

Other Viewpoints

Muddled tax plan won't help anyone

GOP legislators likely will fall in line and eventually approve an income-tax cut, whether or not the state can afford it. But so far the plans mostly have been muddled messes.

Gov. Sam Brownback released a tax-reform plan last month that immediately blew up in his face. Taxpayers and trade associations objected to his elimination of many tax credits and deductions, including for mortgage interest. The plan also would break a promise to Kansans by making permanent the temporary statewide sales-tax increase. But the biggest problem was that his plan, while giving a large tax cut to the wealthy, would raise taxes on those making less than \$25,000 by nearly \$90 million.

Before that week was out, GOP House leaders announced they would release their own plan that would keep most deductions and wouldn't penalize the poor.

But it turns out the House plan, which the House Taxation Committee approved this week, still would raise taxes on the poor. It also would raid about \$350 million from the state's highway plan, potentially harming important projects in Wichita and elsewhere, and it would cost more than \$850 million over the next five years.

On Feb. 23, the House approved an amendment by Rep. Jim Ward, D-Wichita, to provide \$90 million in property-tax relief — which is the tax relief most Kansans say they want. But Republicans later claimed they were tricked into voting for the bill.

The Senate has been using a more careful approach and plans to begin crafting its own tax plan early next month. No doubt it will try to avoid the mistakes and flops of the governor's and the House's plans.

Meanwhile, lawmakers mostly have ignored the reform plan offered by Sen. Dick Kelsey, R-Goddard. As he first proposed last session, Kelsey wants to eliminate most of the state's 99 sales-tax exemptions, which cost Kansas about \$4.2 billion in lost revenue in 2009.

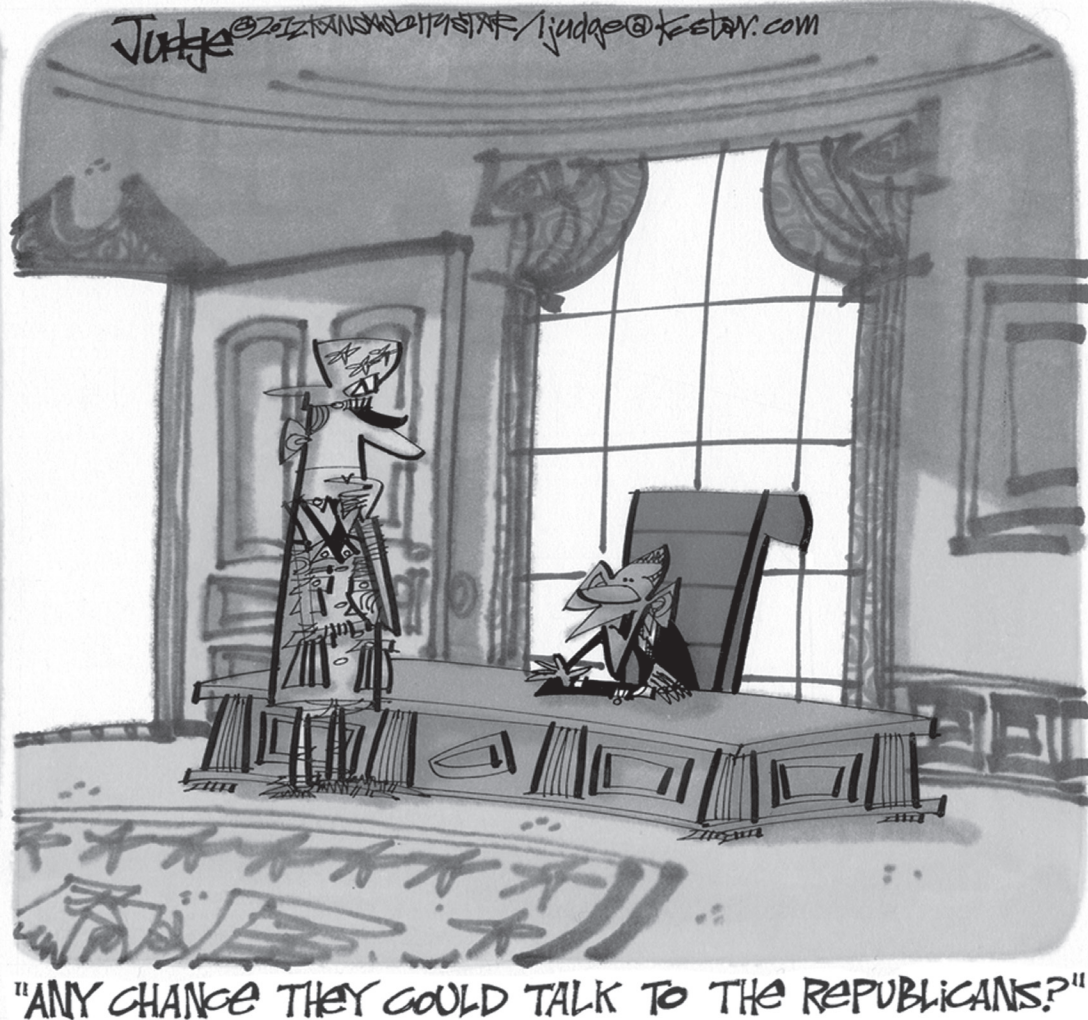
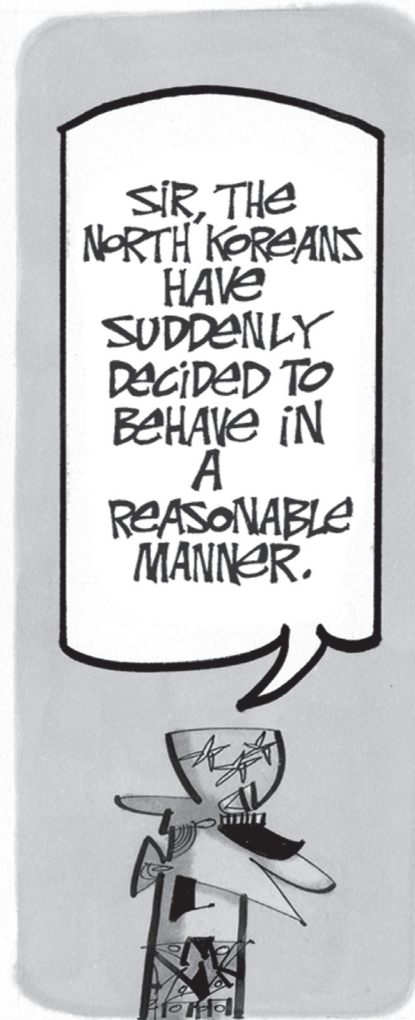
Kelsey would use the extra sales-tax revenue to cut other taxes, including reducing the sales tax on food by half, reducing the state corporate income-tax rate by nearly half and reducing individual income-tax rates. Kelsey's proposal is also revenue-neutral, so it would protect money for education and other crucial programs and services.

Groups that currently don't have to pay sales taxes are sure to squawk — and justifiably so in some cases, as Kelsey's plan may go too far. But Kelsey argues that the same policies should apply to everyone.

How is it fair, he asks, that coin-operated Laundromats are exempt from sales tax but coin-operated car washes are taxable? Or that labor associated with washing a floor is exempt but labor associated with waxing a floor is taxable?

GOP lawmakers talk a lot about not picking winners and losers and wanting fairer and flatter tax policies. But instead of seriously considering Kelsey's plan, which would do that, they have been picking on the poor.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



Tea Party helping Obama campaign

The Tea Party movement is the biggest reason President Barack Obama's re-election bid will be successful.

The power of this grassroots right-wing insurgency has forced the Republicans to move so far to the right that they are having trouble connecting with the majority of Americans. It's ironic the movement that played such a pivotal role in the Republican-dominated 2010 elections will end up costing the GOP a shot at the White House. Yet, this appears to be the case.

Despite the fact that Mitt Romney clearly has a better chance of beating Obama in the 2012 presidential elections than Rick Santorum, Ron Paul or Newt Gingrich, the anti-Romney crowd — which includes a large number of Tea Party members — is determined to do everything it can to stop him from getting the Republican nomination.

The Tea Party's distrust of the flip-flopping former Massachusetts governor has divided the party in a way that hasn't been seen since Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater won the Republican presidential nomination in 1964; an experiment that ended in a landslide victory for President Lyndon Johnson.

I'm sure Republican moderates are well aware of the similarities between the Goldwater debacle and the circus-like atmosphere that has come to define the 2012 Republican presidential primaries. Now that the allure of the Tea Party has worn off, some Republicans



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

have to secretly be wondering if the Tea Party is more of a liability than an asset.

Nowhere have the vulnerabilities of the Tea Party — and other far right groups in the party — been more evident than during the GOP primaries. Members of the Republican establishment must have been wincing in pain as their grassroots supporters lurched from one far-right candidate — each with their own glaring weaknesses — to another in a desperate attempt to find somebody, anybody to defeat a candidate who was seen as the conservative alternative to Arizona Sen. John McCain in the last presidential election. Oh, how times have changed.

The problem with the Tea Party isn't, as some have argued, that its positions on issues are too conservative, with the exception of some members' antiquated views on social issues. America is a center-right country, much to the chagrin of liberals. It's how much this grassroots group detests the give-and-take nature of politics.

The Tea Party views every compromise with Democrats as either cowardly acquiescence or outright betrayal. They are allergic to the idea that sometimes you have to give a little to get a little in politics.

While it's laudable to stick to your principles, no government can function without some degree of compromise from both parties. But the Tea Party doesn't understand — or simply doesn't care about — the need for accommodation and negotiation in the governing process. It, much like the Goldwater crowd in 1964, places ideological purity over the compromise-driven approach to governance that has been practiced for most of this country's history.

Inflexible opposition on every issue makes for great political theater and excellent bumper sticker slogans, but it creates an inefficient, do-nothing Congress that is ill-equipped to confront the major problems the country is facing.

I don't question the core convictions of Tea Party members, but it's long past time for their partisan passions to be tempered by the realities of politics. Perhaps an easy victory for Obama will do just that, but I seriously doubt it.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Lady was a good guard and cowhand

"I wouldn't take any amount of money for that dog," were my dad's most often spoken words when referring to our family dog, Lady.

He and my younger sister, Sandy, picked up the young German shepherd pup from our veterinarian in Colby. Lady was a replacement for our Irish setter, Red. The old gal retrieved her last pheasant during the fall of '62, shortly after my 13th birthday.

Lady spent many years on our farm and became a major part of our family. We all loved her.

True to her name, she conducted herself like a lady around our family, but this sleek silver-and-black canine struck fear into the hearts of anyone who drove up to our home. She was the guard that protected us from door-to-door salesmen and other unwanted guests.

I remember a particularly pesky Fuller brush man who mother couldn't persuade to leave. Once he finally did, I sicced Lady on him and she chased him for nearly 30 yards before he jumped into his car with her ripping at his drawers.

One of dad's best friends never stepped foot out of his pickup while Lady patrolled our property. This neighbor cursed Lady and swore he'd shoot her, but he never messed with her.

This dog was a constant companion throughout our childhood and played many different roles. She was the scout that trotted out front as we explored the western Kansas countryside. She was the horse that pulled Sandy in the wagon. She was the vigilant lookout that waited patiently for us to return from school. She was also that "silly creature" who slept in a wheelbarrow filled with fall leaves.

But most of all, Lady was the dog that worshipped my dad. My father couldn't drive his pickup anywhere without this four-legged pas-



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

senger seated to his right.

"She got so she could almost drive," Dad used to tell us with a smile.

This dog would do anything for my father — and she was a joy to watch working cattle.

"She could tell if there was a cow out (of the fenced-in pasture) a half mile away," Dad said. "She'd put her head out the window and when I'd stop the pickup, she'd round them up and head 'em into the (open) gate."

We enjoyed many happy years with Lady before she became old, tired and feeble. When that day came, we took her to our vet to have her put to sleep.

This was particularly painful. Lady wasn't just our dog — she was a member of our family. Dad gathered her in his arms, placed her on the seat to his right one last time and drove her home.

We buried Lady near Mom's garden in the back yard. She often played in that garden, and it was there she buried her bones. Yes, we all missed that dog, and while it's been a long time ago, I still remember my dad reaching down beside his easy chair to pet the head that was no longer there.

Dad couldn't be without a dog for long, and within a few months, he brought home another silver-and-black German shepherd. We called her Lady, too.

When we'd visit my folks, we'd bring our little Sheltie, Lorna Doone, home with us. Seeing her race through the grass today takes me

back to western Kansas and memories of my father and his dogs. Dad enjoyed the company of his dogs until a few years ago when he passed into the "Great Beyond," as he called it.

And if wishes come true, I know my dad is sitting in his easy chair in heaven with one, or all of his "Ladies," next to him. I can see a smile spread across his face as he pets each and every one of them and listens to the thump, thump, thump of their tails.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

