

Other Viewpoints

'Shotgun' approach dominates Topeka

Maybe Gov. Sam Brownback is shooting from the hip, or maybe the Kansas Legislature has an itchy trigger finger. Whatever the cause, one thing is certain: 2013 is the year of the Shotgun Legislature.

Record-setting campaign spending in 2012 led to the election of many conservative legislators who won favor from some of the state's largest lobbyist groups, thus purging moderate Republicans from the Legislature.

As soon as this new Brownback-compliant Legislature convened in January, members began shot-gunning a wide variety of bills in both the House and Senate. No issue has been out of reach of the Legislature's birdshot – corporate farming, judicial appointments, taxes, workers rights, restrictions on lobbying (not from business, just from people), election laws and immigration, to name a few.

This approach betrays a dire sense of urgency from the governor and his legislative followers – almost as if these changes must happen now, before people have a chance to figure out the truth, and perhaps have a change of heart.

There is good reason for that impatience. Given time to research and ponder the legislation, most Kansans would find much of it unpalatable. Some might realize a vast difference between what we've been told and what we could end up living with if some of these bills become law.

For instance, a bill against using public money to pay for lobbyists sounds reasonable on its surface. But deeper exploration reveals the bill doesn't solve the fundamental problem that lobbyists dominate lawmaking; it simply removes lobbyists that most closely represent the people and in effect silences the voices of the common person while giving well-heeled organizations a louder voice.

Likewise, a corporate farming law seems like a fine idea to some when it's gussied up in the language of economic development, jobs and investment. But its sourness comes out once people realize the legislation also robs counties and their residents of their right to control their own backyards.

A tax cut – who doesn't like the idea of a nice big tax cut? But already Kansans are biting down on the pit in that bill and realizing the pain might well come in higher taxes elsewhere or reduced services in their communities.

As for unions, Kansans have never much liked them anyway – especially those unions that represent teachers and government workers who earn their livings from taxpayer dollars. Another shotgun blast brought a flurry of bills designed to erode union power and membership. Yet, in the process, lawmakers have sought to undo civil service protections, which would allow public employees to be hired or fired based on their political affiliation and the changing winds of each election season.

A shotgun Legislature, indeed. But shotguns aren't used for their precision or accuracy; they're used to spread out a wide pattern in the hope that at least one piece of shot will strike its target. It's a great tool for bird hunting but a terrible approach to lawmaking.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
Gary Stewart, Foreman

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Pressmen
Kris McCool, Judy McKnight, Tracy Traxel,
Sheri Arroyo, Mailing

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.



Easter, not Easter bunny, needs notice

Easter, the oldest Christian holy day, is not about candy and bunnies and baby birds. It's about a grave, guarded by professional soldiers who faced execution if they failed in their duty, coming up empty of the body of one Jesus of Nazareth three days after he himself had been executed.

That said, it's been encouraging this week to note that all but one of the schools whose activities we publish take Easter Monday off – and even have the guts to call it Easter break.

If that requires explanation, let me take you back. In the years when I was growing up, school was dismissed on Good Friday and Easter Monday, honestly and without apology. (We also had Christmas concerts and Christmas break, but that's a tale for another time.) When my children started school, in a tiny rural district, they also had Easter vacation. By the time we moved to Kansas City, however, it had been reduced to one "spring holiday" on Good Friday – or no holiday at all – in deference (or fear) of those of other faiths, or no faith.

Understand, I have no problem with people who practice religions other than my own. I respect Jews and Moslems who are faithful to what they sincerely believe, even though I am sincerely convinced their beliefs are incor-



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

rect. I can even accept that there are some who think religion is only a psychological crutch, which they prefer not to have forced on them. (Do atheists refuse to hide Easter eggs for their kids?)

A serious point, however, comes back to the history and strength of the United States of America. A great deal of noise is made about "freedom of religion" or freedom from religion. That First Amendment of the Constitution has been stretched to the breaking point, though, often to the detriment of society as a whole.

In fact, whatever individual beliefs might have been held by the pioneers who braved the Atlantic Ocean and the wilderness to establish the beginnings of this country, they had a common history rooted in the Christian faith that had shaped the culture of Europe for a millennium and a half. Not only religion, but the

structure and aim of government, of communities, of business, of family life, were molded through all those years by the basic beliefs of Christians.

One of those beliefs was that you can't shove religion down someone's throat and expect it to be of value – hence the First Amendment, vigorously supported by some of those with nontraditional Christian beliefs, like Baptists. There will never be an Inquisition here, or forced baptisms of thousands of non-Christians.

On the other hand, it seems doubtful that those who insisted on the right to express their faith in the way that seemed most proper to them would have countenanced what is more likely in our day – the nearly total suppression of any display of Christian faith in public life – though those of other faiths seem to have no similar problem. Easter may not express the faith of everyone in town, but it is an expression of faith that deserves to be made. So thank you to those schools, public and private, that still have Easter vacation.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Deadlines approach at Statehouse

The "Weekly Five Hard Facts"

• With the current judicial selection, a small minority of 10,000 Kansans, attorneys who are members of the Kansas Bar Association, have a say in who is nominated to the Kansas Supreme Court or the Kansas Court of Appeals.

• Kansas is the only state that gives the bar majority control in selecting its supreme court nominating commission.

• Seventy-three percent of Kansans with income of \$100,000 or more use the mortgage income deduction, while only 17 percent of those whose income is less than \$100,000 use the deduction.

• Big tax credits, such as the real estate tax deduction, encourage home buyers to take out bigger mortgages.

• Data shows states with zero personal income tax significantly outperform states with the highest personal income tax rates.

The pace has increased in this third week of the Legislative session due to the Senate casting its first votes, committees continuing to work on a number of bills and a steady influx of bills making it to the floor for debate.

General Orders in the Senate occurred on Wednesday to debate and vote on legislation. More votes and discussion will continue to occur as the first deadlines are approaching.



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

To stay informed on legislative issues call the legislative hotline at (800) 432-3924 or check the legislative website at www.kslegislature.org.

Major Issues This Week

Judicial Selection SCR 1601 proposes to amend the Kansas Constitution to allow for the gubernatorial appointment and Senate confirmation of judges. It passed by a vote of 28 to 12.

SB 8 is a companion bill which establishes an independent review to help the Senate evaluate judicial nominees. It passed by a vote of 28 to 11.

Paycheck Protection for Public Sector Employees (HB 2023) to ban state or other units of government from making payroll deductions for members of public sector unions to the union's political action committee. Members can still make a contribution by writing a check or setting up an electronic transfer.

The House passed the bill by a vote of 68 to 56; it is now headed to the Senate for further consideration.

Action from my office

I have had many contacts regarding **SB-21**. The first issue concerned reciprocal license standards that match those or are greater than those in Kansas. The second issue was adding to the definition of a firearm so as to include antique firearms.

During committee debate we split the two subjects. SB 21 addresses the issue of reciprocal license standards. There will be a new bill for the definition of firearms which will be sent to the Judiciary Committee.

The Senate and House Education Committees have been meeting jointly to get a better understanding of the budget formula and laws governing education funding. Public education funding in Kansas is \$5,771 million a year, and just over 50 percent goes to the classroom.

I will keep you informed of the issues that come before Federal and State Affairs.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 136-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774 roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW

10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

State Rep. Ward Cassidy, (120th District) State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 151-S, Topeka, Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7616 ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov

State Rep. Don Hineman, (118th District) State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 50-S, Topeka, Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7636 don.hineman@house.ks.gov

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

