



Other Viewpoints

Debate on ag law requires attention

A legislative advisory committee recently recommended the Legislature rewrite Kansas laws that restrict foreign corporate ownership of farms, saying that current laws are discriminatory against non-Kansas residents. Because if there's one thing Kansas lawmakers and administration officials have proven in recent years, it's that they're keenly concerned about being fair and equitable to all people, or at least to all corporations.

During the 2013 legislative session, supporters of a change to Kansas' 80-plus-year-old law against foreign corporate farm ownership met resistance from a wide variety of people across the state – and with good reason. The law would allow foreign ownership of Kansas farms and in the process strip county lawmakers and residents from restricting, regulating or prohibiting corporate agriculture operations within their home areas.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture, currently headed up by a former Cargill executive, and the Kansas Farm Bureau have been the biggest supporters of the change. Part of the push is based on concerns about the state's legal ability to restrict corporate activities within its borders – despite no legal challenge to Kansas' law. But in what is becoming a tired refrain of justification for efforts to alter longstanding Kansas laws and traditions, it's also about jobs and the economy.

"We have a governor and secretary of agriculture doing everything they can do grow the Kansas economy," Baccus told The News earlier this year. "It's difficult when you have the kind of laws we have. This isn't a business-friendly state."

Additionally, both the Department of Agriculture and the Farm Bureau have said companies have expressed interest in Kansas, but have been discouraged by the state's current laws. The details, however – the names of those companies, how many jobs they'd bring, what sort of operations they hope to set up and where – are never offered along with those blanket statements about all this growth potential knocking at Kansas' door. Nor do we hear specifics about what companies looked at Kansas but decided to move on down the road.

The truth is that Kansas is a business-friendly state – something the Kansas Department of Commerce proudly proclaims on its website by highlighting business publications that have identified Kansas as a "premier" state for businesses.

It's also true that doing away with Kansas' longstanding laws against corporate agriculture ownership would require local elected officials to cede to the state their guaranteed home rule authority.

That means the case against Kansas' laws on corporate farming is not as clear-cut as supporters would have us believe, and we do not know the full extent of what changing the law might mean to the family farmer in Kansas.

While the Farm Bureau and the Department of Agriculture undoubtedly will push again the idea that the history of the state's agriculture laws don't matter and that it's time for Kansas to welcome international corporate agribusiness, people who live and work in Kansas should watch this issue closely – and take steps now to protect their futures, just like those forward thinking Kansans did more than 80 years ago.

– 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@nwkansan.com.

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ASK A CARTOONIST:



Remember love for neighbors this season

The sermon Sunday started with the words "Happy New Year."

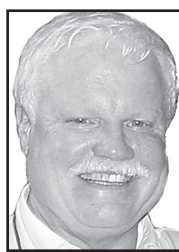
Some people may have been a little confused, but I knew what the preacher meant: Sunday was the first day of Advent, the season which starts the year for the traditional, or liturgical, churches.

Advent, the four Sundays right before Christmas, is a time to think about and prepare for the celebration of Christ's birth so long ago in Judea. And Christmas is, for Christians, a celebration rivaled only by Easter, when we mark his death and resurrection.

So while the rest of the world is busy shopping the sales, hanging lights and going to, or giving, holiday parties, the church is preparing us to think about the true nature of this holiday.

By tradition, Advent involves study, prayer and introspection. In the Eastern churches, Father Mark said in his sermon, it's still the custom to fast at times during Advent. In that way, the season is similar to Lent, which precedes Easter, and both lead up to celebrations.

I always kind of enjoy these times, which offer a chance to think about our lives and where they are going. I think I've led a blessed life – living, as I do, in one of the very best places on earth – but I can always use a little



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

help keeping Christ's second commandment.

It always seems to be easier to be mad, or at least disappointed, with your friends, let alone to love your enemy. The second seems like the harder of the two to me, but maybe that's just human.

But look around, and see where we've come to in this supposedly holy season:

People line up outside big stores – sometimes waiting all night – to save a few bucks on toys, televisions and the like. A friend said her daughter waited patiently for the time to come so she could buy a couple of one popular toy. While she was waiting, a woman rushed up and ripped the plastic cover off the stack of toys, making off with all but one.

Asked if she was supposed to be doing that, the woman replied, "It doesn't matter," and huffed off. To add insult to injury, the store

wouldn't honor its price on the item because it wasn't on the list of "hot" merchandise.

Others reported similar behavior. People behave like animals, pushing, shoving, gouging, cursing and snarling – all in the name of celebrating Christ's Mass. Most stores had to stop opening early or even at midnight on Thanksgiving after shoppers got trampled in the rush.

Can saving some money be that important? At church, we won't be hanging greens and other decorations until the final week, right before Christmas itself. We'll focus on the story leading up to the big event, and talk about why it's still important to us. I'll stick with that and forego the big sales. It's safer, and a lot more calming.

I like the season of gift-giving, to a point, at least. And I know Christmas is important to the economy. Heck, it's as important in our business as in any, and we indulge in the hype and the whirl. We've all got to make a buck.

I just pray I can keep the real holiday in my heart and mind and survive the rest.

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.

Why can't Congress aim higher?

Other Opinions

• Lee Hamilton
Center on Congress

Congressional budget negotiators are moving to meet a Dec. 13 deadline to produce, well, something.

For weeks, we've been told to keep expectations low. There'll be no "grand bargain," negotiators say. Commentators believe that even the narrowest agreement will be a signal achievement. So here's my question: Doesn't that seem like an awfully low bar to you?

Yes, I know. The atmosphere on Capitol Hill is poisonous. The two parties – even the various factions within the parties – can barely stand to be in a room with each other. Expecting a sizable budget accomplishment from Congress right now is like expecting water from a rock. It would take a miracle.

Yet there are consequences to not producing an agreement capable of clarifying fiscal affairs. Right now, government agencies cannot plan ahead; they can't consider long-term projects; they have trouble with staffing; they can't set priorities; they're forced to fund programs that have outlived their usefulness and cannot fund programs they know are necessary.

And that's just the federal bureaucracy. Contractors and people who depend on federal spending can't plan, either. Our economy can't achieve liftoff, and millions of ordinary Americans remain mired by its slow growth. Washington faces tough choices about spending, taxes, and entitlements, and Congress isn't making them.

Things are not wholly bleak. Republican Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the lead House negotiator, and Democrat Patty Murray of Washington, who heads up the Senate team, have been working at least to address the sequester. As you'll recall, this is the draconian set of across-the-board budget cuts put in place in 2011. At first, many agencies were able to defer maintenance, spend money they'd squirreled away, and cut staff by attrition. This next year will be much tougher: agencies are out of easy options, and defense spending faces an immense \$21 billion cut. That will be felt in every congressional district in the country,

given how adept the Defense Department has been at spreading its largesse around. Not surprisingly, pressure is coming from both sides of the aisle to ease the impact.

The sequester is a clever, cutting good and bad government spending without rhyme or reason. If congressional negotiators can take a smarter approach, that's all to the good.

But if they're going to do that, shouldn't they address the real problems? The country needs gradual deficit reduction that avoids disrupting the economy or harming the vulnerable. It needs reforms to Social Security and Medicare that put them on a solid footing for decades to come.

These are daunting challenges, but Congress's toolbox is hardly empty. It could limit itemized tax deductions, increase Medicare premiums for the well-to-do, place caps on spending, shave federal employee benefits to bring them in line with the private sector, increase government fees, sell public assets, put more of the wireless spectrum up for bid, increase the Social Security contributions of higher-income earners, change the consumer price index....

There are literally scores of possibilities, none of them easy, but all of them offering adroit negotiators the chance to craft a long-term solution to problems that have beset Capitol Hill for years and held economic growth far below its potential.

By addressing these issues head on, Congress could move beyond the political machinations that have deeply frustrated so many Americans, and play a constructive role in the

economy: promoting growth by investment in infrastructure and basic research, providing incentives for entrepreneurship and job creation. It could create a responsible framework for reducing spending as the economy grows. It could reform a tax code that everyone agrees is broken.

At some point, Congress will have to put the federal budget on "a sustainable path for the long term," in the words of the Congressional Budget Office. So long as it does not, the economic consequences hurt everyone.

Congressional leaders seem blissfully unconcerned about this and aim only for low-hanging fruit, but Americans know that Congress can and should do better, and are rightly tired of careening from crisis to crisis. As members of Congress continue to make politically attractive suggestions that don't come close to achieving a lasting solution, let's urge them to get real.

It's time for Congress to go big.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

