

Commissioners should not spend new ‘windfall’

County commissioners across the state are expecting a tax “windfall” next year from increased assessments on agricultural land. Some are already making plans to spend it, but that might not be the best idea.

For one thing, tax windfalls have a way of disappearing as fast as they appear. A county that spends a windfall to fix roads, add to its staff or give employees a raise often has to hike taxes later to sustain the spending.

And that leads to unhappy voters. Whether that will happen this time is anybody’s guess. Commissioners have been complaining for some time that ag land was underassessed, even on the “income” formula the state uses to set its value. But that same formula can produce dips in valuation as well as increases.

Assessors tell us that part of the increase this year is due to changes at Kansas State University, which does the math on land values for the state. That part of the increase might be permanent, at least until the formula changes again. But it’s only part of the increase; increases in farm income the last few years account for the rest.

And farm income comes and goes. It’s known for wild swings.

So the likelihood of this windfall disappearing, or shrinking, a year or two out is great.

Plus, it’s a windfall in name only. Even if tax rates stay the same, the farmers and ranchers who own this land will have to pay real, larger tax bills that may not make them too happy. That could lead to more assessment appeals, unpaid taxes and unhappy voters, even pressure on the Legislature to change the formula.

A safer course for counties would be to hold the line on spending and let tax rates — gasp — go down. Voters are almost sure to approve. That would give everyone, even the farmer with an increased assessment, a break.

No doubt, there are a lot of demands on county government, especially from new programs pressed on counties by the state and federal governments. But the mood of voters in this state is pretty clear: they’ve elected the most conservative, anti-tax governor and Legislature in anyone’s memory.

Commissioners will be tempted to increase spending next year, given the situation, but it might not be wise given the times. It might even invite a return of the old tax lid or other limits on local spending which we’d be better off without.

For now, the ball is in the commissioners’ court. We advise due caution, conservative spending and listening to the will and mood of the voters. — *Steve Haynes*

Lawyers have all the power

The “Weekly Five Hard Facts”

- With the current judicial selection system, a small minority of 10,000 Kansans, lawyers who are members of the Kansas Bar Association, have a say in who is nominated to the Kansas Supreme Court or Court of Appeals.

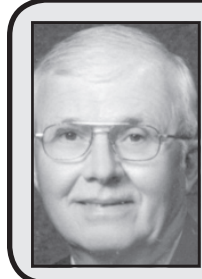
- Kansas is the only state that gives the bar majority control in selecting its court nominees.

- Seventy-three percent of Kansans with income of \$100,000 or more use the mortgage income deduction, while only 17 percent of those whose income is less than \$100,000 use it.

- Big tax credits, such as the real estate tax deduction, encourage home buyers to take out bigger mortgages.

- Data shows states with zero personal income tax significantly outperform states with the highest personal income tax rates.

The pace has increased in this third week of the Legislative session due to the Senate casting its first votes, committees continuing to work on a number of bills and a



Letter from Topeka

By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer
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steady influx of bills making it to the floor for debate.

The Senate had General Orders on Wednesday to debate and vote on legislation. More votes and discussion will continue as the first deadlines approach.

To stay informed on legislative issues, call the legislative hotline at (800) 432-3924 or go to www.kslegislature.org.

Major Issues This Week
Judicial Selection SCR 1601 proposes to amend the Kansas Constitution to allow for the gubernatorial appointment and Senate confirmation of judges. It passed by a vote of 28 to 12.

SB 8 is a companion bill which establishes an independent review to help the Senate evaluate judicial nominees. It passed 28 to 11.

Paycheck Protection for Public Sector Employees (HB 2023) to ban state or other units of government from making payroll deductions for members of public sector unions to the union’s political action committee. Members can still make a contribution by writing a check or setting up an electronic transfer. The House passed the bill by a vote of 68 to 56; it is now headed to the Senate for further consideration.

I have had many contacts regarding **SB 21**. The first issue concerned reciprocal license standards that match those or are greater than those in Kansas. The second was adding to

the definition of a firearm to include antique firearms.

During committee debate, we split the two subjects. SB 21 addresses the issue of reciprocal license standards. A new bill for the definition of firearms will be sent to the Judiciary Committee.

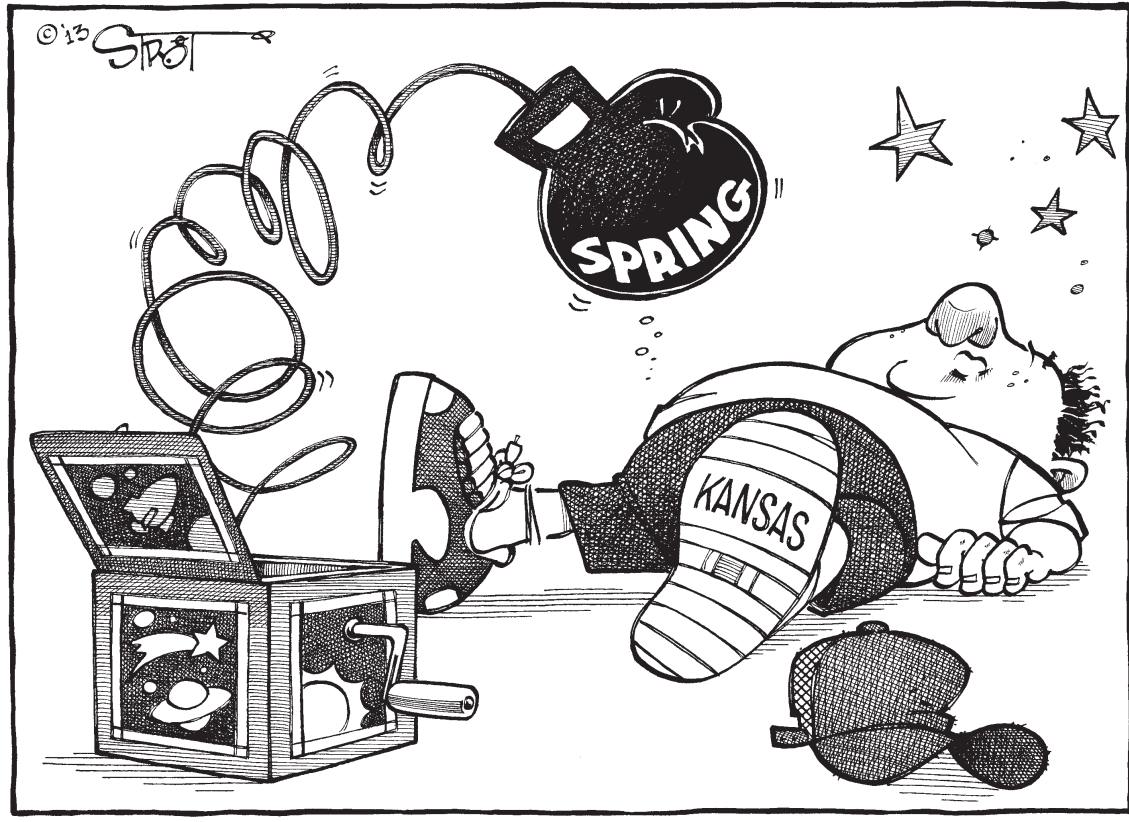
The Senate and House Education committees have been meeting jointly to get a better understanding of the budget formula and laws governing education funding. Public education in Kansas costs \$5.771 billion a year, and just over half that goes to the classroom.

To reach Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, write State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 136-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612 or call (785) 296-7399.

From the Bible

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and was made in the likeness of men; And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

— *Philippians 2: 5-8*



Trip includes White House

A fifth grader can’t get into the White House these days, what with sequestration cutbacks by the Secret Service, but apparently, those with a meeting or who know somebody inside still can.

I have to say I was a little surprised when we got the invitation. I’d met Jim last year when he spoke to Associated Press editors and publishers in Kansas City. It turned out we had a lot in common — we’d both worked at the old *Kansas City Times* before it was merged into *The Star*, me from 1969 to 1980, him from about 1983 to ‘87.

So while our paths hadn’t exactly crossed, we knew the same characters, the same editors, many of the same coworkers, and sat at nearly the same desk. We talked that night, and Jim, said, “When you get to Washington, look me up.”

And when we made plans to attend a meeting in March, I sent him an e-mail. I followed up a week or so before we left, and Jim responded that he thought we could get together on Friday, after our meeting was over. And he thought he could get us onto the White House grounds for the president’s arrival back from a speech in Chicago.

I guess you could say we were interested. Neither of us had been to the White House since we took the tour as teenagers. This was different. Jim got permission to invite us, then had us cleared by the Secret Service. We’d been through that to go to meetings at the Old Executive Office Building next door, which is on the grounds.

Jim said he’d meet us outside the entrance. We took the subway from our hotel, then walked down to Pennsylvania Avenue, where we waited on the sidewalk and amused ourselves by watching the tourists and the nut case protesters camped in the park. You can’t say America doesn’t honor free speech, though the White House cops keep a watchful eye.

After Jim came out, the gate guards cleared us through the metal detectors and issued us temporary press passes. Then we got to walk into the press area, past the permanent outdoor sets of the television networks. You know the ones where the correspondent stands with the White House in the background for a brief report at whatever time it is. These are complete with lights and sound systems.

Jim gestured to “high press,” the corner of the West Wing where the press secretary and communications director have their offices, and “low press,” where the lesser press aides work in one end of the corridor connecting the White House itself to the West Wing.

We went into the briefing room, which is not all that big and unbelievably cramped with all the lights



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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CYNTHIA HAYNES waited on the South Lawn of the White House for the president to arrive. — Herald staff photo by

and television cameras. He took us to the AP’s office, no bigger than a large closet, with five work stations hung on the walls.

“But we have a window,” Jim said.

Only the two wire services, AP and Reuters, have windows, it seems; the rest of the press and all the networks are crammed into the basement. All in all, it’s not what you’d expect from the nerve center of the Free World.

But then Jim likes to say, “the best thing about working at the White House is telling people you work at the White House.” It’s a lot a tedium and waiting, he said, interspersed with occasional moments of manic intensity when things are happening. The arrival was a good example.

Every presidential arrival and departure is covered, though mostly by a pool representing print and broadcast media. Usually, nothing more happens than the president waving to the reporters and cameras as he walks either to the residence or the Oval Office.

But he might say something, take a question or have a Gerald Ford moment and trip on the steps of the helicopter.

So no one wants to miss an event. And there we were, lined up with the television cameramen, still photographers, a handful of reporters, all behind a polite chain. The press aide in charge signaled “O” for Oval Office so the cameramen would know where to aim. The helicopters buzzed in, the two not hauling the president flew by and Marine 1 landed.

First a Marine guard got out and let down the rear door. Secret Service agents took up their positions. Then the president emerged, returned a salute, walked to the Oval Office, waving to the press line as he went. And that was that.

Jim took us for a drink at a oyster bar across the street, and we made plans to have dinner “next time.” A dull day in the life of a White House correspondent, perhaps, but a memorable side trip for a couple of country editors.

Reader thinks the mayor is right

To the Editor:

I’m glad the mayor has big concerns on the financial future of Oberlin. Veto the new swimming pool that is overpriced. Phase 1 of the airport is completed, leave it alone. I have been here eight months, never seen an airplane yet, very busy airport. You will never pay the new swimming pool off; just leave it alone. Be glad you have a pool and airport.

We have this money available; it’s called bond money. You still have to pay it back. Also, you are always wanting to raise sale taxes and property taxes. Taxes are way too high for this small town. This is a retired farm town. Priced so high, I go to McCook to do my shopping, where there are no taxes on food. We don’t have extra money to spend. Better start paying attention to the things that are more important, like water and electricity.

It sounds like the substation is in bad shape, spent enough money,

Letters to the Editor

you could have invested in wind turbines. To save on utility poles, use buried cable. You will make money from the electric company, extra electricity generated we will get money back. We need too save

all the money we can. I thank our mayor, Rob McFee, for doing an outstanding job for the townspeople. We need all the help we can get.

Jerry Vernon, Oberlin

Californian gets paper fast

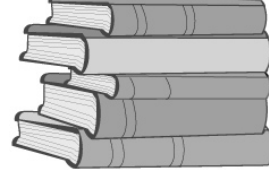
To the Editor:

I just received my March 20 paper now on March 22. Finally, it is almost ahead of time! This month I’ve received all my March papers nearly on time. Up until now, I have been a week or longer late, but I still enjoy western Kansas news.

I just read the letter to the editor from North Grandby, Conn., and thought I should report from California. We are finally receiving them just two days after sent. I think

North Platte, Neb., must be getting very good, better-than-Colby timing. Thank you.

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