

Congress full of people with firmly held beliefs

It's fashionable to blame Congress and the president for gridlock in Washington. People say nothing is getting done, and people say everyone is just "playing politics."

And neither is true. A lot has happened over the last few months in particular, from permanent agreements on many tax issues to actual spending cuts to extension of the Violence Against Women Act. Still, the overall federal budget is growing, not shrinking.

If politics was just a game, the complaining might be justified. But politics is about not just winners and losers, but about who runs the country and which direction they steer it. And the choice does make a difference.

Republicans in Washington, most of them, anyway, really do believe in smaller government, more economic freedom, lower taxes and less spending. The Democrats believe in social programs and the power of government to boost the economy.

These aren't just abstract ideas; they involve real beliefs and real decisions that have to be made, and neither side wants to let the other go its own way.

But while the sides are represented by the "tea party" on the right, whatever that is exactly, and the very liberal Democrats on the left, whoever they are exactly, the country as a whole is more in the middle, more interested in making things work than in change.

None of that is bad. The ideas which move us one way or another come from near the fringes. The cooperation that "gets things done" has to come from the center.

For a long time now, the country had been more or less on the bubble. It doesn't take much to move the government one way or the

other, from Bill Clinton to George W. Bush to Barack Obama and back.

That isn't so bad, either, but true believers think maybe we are near a watershed era, a time like unto the 1930s, when one side or the other gains enough advantage to move the starting gate. Partisans on either side see the possibilities — and fear as much as welcome them.

That fear drives a lot of the defensive posturing. It's left us farther from resolving a lot of issues than we might have been a year ago, even six months ago, when the president at least said he was willing to talk about government spending. Since the election, though his party controls only one house of Congress, the Republicans say his attitude has been more like, "We won. Do things our way."

The sheer size of the budget problem works against a quick solution. The government is a complex and wondrous creature; you don't dismantle and rebuild it in a day. And while "everyone" thinks the budget should be cut, hardly anyone agrees on how.

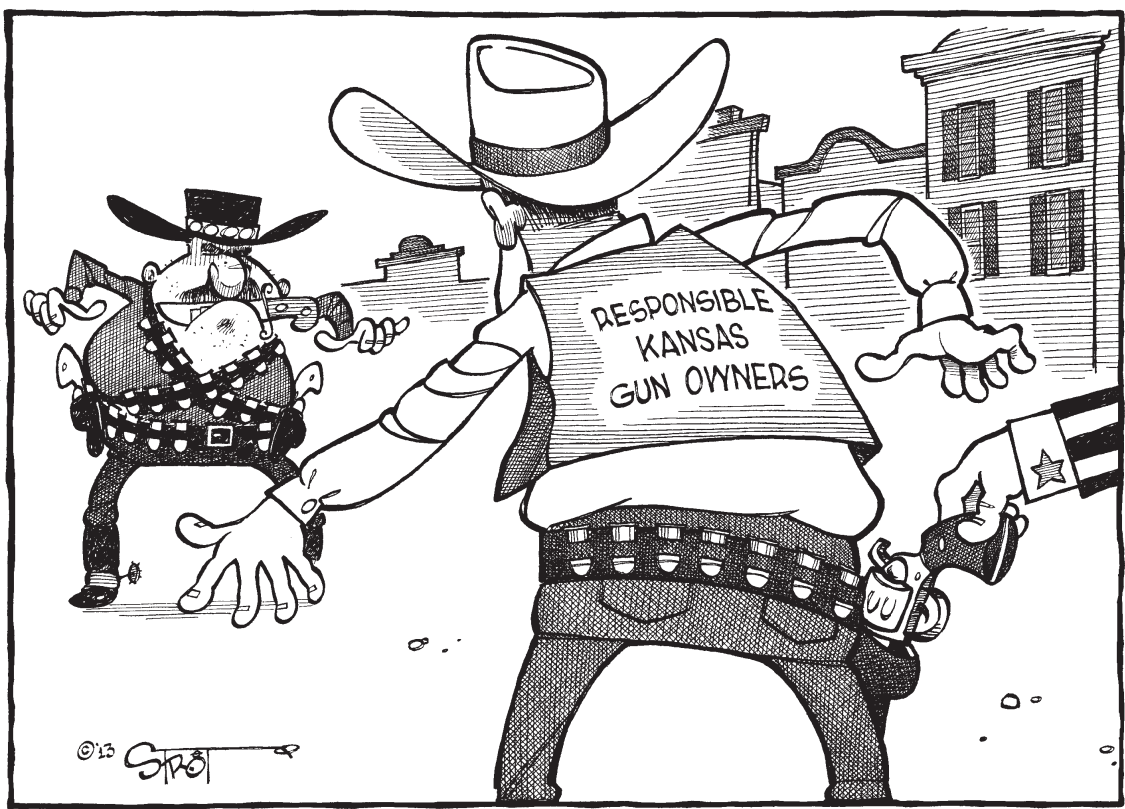
In conversations last week, Sen. Pat Roberts said there's just no way to settle everything at once. There'll be no "grand deal," no single budget "fix" that sets the country on course.

And neither side is going to give an advantage that will tip the scales to the other. Not without a fight, at least.

That may be frustrating to the rest of us, who don't see why they couldn't just sit down and hash it all out. They have made a start with each "fiscal cliff" and each last-minute compromise, but there's a long way to go before anyone will be satisfied.

And too much at stake to throw caution to the wind.

— Steve Haynes



Basement becomes junk pile

The carpet cleaners are coming! The carpet cleaners are coming! It's an emergency!

Well, the carpets in my house certainly need cleaning, but they aren't the real emergency. Finding them under all the junk is the real problem.

There's stuff all over the place on the upstairs and main floor of the house — newspapers, books, clothes and just plain ol' stuff. But it's the basement that's going to cause us problems.

Our son left home for college in 1999. Since then, for 13 to 14 years, the basement has been the catch-all for everything we haven't had another place to put and everything that "we may use sometimes, we'd better keep it."

Looking over the basement last week, I had a hard time finding the floor in spots.

The laundry room is OK. While there are plenty of things strewn around in there, the cleaners won't be going in because the floor is solid concrete.

The main room is a different story.

We have my mother's old television in one corner. It's about the size of a coffin, and I'm not sure if it's even a color television. I just know that there's probably a museum out there somewhere that might want it for their '50s or '60s room.

Next to that are an old desk, some short metal and wooden file cabinets



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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with either nothing in them or nothing of value in them.

Then there's the ratty old couch that's been handed down from generation to generation, and a couple of those funny-looking television game chairs, the ones that look like loungers without legs. The couch and the chairs are piled high with books and cookbooks that I've removed from shelves upstairs to make that space look better.

I didn't actually clean up the upstairs bookcase so much as move the mess to the basement. Now, I have to figure out how to clean up the basement without moving it back upstairs.

And then there are clothes — out-of-season clothes, too-small clothes, too-big clothes, too out-of-date-and-really-ugly clothes, clothes for the beach, clothes for the mountains, clothes for the pool, clothes for arctic treks. And now I've got two days to remove all the books, clothes, broken light fixtures, magazines, broken furniture and what-nots so that we can get the

carpet cleaned.

Actually, this is probably a good thing. We've been talking about cleaning out the basement for a couple of years, but the job has been too daunting and we could always find something else that seemed more pressing.

Now this is the most important project for next weekend, and there is no putting it off.

Just what we needed. Another deadline.

From the Bible

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; Not of works, lest many man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

— Ephesians 2: 8-10

Trip starts with grandkids

We've been on the road for six days, visiting kids and grandkids across Texas.

Taylor looked like she had grown three inches since last summer. Can't believe she'll be in high school next year. Alexandria is 18 and about to graduate, with honors. She toured a university that is offering her a very nice four-year scholarship.

Chantelle (who some remember as "The Texas Tornado") is in her first year of nursing school and has a boyfriend. Angelia is working in the nursing field. She is the mother of our first great-grandchild, Kayden, almost 3, and about to have our second "great," already named Lucian.

We were able to attend her baby shower along with friends and other family. Practical us, we decided to give her something we made ourselves — money (and diapers).

And, last, but not least, is our 6-year old granddaughter Ani. We took her to the San Antonio Zoo one day. At first she didn't want to go into the reptile house, then it was nothing but the snakes. Even had to take her picture with a giant boa constrictor. Her only disappointment was no giraffes. Their compound had a sign that said it was being renovated and apologized for the giraffes not being there.

It was spring break and the zoo was jam-packed with people. Jim said, "I think God made zoos so



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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people could parade by for the animals to look at."

—ob—

As I sit here writing this at our daughter's house in San Antonio, it is the night before we leave for Guatemala. I can't tell you how many times we have packed and unpacked to make sure our luggage falls into the 50 pound weight limit, our carry-on bags don't measure more than 45 inches and neither one of us have more than 34 fluid ounces of liquids or gel sealed in quart-size zip lock bags.

Since we're going on a house-building mission trip, we are taking some tools. Just glad I didn't put the hammers in the carry-on. Try to explain that to a security official. This is our first time on an international flight and, understandably, we are a little nervous. I had a brief panic-stricken moment when I couldn't find Jim's passport in my purse. It was there, rubber banded to my wallet, under an envelope of cash.

Our flight is at 7:30 a.m. and the

airline's website said to arrive three hours before scheduled departure. That means we need to be there at 4:30 a.m., which means we have to leave the house at 4 a.m., which means I have to get up at 3 a.m. to get ready, which means, "Good Night."

The next installment of "Out-Back" should be coming to you direct from San Raimundo, Guatemala. 'Til then, "Hasta la vista."

In the U.S.A.

"When the people fear the government, there is tyranny. When the government fears the people, there is liberty."

Thomas Jefferson
April 13, 1743-July 4, 1826
Third U.S. president

House has its budget plan

Last week, I wrote about the proposed tax plans, noting that there would be a House tax plan, a Senate tax plan, and the governor's tax plan. This week, the House passed its plan out of committee.

Here are some highlights:
Part 1 allows the rate to go down to 5.7 percent, as provided in current law. That will be a reduction of .6 of 1 percent from the current rate. The .4 percent increase that remains, and was earmarked for the Kansas Department of Transportation, would instead be diverted to the state General Fund for the next two fiscal years. It would result in a positive fiscal note to the general fund close to \$400m over the two years.

This appears to be an additional draw from transportation on top of the diversion funds in the governor's recommended budget. What will be the effect? Will all of the T-Works projects delayed for two years? Does T-Works continue but statewide road maintenance take a hit? This remains to be discussed.

Part two: Instead of singling out the mortgage interest deduction for elimination, as the governor pro-



Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy
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posed, the bill would cut all deductions by 24 percent, proportional to the size of the income-tax rate cut on last year's top bracket (4.9/6.45=76 percent). As income tax rates are decreased in the future, the cut would also be adjusted. Projection — from 2014 to 2018 would see an additional \$4.5 million cut. The cut applies only to itemized deductions on individual tax returns, and not on corporate tax returns. It does not affect any tax credits.

Part three: Future income tax cuts would be tied to a growth trigger. Whenever the taxes that are the primary funding source of the general fund grow by more than 2 percent, then the excess would be used to compute a further reduction in income tax rates. It gets even

more complicated from here, and I'll stop with this information.

What I feel is key is that we have to generate enough income to have a budget with a 7.5 percent ending balance. We have already cut over \$200 million in appropriations, and we don't yet know the number we need to pass a budget.

I have always said that we cannot and should not be like the federal government and spend more than we have. We still have to provide services to the state, and I personally don't see any more cuts we can make. I have yet to talk to anyone in northwest Kansas who wants the income tax rate to go to zero. Our concern is how to finance our schools, cities and counties?

Bill would protect firearms in state

By REP. WARD CASSIDY
Early this session, I had the opportunity to be a co-sponsor of House Bill 2199, the 2nd Amendment Protection Act. This bill would exclude from federal regulation any personal firearm, firearm accessory or ammunition manufactured commercially or privately and owned in Kansas.

As long as any such firearm, accessory or ammunition remained in Kansas, the bill would provide that it would not be subject to any federal law, regulation or authority. Also, the bill would prevent any federal agent or contracted employee, any state employee or any local authority from enforcing any federal regulation or law governing a personal firearm, accessory or ammunition manufactured and owned in Kansas, provided it remained within the state.

This bill essentially reaffirms the 2nd Amendment, which guarantee the right of Kansans to keep and bear

arms. The bill also says that because the Constitution does not grant the federal government authority in this area, any leeway to determine how the 2nd Amendment right is exercised is the prerogative of the state. Thus, any attempts by the federal government to regulate the use of firearms manufactured and owned in Kansas would be considered unenforceable by the state.

The bill passed the House by a vote of 94 to 29. It headed to the Senate for further consideration. My best guess is this will become law in Kansas.

HB 2052 would establish a uniform state law addressing unlawful discharge of a firearm within or into a city. This bill would unify the law for all Kansans, ensuring them the ability to use a firearm lawfully to defend themselves or others anywhere in the state. It passed 212 to 2.

The third bill passing the House this week was an addition to the

Concealed Carry Act which ensures Kansans have the right to protect themselves in public places where security is not provided. I believe that placing a sign saying guns are not allowed is not a deterrent and does not provide the public with a safe environment. I also argued that citizens who have gone out of their way to obtain training from a licensed individual, as well as a background check by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, are not the people who shoot up schools and movie theaters.

This bill passed the House 84 to 38, and I voted for it.

Ward Cassidy of St. Francis, a retired school principal and teacher, is the state representative for the 120th District, covering Decatur, Cheyenne, Rawlins, Wallace and Sherman counties and the northwest part of Thomas, including Colby. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

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