

How can taxpayers afford increases

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



We understand the pressure on public officials to spend more, especially on programs that federal and state governments push on them, including homeland security initiatives, emergency preparedness and the like.

But we're not sure taxpayers want, need or can afford everything local government wants or is told to do.

It may seem a small thing to increase taxes "just a little," but board members need to consider that many, maybe most, of those they serve cannot do the same.

People can't "raise taxes" to generate more income. In this economy, the boss would just laugh at them. For many, including teachers and most health workers, and many at small businesses, there have been no regular increases in the past few years.

Many businesses are still hurting from the recession. Unemployment remains high and this area's population continues to plummet.

A business can raise prices, of course, but that does not mean customers will pay. Many can and will go elsewhere.

Time was when our public officials were very conservative when it came to spending and tax increases. That's been less so in recent years. Often, when a city or county has had a windfall from increased assessments, it has kept tax rates high and spent much of the money. When assessments have gone the other way, board members feel they need to raise taxes to maintain spending.

Particularly in a bind are businesses and homeowners. The share of county government they pay for has increased in recent years as the state's complicated system for assessing farmland lags years behind reality. Farmland values are through the roof even while taxes on ag land fall behind, leaving the county with less valuation.

The decision board members make goes beyond whether people can afford a "small" increase in taxes. The question is whether the cost of government - city, county, school, state, federal - should continue to increase, year after year, while the pool of taxpayers continues to shrink.

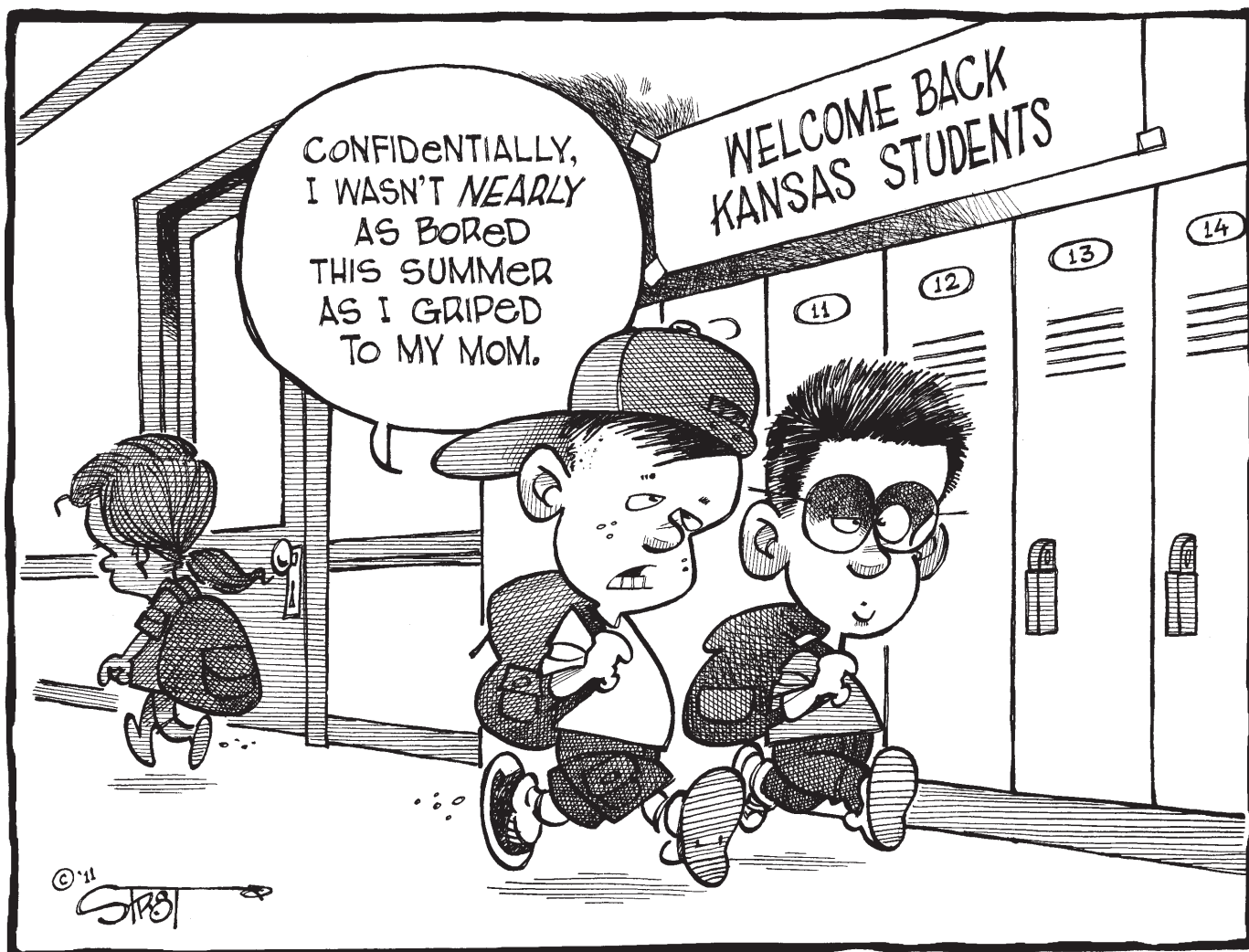
The level of local government we can afford may not match the level we are used to; we understand that.

It's not a matter of whether government employees need or deserve a raise. We know they deserve one, the same as many others do. It's not whether the county or city needs new computers or new equipment.

The question is whether taxpayers have received any kind of increase where they can afford to pay more.

What we know is that many taxpayers have no way to match any kind of tax increase in these times. And if people are not tired of higher taxes, they ought to be.

- Steve Haynes



A passionate fan stands up for her team

This Too Shall Pass
Nancy Hagman



There are two kinds of people. No, no, not cat people and dog people.

News people and baseball people. The divide has never been so great! And with a recent development it appears I have no choice: I'm calling Bill O'Reilly out.

Ordinarily I would not even know what Bill O'Reilly says; because I'm a baseball person.

But I live with a news person. He keeps me informed, particularly when something provocative goes down.

So Monday night the hubby was watching Bill and I was reading because the Royals were off.

The hubby finds me, laughing about Bill's argument with Juan Williams. As told to me: Juan said, "Things could be worse." And Bill said something like this, "That's like saying the Kansas City Royals could be worse. How could they be worse? Win zero games?"

I was gravely offended.

Sure, I've said disparaging things about the Royals, but that's okay because I get baseball. If you don't get it you don't get to say anything.

I've tried to explain this to so many people. And mostly their eyes glaze over. Maybe I'm not eloquent enough. But I'm going to try. One last time!

There is always HOPE in baseball. There is hope every new season, every series, every game. There is hope every inning. There is hope in each trade, with each new player signed.

Even when it is over, it isn't. There is hope for the next day, the next season.

If I'm watching a game and asked, "Are they winning?"

No matter what the score, my answer is, "Yes!"

There are victories everywhere in baseball. Taking the field can be a victory. Getting the first hit off a pitcher

a player never hit is a victory. Getting out of a bad inning with no more damage is a victory.

There is a sense of family in baseball. You get to know the players. Who got engaged, who has a new baby, whose grandma died. Who fled to the USA from Cuba.

You see the parents of the new guy in the stand celebrating that first hit!

Baseball players appear to mostly like each other. They move around a lot, so they are friends with guys on other teams.

They support each other. They support the new guys, even when they know that new guy may take their spot.

There is more grace and civility in one baseball game than in a month of news.

The announcers are thoughtful, even kind. Early this season the FSNKC announcers said of former KC Ace Zach Grienke: He is now playing for the Milwaukee Brewers. We're here to discuss this team.

That's about as bitter as it gets in baseball. Grienke did not depart on the best of terms with the Royals. But, as the season progresses, the good memories of Zach bubble up and stories emerge.

Those giving the news might take a lesson. Before talking, wait for some perspective. Things seem different in August than they do in April.

Even colossal blunders in baseball

become the stuff of legends. There are lessons to be learned in every situation.

The signing deadline for drafted baseball players just passed. The huge get for the Royals was Bubba Starling. He's 18 and had to decide between playing football at Nebraska and 7.5 million from the Royals.

I think he made the right decision. A Kansas farm kid, he likes to fish in his daddy's farm pond, caught a 40# catfish this summer. Made me long for a farm pond stocked with fish (and a son who just signed with a major league baseball team for 7.5 million!)

As they discussed how players are prepared for the big leagues, I was struck that part of it is basically etiquette. Players are taught how to respond to coaches, umpires, fans, and the press. They are counseled on how to handle success.

Of course not everything is pure in baseball. But it's purer than the news!

People say nothing ever happens in baseball. That's true. And it isn't. No matter what the score or situation it can change; with one swing of the bat, one pitch. You have to pay attention.

Even if you don't pay attention; what happens will happen. We are not in control here. But life is not futile.

Whether we are watching the debate about debt limits or Soria trying to save a game; for a moment we experience a thrill when our side wins, disappointment when they lose.

Then we have a choice; we can decide like Juan Williams, things could be worse. Or like Bill O'Reilly it's as bad as it can get.

Or we can sit in the sun, eat popcorn and hotdogs, savor life and say with conviction, "It can't get any better. There is baseball today!"

Letter to the Editor Response:

I was dismayed to read the letter to the editor in the 7/29/11 issue regarding college educations. The comment that "We unambiguously do not need more college graduates" was enraging and not indicative of community leaders working to improve the lives of local young people.

While true that a large percentage of college entrants do not graduate, the Koehler Center for Teaching Excellence attributes that largely to the fact that more than 50 percent of incoming college students are under prepared for college level work. Unfortunately, failure in our society has become far too acceptable, especially where education is concerned.

The US Bureau of Labor Statistics found that from 1992-2009 the number of college-educated workers almost doubled while those workers with a high school diploma or less education remained steady or declined.

According to a recent Pew Research Center study, a typical college graduate majoring in business will earn over \$500,000 more in a lifetime than a high school graduate. Work life earnings are not the only argument for a college education. In 2010, the unemployment rate for college educated workers was 4.7 percent but was 10.3 percent for high school graduates and 14.6 percent for workers lacking a high school diploma. College is not for everyone but provides additional opportunities for better paying and more stable jobs, opens doors to jobs they would otherwise be passed over for, and allows the US to remain competitive worldwide.

It is my hope that our local young people carefully weigh all of their post-secondary education options, including four-year colleges and universities, vocational and trade schools, and professional certifications, as well as on-the-job training. Categorically discounting the value of any of these options without taking into account each individual's circumstances is a disservice to them.

Missy Amlong,
College graduate and parent looking to instill the value of education in our children

Keeping education entertaining and exciting

I was very lucky. My mother was a teacher and my dad loved to teach. Mother introduced me to books and reading; my dad to the world in which I live.

Mother had very strong ideas about teaching and learning. She believed learning took place in many areas... not just in the classroom. My dad believed the world was the classroom, from cloud formations to animals to the smell of the soil; all were subjects to enhance our lives. But most of all they both taught me a love of learning, a lifelong love.

As I watch kids head back to school, I am in hopes they are developing not just knowledge but passion.

Studies are varied about the benefits or lack of benefits of homework. The big thing is the need to promote the desire to learn. I have always found it interesting how many children are so excited to begin kindergarten and then when they are a few years older, express downright disdain for formal educa-

Phase II
Mary Kay Woodyard



tion. Do we push children too much at an early age i.e. pre-schoolers to learn things beyond their capabilities?

When Michael was in third grade the entire class was assigned a term paper complete with footnotes, and note cards. The unfortunate thing was no one gave instruction on how to do a term paper...except the parents. WE got an "A".

When our oldest son was in third grade he read at a 12th grade level. Some would say, "How wonderful." The problem is his vocabulary and reading ability was as a senior, but his experiences, thank God, did not match

his abilities.

When John was a sophomore in Tuscaloosa, Ala., he was assigned a term paper on Walt Whitman. The teacher recognized John's art was what spoke to him so she asked him to do his term paper as a painting. I guarantee you he did more research, read more literature and wrote more to formalize his thoughts than he ever would have done with a conventional research paper. Not only did he learn, but his teacher inspired a love of learning and introduced him to learning in a whole new way.

Teaching is a difficult task, but so is being a student. Each year I pray my grandchildren are inspired to learn from the classroom around them. Walt Disney once said, "I would rather entertain and hope that people learned something than educate people and hope they were entertained." mk-woodyard@ruraltel.net

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