

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

On the way up

By Steve Haynes

It probably comes as no surprise that 49 states collected more from their taxpayers in 2004 than they had a decade earlier.

The only real surprise was that one state — Alaska — saw a decline of 1 percent, but don't mark Alaska down as thrifty, just rich. Most of the state budget comes from oil revenue and Alaska spends more per citizen at \$12,294 than any other state.

Kansas fell in the middle of the pack, 28th in per capita state taxes at \$1,933 per person, up about \$500 for the decade. Neighboring Colorado, on the other hand, is in the bottom five in collections per taxpayer.

Colorado is one of the few states with strict constitutional limits on state and local spending. Kansas, having abandoned its tax lid law, has none, and it shows.

State tax rates have been frozen in recent years, but spending keeps on going up. With conservatives losing ground in the Legislature this year, there's great pressure to raise taxes and spend even more.

Increases for schools and just to keep the state running have taken every extra cent Kansas brings in. Schools, colleges and other programs say they need more.

In Colorado, by contrast, officials had to get voter approval just to keep the "extra" money that came in when the economy warmed up.

In Kansas, property taxes on homes now are roughly double those in Colorado, despite years of "tax relief" efforts in Topeka. City and county governments, even those that try to be careful, just keep raising the levies.

And the Kansas economy is not growing, possibly because of the high tax burden here compared to surrounding states.

In Kansas, only the government is growing. A state report last month showed just 6,000 new jobs created in the state over the past year, all in state and local government. Private nonfarm employers actually cut 2,400 jobs over that period.

It doesn't take an economic genius to see that this can't continue. Fewer working taxpayers can't be asked to support an ever-growing government apparatus.

That's apparently what our leaders believe, however. They keep hiring people and raising public salaries, raising taxes and squeezing more out of the long-suffering middle class.

Around here, for instance, the City of Goodland plans to cut taxes slightly but give it's workers raises averaging 5 percent and boosted spending by 8.5 percent when property valuation rose. That in a time when most private employers can't manage any raises at all.

You'd think someone would complain. Maybe someone will, but until taxpayers rise up in revolt, taxes and spending are bound to keep on going up. And up. And up. — *Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press*

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

COLBY FREE PRESS
155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS
Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcx@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING
Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Kristi Powell - Advertising Sales
kpowell@nwkansas.com

Emily Wederski - Advertising Sales
ewederski@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE
Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager
lea@nwkansas.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS
Jim Bowker - General Manager
Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Delisa Allen, David Erickson, Betty Morris and Dana Huthansel

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company



Not everything in life is fair game

Mother Nature is being stretched to her limit and it's time for us to step up to the plate and help those less fortunate.

I can't tell you how many Kansas Meadowlarks, pheasant and quail I've seen scavenging near the highway's edge between Hoxie and Colby the past couple weeks, but the number is huge.

Each time I drive by any of the little critters it makes me think about how it is our duty to care for them. Care for them particularly during times of late when there has been so much snow and ice on the ground that they cannot easily find enough to eat to stay alive.

I heard one report of a farmer who took a bold stand for nature when asked by someone whether he'd allow pheasant hunting on some of his ground.

He reportedly told the person in weather conditions like we are currently experiencing the request was not one of pheasant hunting, but rather pheasant murdering.

To purposely track down and kill creatures that are struggling to meet their daily requirement of nutrition is, in my opinion, the same as the man's murder, not hunting.

Excuse the pun, but not everything in life is fair game.

During times animals/birds can not dig through inches, and in some places, feet of snow



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

and ice to get to much needed grasses and grains, bugs and left over remains of road kill, it is inhumane of us not to help them out.

A couple bushels of grain strewn about or a spared hay bale scattered in an area where deer get in out of the wind is not only a blessing to them - it is our responsibility as humans.

God blesses us with all we need for our daily portion, and in turn, it's our duty to provide a daily portion for His creatures which are in need, be it because their food is hidden by snow or burned up by heat.

It was important enough for God to spend day five making the critters; yes, it happened before we humans were made (Genesis 1: 20-23), so we need to see the importance to help wildlife out when they are in need. So please, take time to cast out some grain, bird seed or hay to assure new generations.

Trust me, nature will appreciate it. And God

will appreciate your effort.

Speaking of effort, seems the power company crews which worked so diligently to restore electricity to western Kansas have been called to eastern Kansas and western Missouri.

I spoke with a friend who lives in Wichita and back-to-back ice storms caused power outages and poor travel. Seems this is the winter of bad ice and snow storms.

But when it comes to talking about storms, I giggle at Wichita TV station weather men and women because they make an inch of snow sound like a foot of it. It's not the weather's fault, things in cities get bad, it's silly drivers who don't slow down, or better yet, stay off the streets.

But wait, give me 20 years and people will probably be talking about me thinking I must drive to the grocery store on a sheet of ice just to get a cake mix. And I wonder why my dad at 89-years-old won't give up driving.

I'm one who does not tolerate cold well and I can't imagine working out in it hour after hour, day after day like the power company folks do.

And think of it like this, when it's bad for us — not having electricity — it's good for them — in overtime. All that aside, my hat's off to their dedication to keeping us up and running.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

Holding the door



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

As I was doing some research for a recent sermon, I came across this interesting axiom — the respect a society holds for its members is often manifested in small daily interactions among members of that society.

In other words, our daily actions reveal more about our attitudes than we would like to admit. To some, that isn't much of a revelation, but I think it just might be to others.

You see, we have lost much of the respectful interaction in our society in the name of equality and informality and with it, some of the respect for others.

Of course, there are a couple of other axioms about respectability which must be remembered.

First, true respect cannot be demanded; it must be earned by being respectable.

Second, even being respectable will not earn the respect of a fool. There are those in every society who do not respect themselves or others and reveal their uselessness through inappropriate language and actions.

The ignorant and the arrogant cannot learn to respect others.

Third, respect must also be manifest for the responsibility one holds. Our society prides itself on its democratic ideals in which no one is above the censure of the people and that has served us well for the past 200 plus years.

We must also remember, however, that when an office is held in contempt, only the contempt-

ible will seek it. We have degraded the office of politician and now we are reaping what we have sown.

We have allowed dishonesty, malfeasance and ineptitude from our leaders and turned on those who had the courage to tell us what we did not want to hear or dared to call us to a higher standard until our leaders are both corrupt and afraid to call us to sacrifice even for the national good.

Those things will not change until our society changes and our society will only change one person at a time and perhaps even one habit at a time. After all, society is made up of individuals and it is the customs of the individuals which make up the corporate traditions of a nation or group.

Our respect for others is heard in our language.

No, we probably don't need to return to the stilted, formal language of a century ago, but we could do without some of the slang and a lot of

the swearing that is common today.

In fact, some of the conversations we seem to want to have in public would be better in a much more private venue and, in some cases, maybe not at all. Some of our morning radio shows are no better in the topics they choose to discuss or the language used.

Swearing, on the other hand, has no place in polite society. I'm no shrinking violet. I grew up in the oil patch and was in the Navy for 11 years. I have not only heard the words, but have used them correctly and in context at times.

That doesn't make it right or excusable and to hear such language in casual conversation around ladies and children (sometimes it is the ladies and children using the words these days) is simply indefensible for a respectable society.

There is also the respect that we show for those around us. Holding the door for a person carrying a package, giving one's seat to a lady or to an older person, or saying thank you and please doesn't cost anything, but it does reap dividends.

It shows other people that you not only noticed them, but that you care about them. That is the secret to respect, caring about others.

Humanity was created in God's image. We can respect that — even if some of us don't believe in it.

Jay Kelley is a local preacher and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

