

Tax-rebate plan offers hope of improvements

The proposed Neighborhood Revitalization tax-incentive plan being considered by city, county and school officials is just too good an opportunity for us to pass up.

Not only might it be the push needed to get a proposed new motel project off dead center, but it could open up a whole new realm of possibilities for development and growth in Oberlin and Decatur County.

The plan is as complex as it is simple. A property owner can get a rebate on taxes paid on new development over 10 years, based on the actual increase in the tax valuation after construction or renovation. Officials are talking about a \$10,000 minimum to qualify and have discussed setting a maximum.

Frankly, it makes no sense to put the minimum that high; any renovation of property, homes or businesses, that improves the town and will bring in more tax revenue would be a boost in our declining economy. Nor would it make sense to confine the rebates just to business property. We should encourage homeowners to fix up their property, too.

A cap on rebates would just limit the benefit the city and county might see from the program. Why do that?

The city, county, school district and other taxing agencies have little to lose. If something gets built, a new motel or a new building for an existing business, all will share in the increased revenue as the rebates fade away.

Property owners and developers would have an incentive to spend more. Any increase in construction would create some jobs and help

area suppliers. The rebate would be 100 percent of any tax increase the first year, but that goes down by 10 percent a year, so governments would benefit by the second year.

Someone will say, why give tax incentives when people might build a motel or a house without one?

Just look around and see how many construction projects are underway in this county. People might do a lot of things. But why not encourage them?

The program can be complicated. A property owner has to apply for the rebates before starting work, and the county could make the plan simple or too complicated to be much good. A simple application would be best, one that would encourage development.

Our economy isn't exactly booming, and we can give up some of the increased taxes over 10 years in return for having some growth.

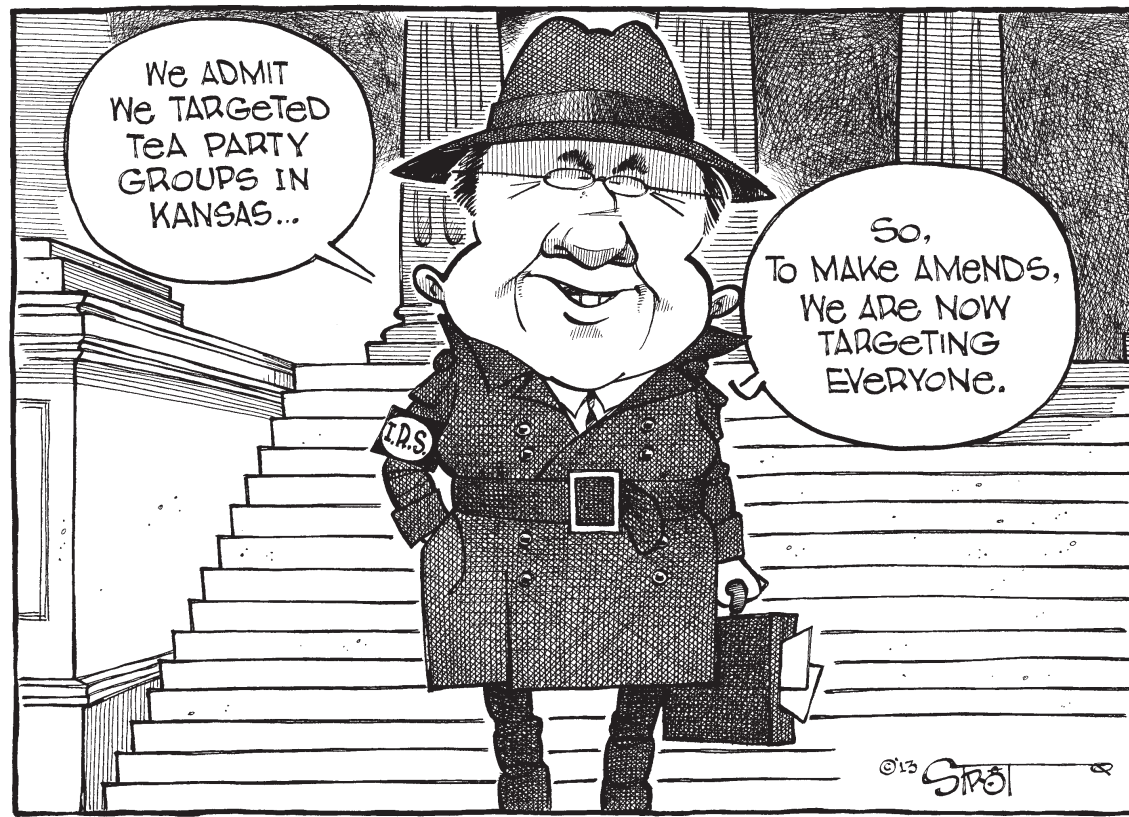
This program already is working in Norton and Sherman counties and should soon be in effect in Colby. Other Kansas counties have had good experiences with it. In Norton, it gets credit for both commercial and housing development, things we could use.

The question isn't should we give tax incentives. To compete with our neighbors and to attract development, we must give tax incentives.

The question is whether we want our economy to continue to be stagnant and decline, or whether we want to push it the other way.

And that should not be a difficult decision.

— Steve Haynes



Honest, boss, I was working

One of my work assignments last week was to write a short story about a couple of the anniversary classes that graduated from my home town's alma mater. Don't tell my editor, but he should have paid me by the story rather than by the hour.

My research led me to flip through the pages of the archived newspapers. That, of course, led me to run across my mother's old columns. Which, of course, led me to read them. Which, of course, took time. Lots of time.

That was fine. I expected to find my mother's columns in the archives. But then — wait a minute. Who was that? It was me. There was my mug shot above a new column called, "OutBack." It was a little unsettling to find myself in the archives. This February marked 15 years of me sharing most everything about my life and my family with you. My husband Jim calls it, "Life in the goldfish bowl."

I say, "most everything," because Jim does censor what I write. After getting, what he called "flack" from the locals when some of my early columns were a little too personal, he now gets first right of refusal. Doesn't matter what time of the night I might finish, I have to read it to him. Sometimes he says, "You can't write that!" Usually, though, it's, "That's a good one." Which I consider high praise.

It was another rodeo at our house. After acquiring our first calf, Cocoa, from Dave, our farmer-rancher friend, Jim thought she needed a companion and bought a little heifer at the sale barn. Friday night, Dave called to tell us he had an orphan calf, a little steer, if we wanted him. The baby's mother had died and another nursing cow wouldn't accept him.

"Sure," we said. And off to the



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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ranch we went to pick him up. I had visions of a weak day-old calf that I could hold in my lap on the trip home. Upon arrival, we found a very healthy, very heavy, kicking and bawling 2-month-old Hereford calf who did not like us at all. There would be no lap-sitting.

It took some doing, but we finally contained him in the back of the pickup and delivered him to his new home. Cocoa and the as-yet-still-unnamed other little heifer sniffed him when we pushed him into their pen, but basically ignored him. As long as he didn't get in their way when they saw supper coming, they didn't pay him any mind.

The first bottle feeding didn't go well. He wouldn't have a thing to do with it. I pried his mouth open and forced the bottle's nipple in. He wouldn't do a thing. Milk was running out the sides of his mouth, but he wouldn't swallow. I bent over him as long as my back could endure, then I quit and shared his bottle with the two girls.

The next feeding wasn't any better. However, the third feeding was a different story. He finally got the hang of it and drained the two-quart bottle of milk replacement in about a minute. Now, to get him named. I need to send another picture to our granddaughter Ani so she can make sure his name suits his "style."

Memorial Day is almost here and, except for lilacs and a few

dandelions, I don't have a single flower on the place. This unpredictable weather has caused confusion, even amongst the plants. They don't know if it's winter, summer or spring. So, even though I prefer to put a variety of fresh flowers on our family members' graves, this year it may be lilacs and lilacs only.

We lost a dear friend this week. Rea Magers has been part of my life since before I was born. He was a good man and a smart man who had an opinion on most things. He wasn't bashful about sharing his opinion, either. They were well-thought out and he could easily defend his stand in a debate. I doubt there was a newspaper editor or radio station manager who did not get at least one letter from Rea with a "suggestion" on how to improve.

When he retired from his first career, he and his wife Dee moved to our little town and began second careers as antique dealers. Soon, they were permanent fixtures at auctions, often competing with my mother for the best box of junk.

Rea loved dogs. Scarcely a day went by that you would not see Rea and Dee, always together, walking their dogs. The walks were for exercise, of course, but they were never in such a rush that they couldn't stop and chat.

So, we'll miss him. But we won't say, "Goodbye." Just, "See ya later."

Grandson surprises his mom

He's a cute little thing, but then all babies are.

We drove more than 20 hours to get to Augusta, Ga., to check out the new arrival, our grandson, Grayson Henry Blake.

He was born a few days early, so we didn't make the big day, but he was less than a week old when we came rolling up.

Each year, we fly to Georgia in the fall, since you never know what the weather will be like in October or November. We drive down to see our kids in the spring, when we always seem to have a truck full of stuff to take down to our daughters. We're really lucky to have both girls living close together, even if they aren't very close to us.

This year, the drive corresponded nicely with the impending arrival of Mr. Blake.

We spent the first few days at our oldest daughter's house. She had taken Thursday and Friday off from work and was determined to have "her" time when she would be around. Her sister, after all, is on maternity leave for the next couple of months.

That turned out to be a better choice than we knew.

After arriving at eldest daughter's and unloading the junk we brought down for her, we headed for youngest daughter's suburban home.

It took only a few minutes to unload the rest of the stuff and meet our new grandson.

Granddaughter Taylor is 3 now, and instead of hiding behind mother, like she did last fall, she came right out and greeted us. Six months can



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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make a big difference in remembering a grandmother and grandfather. Besides, we always bring something for her. This time it was a snow globe, some stickers and sippy straws. Little things, but she was enchanted.

The baby was passed around and duly admired, held and petted. He accepted all this attention as his due, but still told us rather vocally that Mom was his favorite person, not to mention his lunch.

Friday, we spent with the oldest daughter and her husband, hanging out and getting over the long drive.

We had a date to take Taylor to the zoo on Saturday. Steve made it. I didn't.

I was up most of the night running to the bathroom. I was in no shape to go anywhere, and in no shape to be near any of my grandchildren.

I spent all of Saturday in bed. Sunday, when we were supposed to move to youngest daughter's house, we stayed put. There was no way I was going anywhere near my week-old grandson.

Everyone went out for Mother's Day lunch. I stayed home and had another Gatorade. By Monday,

though, I was well, and we changed houses.

Youngest daughter is still trying to figure out a lot of things. They moved into a new house just a month ago and the new baby arrived shortly thereafter.

Grayson has not been a totally happy baby. He won't take a pacifier and he cried a lot when he wasn't eating. Daughter was trying to get him on a schedule, but he wasn't buying it.

She soon learned that he was just hungry. She was surprised. She had fed Taylor and always had plenty of milk. But this time, the baby was draining her and still wanting more.

Once she figured out what his problem was and started to supplement with formula, he was a much happier camper — and so was she.

There's a lot of difference, she's learning, between a boy and a girl. Taylor's a petite little thing, but Grayson gained a pound his first two weeks. And wanted more to eat.

Oh, honey, you just wait until he's a teenager. You ain't seen nothin' yet.

Lizard goes along for the ride

Alexander joined us in Augusta, I guess.

I first noticed him on my leg when I'd just gotten on the Interstate.

He had such a light touch, it felt like maybe a moth had landed on my leg. I brushed, and it went away.

Later, he was back. I caught a glimpse of something brown. I brushed again at the moth, and it flitted away.

The next time he jumped on my leg, though, I got a better look. I felt him and looked down. He looked back. This was no moth, but a lizard, small, brown and green, wide-set eyes.

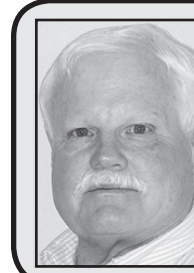
A gecko.

We knew that Lindsay had plenty of lizards in her big suburban yard. We'd see them hopping from the back deck to the wall of the house, scurrying up the bricks. Mostly, she had skinks, slick and shiny looking, and big, some close to a foot long.

We used to catch them when I was a kid, but you had to be quick. Grab the tail and it just pops off.

Then there were the little geckos, smaller, green and brown, with spots and a matte finish. Nothing shiny about them.

Anyway, Alexander was just a sittin' there on my leg, looking up at me. All this while I was getting the truck up to 70 mph for the first leg to Atlanta. We'd had to stop at a



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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bookstore on the way out of town, and I wanted to be through Atlanta before rush hour started.

No time to fool with a lizard. No problem. Alexander jumped over to the door, clinging to the left hand speaker. I called our friend John, who lives in Roanoke, Ala., southwest of Atlanta, to see if we could buy him dinner. It's about an hour out of the way, but we don't get to see John too often.

I tried to explain what was going on to Cynthia, since she likes reptiles so much, but from the passenger's seat, she couldn't see him. Alexander just kept his place. Every once and a while, he'd move, and I'd feel his tail. Once he got back on my leg, but mostly he stayed on the speaker.

When we stopped at Newnan, Ga., to change drivers, he scurried up into the dash. Cynthia took over, and we saw nothing more of him until we got to Roanoke and parked at John's house. John had to introduce us to his new puppy and let us play with his wife's cat, Brady. Brady loves to play, but you don't want to find out what he'd do to your hand if he catches it.

When we went back to the truck to go to dinner, there was Alexander on the floor mat. I tried to catch him, but he scurried up into the dash again. On the way west to Birmingham, I saw — and felt — nothing of him.

We finally made it through the Steel City of the South and scooted off northwest to Jasper, where we

found there was no room in the inn. Not the Hampton. Not the Holiday. Not the Best Western. The Super 8 had a room, and we took it.

Next morning, while she was packing the car, Cynthia said she opened the driver's door and told Alexander he should get out. She told him it was a nice building, lots of greenery and surely plenty of bugs in the grass. Maybe even a good place to start an insurance business.

With that, we took off for Tupelo, Miss., birthplace of Elvis.

I can't be sure he's gone, but I haven't seen Alexander since. I hope he got out, because I don't think Kansas winters would be too good for him. But we're two-thirds of the way across Missouri as I write this, and I haven't felt a thing on my leg all day.

From the Bible

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to the, Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name; those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

— John 17: 11-12

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