



## Other Viewpoints

### Keep promise to lower sales tax

Gov. Sam Brownback pushed through an unaffordable tax-cut plan last spring with the assurance to Kansans, "I think we are going to be in good shape." Surely he won't now try to help pay for the massive income-tax cut by breaking the 2010 Legislature's promise to lower the statewide sales tax next summer.

That would be wrong, because the income-tax cuts will most benefit business owners and the wealthy and sales taxes fall disproportionately on the poor. The tax plan even newly burdened lower-income Kansans by eliminating the food sales-tax rebate and the child and dependent care credit.

Extending the higher sales-tax rate also would be hypocritical, because Brownback was harshly critical of the hike as a candidate for governor, and he and allies such as the Kansas Chamber of Commerce and Americans for Prosperity have hounded moderate Republican legislators out of office for voting for it.

But Brownback said last week that he hadn't ruled out extending the 6.3 percent statewide sales-tax rate, which was passed as an emergency measure under then-Gov. Mark Parkinson during the downturn and is supposed to drop to 5.7 percent next July. "I'm not opposed to it. It's just, let's see where we are in the budget," Brownback said last Wednesday.

Last January, Brownback had included extending the sales-tax hike in his own tax-cut proposal, which even his closest legislative allies quickly rejected because of that and other offsets, including the elimination of the mortgage-interest deduction.

It's hard to fathom how the members of the conservative-controlled House and what's expected to be a newly conservative-controlled Senate could justify voting to keep the higher sales tax now, especially when so many voted against it originally and have been bitterly critical of it since.

"Let's just leave Kansas. Let's forget about buying food in Kansas," said state Sen. Susan Wagle, R-Wichita - likely to become the new Senate president - as she voted against the tax hike in 2010.

True, these are strange times. Whenever such a vote comes, even moderate Republicans and Democrats may conclude that breaking the sales-tax promise is preferable to further cutting public school spending and social services.

And Brownback finds himself in a bind. On one side he has legislative researchers' projections that the tax cuts will create collective budget shortfalls approaching \$2.5 billion over the next six years, starting with a \$242.2 million shortfall for fiscal 2014, and that retaining the sales-tax hike would bring him a projected \$250 million a year.

On Brownback's other side is the adulation he's getting nationally for the tax cuts - "the biggest tax cut of any state in recent years relative to the size of its economy," wrote Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at the Cato Institute, in a *Wall Street Journal* commentary last week.

But Kansans should not let their governor and legislators treat this as an easy choice.

Besides, a promise is a promise - and turning a temporary tax hike into a permanent one is the same thing as a tax increase.

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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### Snow a shock when on vacation

"It's snowing," Stephanie reported. Snowing. I know snowing. That's when water drops from the sky in fluffy flakes. I seem to remember that happening last year.

Any kind of water dropping from the sky seems kind of incredible this year, but snowing really wasn't on my radar.

Mary and I were dripping sweat as we walked the three blocks from our hotel to the store to get her some eye drops. It was about 85 degrees with 90 percent humidity in Charleston, S.C. Not a pleasant fall day in the south.

But, then again, it obviously wasn't a pleasant day in Kansas, and the overnight freeze that my ace reporter told me about had undoubtedly killed my garden.

Luckily, I had asked her to pick as many green tomatoes and other produce as she could the day before. She reported that I had two bags of tomatoes and peppers.

Thank you, thank you. I always go out the night before the first hard freeze and pick as much as I can. Then, I wrap the tomatoes in newsprint and put them in the basement. They aren't quite as good as fresh-off-the-vine, but they're worlds better than picked-green-in-Mexico-and-shipped tomatoes.

The report came back that fall had come to Kansas, and I knew that when I got home, I'd have to deal with one of my least favorite gar-



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

den chores - disposing of the slimy, dead vines which will now show every lovely tomato and pepper that were overlooked at last picking. These poor darlings will have already started to wither and shrivel, but still show the promise we all missed.

Oh well, it's gotta be done. In the meanwhile, I moved from Charleston to Augusta, Ga., where both our daughters live. I figured that if you are three hours from children you only see two or three times a year, you'd better go visit.

Augusta was nicer than Charleston. Maybe the weather had changed or maybe it's just that much farther from the sea. The weather was cooler and less humid. A midday walk would still make you hot, tired and sweaty, but not a stroll to the store.

I helped youngest daughter weed her garden, which was down to about three green pepper plants and weeds.

Then, I helped oldest daughter pick a peck of peppers - really. That child plants every kind of pepper that grows. We picked habañeros, jalapeños, cayennes, tabascos. She even had a few sweet bell peppers. The produce came in green, yellow, orange and bright red - beautiful colors. For contrast, she picked her eggplant. The kitchen counter was covered with vegetables.

And she plans to pickle most of the peppers. Where is Peter Piper when we need him?

Unlike her sister's neat little garden by the edge of the house, oldest daughter's is a jungle in the back yard, and we had to take a whip and chair to even get in it.

After beating back the pepper plants, we turned to her grape vines, which we deforested, leaving only the approved central trunk and two branches on each side. She made a wreath out of the mound of discarded foliage.

Ah well, such is life. She gets a wreath and I get several bags of slimy vines.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

### Give the people what they want

While almost every industry today does a less than perfect job of living by the motto, "the customer is the most important part of business," Kansas farmers and ranchers are one segment that adheres to this philosophy.

It's been a gradual process but one that has consistently picked up steam. Still, Kansas farmers and ranchers cannot rest on their laurels but must continue to look to the future with an open mind and the flexibility to develop new ways of marketing their products.

Our customers are driven by changes in personal preferences and increasing income levels. They tend to be a bit more generous with their hard-earned money in good times and more tight fisted when our economy is down.

Today's customer will continue to spend his or her money on what they want. Convenience is more important than ever before; however, price is also important and will remain a major piece of the buying equation.

Our agricultural economy will continue to be driven by customer demand. Buyers of farm and ranch products continue to become wiser and savvy every day.

Tomorrow's well-informed shopper will want, and demand, more information about how food is produced. It will be up to farmers and ranchers to help provide such informa-



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

tion. These customers should be viewed as friends of agriculture who are interested in buying products that keep farmers and ranchers in the business of producing food, fuel and fiber.

We should welcome their input and feedback. And once we understand what their needs are - provide for them.

It makes smart business sense for Kansas farmers and ranchers to connect with their customers. In larger communities and next to urban areas across Kansas, farmers and ranchers are carving out niche markets by providing meats, dairy, fruits and vegetables directly to customers who live there.

By doing so, farm and ranch families have developed the kind of direct, personal relationship with people that eat what they raise. These buyers become friends and, in some cases, part of an extended family.

Such customers not only have the opportunity to buy and enjoy quality products for their families, they become more knowledgeable about the product and they know exactly who is producing it.

Customers can find out about a specific animal and how the livestock man raises it and why they care for, and do the things the way they do.

Kansas farmers that connect with their customers will have an advantage. When buyers of farm and ranch products have questions, they will know where to find the expert with an answer - Kansas farmers and ranchers who care for their crops, livestock, land and customers.

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

