

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



Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



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It pains me when people don't appreciate history. I believe there are valuable lessons we can learn from the past and mistakes that don't have to be repeated.

Then there are those who deny history. I have to shake my head when I hear someone say that the holocaust never happened.

There are many still around who were born before Hitler and his Nazi thugs tried to conquer the world and eliminate those who they thought were a threat to them. Luckily there were some Germans who saw their country's leader

as a person who needed to be removed.

The last surviving conspirator involved with the bombing of the Wolf's Lair on April 20, 1944, has died.

Ewald von Kleist was a Wehrmacht officer who was involved with fellow officer Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who sought to end Hitler's reign. However, when the dictator survived the assassination attempt he had his Gestapo arrest over 7,000 Germans. Of those, 4,980

were executed.

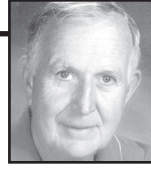
Von Kleist managed to be overlooked to a point and spent the rest of the war in forced labor camps. After the war, when his family lost their holdings when their land was incorporated into Poland, he began a successful publication business.

There is still a glimmer of hope that individuals can see wrongs and do their best to correct them. History tells us so.

Legislative News

Budget Cuts and House Tax Plan

By Ward Cassidy



120th State Representative

Last week, I wrote an article about the proposed tax plans. I stressed that there would be a House tax plan, a Senate tax plan, and the Governor's tax plan. This week, the House passed out of committee a tax plan.

I will give the highlights of this plan.

Part one: The sales tax rate allows the rate to reduce to 5.7 percent, as approved in current law. That will be a reduction of .6 percent from the current rate. The .4 percent increase that remains, and was earmarked for the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), shall instead be diverted to the State General Fund for fiscal year 2014 and fiscal 2015. It would result in a positive fiscal note to the State General Fund close to \$400 million over the two years.

This appears to be an additional draw from department of trans-

portation on top of the diversion funds that are in the governor's recommended budget. What will be the effect? Is all of T-Works 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 proposed to do, the bill gives a 24 percent cut to all deductions. The size of the cut is 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 will also be adjusted. Projection - from 2014 to 2018 would be an additional \$4.5 million. The cut applies only to itemized deductions on individual tax returns, and not on corporate tax credits.

Part three: Future income tax cuts are tied to a growth trigger. Whenever the growth of taxes that are the primary funding source of State General Fund

grows by more than 2 percent, then the excess percentage above 2 percent is 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 made over \$200 million in cuts, in appropriations, and we don't yet know the number we need to pass a budget. I have always stated that we cannot and should not be like the federal government and spend more money 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 will we finance our schools, cities, and counties?

Corrections

The Saint Francis Herald will correct or clarify any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story. Please call our office at 332-3162 to report errors. We believe that news stories should be fair and factual, and appreciate your calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

GOD SAYS
And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.
Matthew 24:4, 5

The Gardener

By Kay Melia



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As we move ahead into the growing season that is rapidly approaching, I wish to pose a few questions to each and everyone of you who are planning some kind of planting this spring. I do not wish to question your ability to grow things...I merely wish to encourage you to begin thinking about what lies ahead as the weather warms and outdoor activities increase.

And so I will ask each one of you to seriously think about what you will be planting and how you intend to care for whatever it is you will be growing this spring. There will likely be no absolute answer to the questions I pose... but hopefully they will begin to arouse your thoughts about the season and get the juices flowing. You may want to make some notes.

Here we go. Do you feel like you have a pretty good idea of what varieties, or names, of the various garden crops are the most productive, whether you grow vegetables or flowers? Or do you grab the

first packet of cucumber seed, or zinnias seed that you see on the rack, figuring that a cucumber is a cucumber, and a zinnia is a zinnia. Remember, some varieties ARE more productive than others.

Are you convinced that you know the ideal dates for planting certain vegetables or flowers, or do you just plant everything at once, believing that if it's time to plant onions, it must be time to get those geraniums out into the flower beds?

Have you considered watering your garden and flower beds with something other than the lawn sprinkler, or do you feel that if it's good enough for the grass, it must be good enough for the tomatoes?

Do you have a favorite tool you use to rid your garden of weeds? How do you manage weeds that grow between onion plants, in the potato row, or in the flower beds?

Mulch is any kind of biodegradable material, that, when placed between rows of beans, or around

newly planted trees, will keep the soil damp, cool, and weed free. Do you mulch anything in your garden, and if so, do you know the best time to apply it. If you don't mulch, why not?

In the heat of summer, do you climb out of bed earlier than usual and do some of the heavier work in the garden when it's nice and cool?

And finally, do you plow your entire garden plot in the late fall of the year, always adding all the organic materials you can get your hands on, or do you wait until spring to plow, when it's too late for any soil additives to biodegrade?

There! Form your own basic garden opinions, Make some plans. Ask questions if you're not pleased with past year's efforts. Compare notes with other gardeners. Be the best gardener you can be!

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