizens, the

only ones left with guns will be the bad guys.

Out here, we don't have to worry much about home invasion, but it does happen. I don't have a handgun or a concealed-carry permit. But if I decide I want either one, I want the right to do so.

Bottom line — I'm all for gun control: Use both hands.

-ob-

Little Ricky was asked, "How do you to make a marriage work?"

Men — take notice. His answer could make your life lots easier. He said, "Tell your wife that she looks pretty, even if she looks like a dump truck."

In the U.S.A.

"In the beginning of a change, the patriot is a scarce man, brave, hated and scorned. When his cause succeeds, however, the timid join him. For them, it costs nothing to be a patriot."

— Mark Twain
American writer
Nov. 30, 1835 - April 21, 1910



Son makes tough trip home

They say you can't go home again, and sometimes that seems true, especially for our son.

It's not like he wasn't trying, but there seemed to be no end to problems between him and getting back to Oberlin for Christmas.

It started off when he announced that he was planning to come home for Christmas, something he only does every couple of years due to his work schedule.

Son is single and a bartender and night manager for a downtown restaurant in Lawrence. The weekends are his big time, and he seldom has more than one day off in a row.

This year, he had barely announced his intention to come home when he found a house he wanted to buy and his offer was accepted.

This was the middle of November. After signing the last of the paperwork, he spent the next month painting, refinishing floors and making small repairs. His Thanksgiving was spent painting his bedroom, but he planned to be home with his family for Christmas.

Then his boss announced that the restaurant would be open Christmas Eve. That sort of shot his plan to get home, since he couldn't work until midnight on Christmas Eve and reasonably expect to drive the six hours it usually takes to get from Lawrence to Oberlin.

He called and rescheduled for



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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January.

While we went to midnight Mass and had a quiet dinner at home, he spent Christmas eating takeout Chinese food and refinishing his living-room floor.

But he got the time off and was ready to leave on Thursday, but first he had to have his oil changed. And, did I mention, he works nights and usually doesn't get up before noon.

I planned a special dinner for him. We knew it would be late when he got in, but we ended up eating it by ourselves.

He called from just this side of Abilene. His truck was acting funny, with the gauges jumping around. He returned to Abilene to have it checked out.

An hour later, he was on the road again with a new battery.

Another hour and we got another call. The battery wasn't charging. He was about 40 miles east of Salina. We suggested he call the

Highway Patrol.

He called again to say that he was getting towed into Russell and would get a hotel room and see what could be done in the morning.

The next day, he was on the road a little before noon with a new alternator. He said he had walked around Russell after leaving his hotel trying to find the towing company. When he arrived, they said they were just getting ready to go get him.

He finally made it home at 3 p.m. Friday. We had our traditional Christmas dinner — steak, twice-baked potatoes and green beans. Then we opened the presents, which had been sitting under the tree for more than a month.

It was a lovely, if slightly late, Christmas.

He got home Sunday night without any more trouble, but he did mention as he drove out of sight, "Merry Christmas to all, and why don't you come to Lawrence next year?"

Thank goodness for light

Sunlight.

You can sit at the table and watch the sun set a little later each day. It's such a relief after the hypershort days of late December.

It's not much yet. Just 10 minutes since the shortest day of the year, Dec. 21, known as the winter solstice. But it's something.

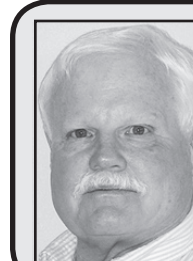
We only get about 9 hours, 23 minutes of daylight here then. The sun rose at 8:01 a.m. and set at 5:24. Last Monday, it rose at 8:04 and set at 5:37. That's not a lot of progress.

But gaining a minute or so a day, in a couple of short months, we'll be back to even at the spring equinox, March 20. After that, the days just keep getting longer until June.

In the summer months, after the solstice June 21, we may notice the long evenings slipping away, but we'll ignore it until September, when the autumnal equinox sneaks up on us Sept. 23.

People, most of us anyway, prefer light to dark. Scientists says there's an increase in depression in the dark months, something called seasonal affective disorder, brought on by, well, darkness.

If you have only 9 1/2 hours of daylight, then you have 14 1/2 hours of darkness. Five hours more dark than day. It gets to people around the holidays. And that may be one reason why we're so fond of stringing holiday lights everywhere in November and, especially in the last few years, leaving them up later and later. Why people started putting up



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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orange Halloween lights in October and why you see more and more red and white lights in January and February.

Heck, some places leave Christmas lights up year around, sometimes for commercial purposes, like decorations at a restaurant. And sometimes just because.

While we haven't stooped to Halloween lights at our place, I'm thinking we'll have Valentine's Day lights. They've got to brighten up the long January nights.

It's still more than two months to the equinox, and the gains from day to day seem painfully slow. Yet, you know they are gains, and it makes a lot of people feel better about the season.

Two more months of winter, oh yeah, but we'll survive. Especially when it's getting lighter out. We pretty much always survive these dark times, but a few little lights can't hurt much, can they?

And while the religious status of St. Valentine has been called into question in recent years, his day doesn't have the devilish connotations which have grown up around

Halloween, or the eve of All Saints' Day. It's interesting how a Christian holiday morphed into something altogether different, but to me anyway, the witches and goblins are fantasy and little more. Delightful for kids, fun for adults and mostly harmless.

That's not saying we might not have Halloween lights up some day. Cynthia does like lights, but she has enough trouble right now getting ready for Christmas without decorating the bushes a month earlier.

I think.

From the Bible

What know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's
—I Corinthians 6:19-20

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Jack D. Roberts
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Reader has ideas for school safety

To the editor:

Now that we have experienced another mass murder at yet another school, what are we going to do about it? Here are my suggestions:

- Let our military be the armed guards at all of our schools, at least two per school depending on the size of the school. The military is already on the payroll, so this doesn't create additional expense and they are experienced with weapons and surveillance. Also, there should be one local police officer.
- One dog per school trained to detect explosives and chemicals.
- One entrance with metal detectors. All others entrances/exits to have alarms.

Any school not wanting this

Letter to the Editor

protection should sign papers to say they are responsible and have to post at least a \$25 million bond.

The military could wear their Class A uniforms and carry side arms.

I think assault weapons ought to be banned. Weapons, magazines and clips should only contain 10 rounds or less.

I think every weapon owner should have trigger locks on all their active (not antique) weapons. This should be mandatory with no exceptions with a very stiff penalty for any violation.

The weapons problem will be an ongoing battle with the lobbyists being the real benefactors. Our Congress moves at a snail's pace.

Mental health is a serious problem in the U.S. and we can't possibly get all of them treated.

If anyone can come up with a better solution, please do so and get it to the proper authorities. Let us not let this issue go by without proper review. Children's lives are at stake.