



Other Viewpoints

Kansas tax cut plan an exercise in hubris

For Kansas, the end of the 2012 legislative session did not bring relief. Legislators awoke Monday morning to the terrible news that Rep. Bob Bethell, a Republican from Alden, had died in a traffic accident Sunday night. Bethell was alone when his car ran off Interstate 70 at 7:35 p.m., about an hour after the Legislature had adjourned.

Since first elected in 1999, Bethell had fought to get a better deal for the disabled and elderly. Those communities can ill-afford to lose a key advocate. Along with Kansans who desire to maintain quality schools and universities and an acceptable quality of life, they are dreading the consequences of an income-tax reduction bill that Gov. Sam Brownback has vowed to sign.

This bill was conceived in treachery. Brownback's staff persuaded the Senate to pass it as a starting point for negotiation with the House. The governor then prevailed upon the House to pass it.

The bill drastically slashes individual income tax rates and eliminates some business taxes. The nonpartisan Kansas Legislative Research Department estimates it will create budget deficits widening to \$2.4 billion or more by the fiscal year beginning in July 2018.

Kansas' fiscal troubles would only get worse if Brownback's administration fails to achieve the \$367 million in savings over five years it has projected from an overhaul of the Medicaid program.

Brownback also refuses to acknowledge the distinct possibility that a federal probe may result in an order to reduce or eliminate waiting lists for physically disabled and developmentally disabled Kansans. The state has shamefully ignored their needs for years.

Another wild card is a pending court case over inadequate school financing.

With trademark hubris, Brownback's administration contends lower taxes will bring enough of a job surge to overcome the loss of revenue. And if hot air and think-tank logic created jobs, everyone would feel a lot better.

The truth is, Kansas would need tens of thousands of new jobs almost immediately to overcome the effects of the bill Brownback plans to sign.

Barring a last-minute change of mind, Kansans are about to witness the stunning act of a governor knowingly jeopardizing the state's future for the sake of ego and unproven theories.

— *The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press*

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Barbecue tour takes in granddaughter

We drove all the way to Augusta, Ga., this month, which is about 1,330 miles, give or take, to see our daughters.

Who are we kidding. We did it to see our granddaughter, and her mother and aunt. The spring drive has become a habit since she was born. Before that, we flew, which is faster and usually cheaper, but usually not half as interesting.

And this time, on the way down, anyway, we drove about 1,600 miles over four days, spending one night in a hotel and two with friends who'd invited us to stop by. This takes longer, but makes the trip even more interesting.

One thing you have to understand about traveling with Cynthia is that any road trip becomes a tour of the barbecue places of the nation.

Ask her what she wants for lunch: "Oh, how about barbecue?"

Dinner: "Are there any barbecue places?"

You get the picture.

She will take an occasional hamburger, especially on the first day. And she'll eat about anything if she gets hungry enough. But barbecue is her No. 1 desire for road food.

It's not that I don't like barbecue — actually, I love it — but I do believe in variety.

To her credit, by the way, she has not yet asked for barbecue for breakfast. I think that's coming, though....

The first day, we took a detour from the prescribed, but somewhat sterile, route and left Wichita eastbound on U.S. 400, a mostly new, high-class two-lane road across southeast Kansas. If you've never been that way, it cuts through the Flint Hills before crossing the Neosho and Verdigris river valleys. It's beautiful down there, especially in the spring.



Steve Haynes
 • Along the Sappa

By dusk, we had crossed into Missouri and stopped for barbecue at Joplin. Then we headed south on four-lane U.S. 71 to catch the new freeway from Walmart land — I mean Bentonville — south to join Interstate 40 east.

We didn't get as far as we'd hoped, but the barbecue was great and the freeway through the Ozarks seemed to be spectacular — high soaring trestles and beautiful vistas, at least in the moonlight. We made it to Clarksville, Ark., on the river, and called it a night.

Next day, we were up and moving early, made Little Rock by midmorning and stopped somewhere for lunch down in southeast Arkansas. Mexican food; it was almost Cinco de Mayo, after all.

That night was spent with friends in Brookhaven, Miss., where we sat on the porch and heard tales of the gators and snakes at their country place and had a great dinner. Grilled chicken, but not barbecue.

Next morning, we toured their operation, saw Amtrak's City of New Orleans make its daily stop, then took off for our next overnight, just south of the big racetrack at Talladega, Ala.

When we got to John's house in Roanoke, he had bought barbecue from the local stand. Ribs, beef, pork, beans, Brunswick stew, all great. Next morning, he made us breakfast —

eggs, bacon and blue corn grits. Fancy.

And that evening, after bucking traffic in Atlanta, we wound up in Augusta, tired of the road and full of tasty barbecue.

We spent a great week with the kids — it's always great when we visit there — and took the short route home: Chattanooga, Interstate 24 to Nashville, spent the night somewhere in Illinois after finding motels in Mount Vernon completely full (in the morning, we discovered it was Nashville, Ill.!), then made St. Louis on Saturday morning.

Though we could (and should) have headed north for U.S. 36 across Missouri, a pleasant and pretty drive and all four-lane now, I wanted one more shot at some good barbecue at Gates and Sons in Kansas City. I know, this time, it was me, but Kansas City barbecue is still the best.

So we followed I-70 across the state, a nice drive, but jammed with trucks and, while it should have six lanes, Missouri apparently can afford only four. The barbecue made it all worthwhile, but if you're headed anywhere east of downtown Kansas City, or even to the airport, take U.S. 36. It's shorter, faster and much easier driving.

And we did just that after lunch, arriving in Oberlin dead tired about 10:30 p.m. that Saturday night after a smooth drive across the state.

So, there you have it: the barbecue tour of the South and Midwest. And for the most part, when we didn't have barbecue, we should have.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Teachers say budget offers bleak outlook

In a move that is all but certain to force devastating cuts to education, public safety, highway maintenance and services to seniors and those with disabilities, Gov. Sam Brownback signed into law a tax bill that will leave a \$2.5 billion hole in the state budget within six years.

The governor and Legislature have decided to abandon common sense and bet the future of this state on the false promise that hundreds of thousands of jobs can be created over the next five years, more new jobs than in any other state that has attempted this flawed strategy.

An analysis by the Kansas Economic Progress Council shows that to try and recover the lost revenue through increased sales tax collections, Kansas would need to add nearly 500,000 new jobs each paying \$50,000. That is equivalent to a 50-percent increase in jobs in just six years.

Yet the governor's plan assumes this will happen. It also assumes a savings of over \$350 million in Medicaid. It assumes the state, now under investigation for failing to provide need-

Other Opinions

- **Blake West**
 Kan. National Ed. Assoc.

ed services to the disabled, will not be forced to provide those services. It assumes that businesses that don't qualify for his business income tax cuts won't bother to change their tax status to get the cut. It assumes that every business receiving a tax cut will use it to create jobs instead of padding their profits.

I say, by signing this reckless bill the governor is ensuring that the damage done by education cuts over the past several years will not be repaired. In fact, Kansas schools, classrooms and students will likely see even more programs cut, fewer opportunities for learning 21st century skills. Despite salaries frozen for

four years while assuming the increased cost of health benefits, Kansas teachers have tried to fill the gap created by inadequate school budgets, purchasing school supplies needed to help students learn with their own money. Just when we see a light at the end of the tunnel, the governor shuts it off.

Legislation passed through parliamentary tricks and bullying, a communications system in the governor's office that does not allow citizens to express their concerns and a hastily scheduled signing ceremony have all worked to silence the voice of the people in this process. We call on the governor and the Legislature to take action as soon as possible to reverse this destructive course for Kansas.

With the economy in recovery, this is not the time for massive corporate tax cuts. This is a time to reinvest in the future of Kansas with great schools and quality of life for all citizens.

Blake West is president of the Kansas National Education Association.

Where to write, call

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Mallard Fillmore

- **Bruce Tinsley**

