

When are we going to say 'enough'?

It probably comes as no surprise that 49 states collected more from their taxpayers in 2004 than they had a decade earlier. The only real surprise was that one state — Alaska — saw a decline of 1 percent, but don't mark Alaska down as thrifty, just rich. Most of the state budget comes from oil revenue and Alaska spends more per citizen at \$12,294 than any other state. Kansas fell in the middle of the pack, 28th in per capita state taxes at \$1,933 per person, up about \$500 for the decade. Neighboring Colorado, on the other hand, is in the bottom five in collections per taxpayer.

Colorado is one of the few states with strict constitutional limits on state and local spending. Kansas, having abandoned its tax lid law, has none, and it shows.

State tax rates have been frozen in recent years, but spending keeps on going up. With conservatives losing ground in the Legislature this year, there's great pressure to raise taxes and spend even more.

Increases for schools and just to keep the state running have taken every extra cent Kansas brings in. Schools, colleges and other programs say they need more.

In Colorado, by contrast, officials had to get voter approval just to keep the "extra" money that came in when the economy warmed up.

In Kansas, property taxes on homes now are roughly double those in Colorado, despite years of "tax relief" efforts in Topeka. City and county governments, even those that try to be careful, just keep raising the levies.

And the Kansas economy is not growing, possibly because of the high tax burden here compared to surrounding states.

In Kansas, only the government is growing. A state report last month showed just 6,000 new jobs created in the state over the past year, all in state and local government. Private nonfarm employers actually cut 2,400 jobs over that period.

It doesn't take an economic genius to see that this can't continue. Fewer working taxpayers can't be asked to support an ever-growing government apparatus.

That's apparently what our leaders believe, however. They keep hiring people and raising public salaries, raising taxes and squeezing more out of the long-suffering middle class.

Around here, for instance, the City of Goodland plans to cut taxes slightly but give its workers raises averaging 5 percent and boosted spending by 8.5 percent when property valuation rose. That in a time when most private employers can't manage any raises at all.

You'd think someone would complain. Maybe someone will, but until taxpayers rise up in revolt, taxes and spending are bound to keep on going up.

And up. And up.

— Steve Haynes

Thumbs Up to . . .

√**Ruth Kendell**, on an excellent job at the Geography Bee, and good luck at the state competition. (e-mail)

√**Nancy Sebelius**, we are all rooting for you and await your return. Listen to the doctors. (e-mail from the kids at school)

√**Everybody** who responded to the latest Red Cross blood drive in Norton. (e-mail)

√**Eisenhower Elementary's** "Thinking Cap Quiz Bowl Teams." You made us proud. (e-mail)

√The three **Norton High boys**, who exercised patience in getting me out of a snowy predicament last week. (by telephone)

√**Jessie Redeker**, Northern Valley High School senior, on the scholarship awarded. (e-mail)

(E-mail tomd@nwkansas.com to have a salute placed in this space. Or mail it to 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton 67654, fax to 877-3732, or call 877-3361 or 877-6908.)

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Weather picture: so far, so good

We've had rain and snow and ice on and off this winter season. But not near the amounts that fell to our west and southwest. I wondered as I read those stories in other papers in our area just where we are on the precipitation chart. So I went back to Dec. 1 and tracked the numbers through Tuesday, Jan. 16. Bear in mind we get our numbers from the Kingham farm 9 miles northwest of Norton (Mrs. Fred Kingham is our weather recorder).

Surprisingly, we received 2.62 inches of precipitation in that month and a half. That really helps the cause. Some of it came in the form of rain, much like we would get in the warmer months. As for snowfall, we received 23 1/2 inches. That's what surprised me. I never figured that would be our tally at this point in time. I thought it would be less.

And as far as cold goes, our lowest reading was minus 3.

As much as we need moisture, I am sort of glad we aren't in the position Colby finds itself in after their 19-inch snowfall. That was their second largest single deposit of snow, the record being 20 inches in 1997. I was in awe when I saw what their town looked like. I was over there for two meetings — one last week and one Wednesday of this week. The snow piles were gigantic. Many streets, I am told, are still begging to be dug out. Patience is the best approach residents can take in conditions like that. Of course sometimes Mother Nature enters the picture and helps the snow movers with their work.

One of the most hopeful signs of a recovering drought is seeing field after field after field look like carpet installers put down a sparkling plush white rug, perfectly sized. While there may be a complaint here and there, overall we'll sit back and appreciate later on what winter did for us.

With March generally considered our snowiest month, we can hope it lives up to its billing.

Any way you look at it, we've got a pretty good start on something good!

-td-

How do you readers feel about President Bush sending 21,500 more troops to Iraq, the bulk of them to Baghdad? Let me know. Send an e-mail to tomd@nwkansas.com, write 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton 67654, fax to 877-3732 or drop your thoughts off at the office. I

Good Evening Norton

Tom Dreiling



could initiate another Telegram Poll, much as I did for the gubernatorial election last fall. Simply state "yes" or "no" to the question of 21,500 more troops to Iraq. Include a brief remark if you desire. No signature required. Your name won't be used, unless you ask that we do. If I get enough feedback, I'll begin a new poll. But it's up to you as to what I do. Thanks, in advance.

-td-

What a drive Wednesday turned out to be. Carolyn (Plotts) and I went to Colby for a meeting. US-36 to the six-mile corner was clear and dry. Two miles into the temporary roadway skirting the US-36 construction, we encountered ground blizzards. The winds were strong out of the southwest. And that's the way it was to Oberlin and from there to Colby. The roadways were snowpacked and icy and Carolyn, who lives at Norcat, said they weren't like that when she came to Norton that morning. Our meeting was scheduled to start at 4:30. Not knowing the deteriorating road conditions we expected to be there before 4:30. It was a little after 5:00 when we arrived. And then we faced the same road conditions on the way back, although we didn't take '83' through Oberlin, opting to stay on K383, which was a little bit better. On the way over to Colby, we came up behind a snow plow working the highway just east of Oberlin. Then east of Colby about eight miles (US-24), we watched as a small tractor with a huge hay bale in a carrier behind moved slightly off the roadway to allow traffic behind to safely pass, only to slip off the roadway into the ditch and it looked like it was going to go over. Thankfully, it didn't. Next time I think we'll check on road conditions before we set out. You'd think we would know better.

-td-

I read a while back where some college students were beaten by some thugs for singing our national anthem at a gather-

ing. I read also where some students were told to get off a school bus because they were speaking English. I saw photos on TV of some teenage boys literally beating up a homeless man, who later died of injuries inflicted. I saw television pictures just this week of some teenage girls brutally attacking another girl. In this case, the attack was being recorded and placed on the Internet for the world to see.

What's wrong? Or is there not an answer to that question. Who is falling asleep at the switch? You can't blame society as a whole as we tried doing a number of years ago. That didn't work. And not knowing the backgrounds of the young people involved, we can't point the finger at their parents, or their home environment, or the schools they attend.

But nonetheless it's frightening. I am not surprised anymore at anything I read or see or hear. It's just beyond comprehension. But maybe, as we ponder these examples of deterioration, good lurks in the background.

I was disappointed with FOX News, because to me they overplayed the situation where the girls were beating up another girl, while complaining that those kinds of things can be put on the Internet for all the world to see. If it's inappropriate for such action to be placed on the Internet, why, then, does FOX News continue to show it? They claim to be the world's newsroom, so explain the difference.

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Speaking of FOX, I watch Bill O'Reilly quite often because when he says "the spin stops here," he means it stops with his guests, not particularly with him. He is a 'cause' kind of talk show host — his current 'cause' is seeing that justice is carried out as he highlights circumstances in some states.

He finds stories where judges render a slap on the wrist instead of dishing out a jail sentence and then rides that issue to death. At times he gets something done. If you watch him you know what I'm talking about. I have no fault with that. But I have come to a conclusion: Mr. O'Reilly is in the wrong profession, he should be attorney general. He's certainly more forceful than the one we have.

-td-

Have a good weekend. And why not plan a family outing to the church of your choice?

This teacher had the right answer

At Week's End Your Column

The following came from a reader of this column: The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life. One man, a CEO, decided to explain the problem with education. He argued, "What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?"

He reminded the other dinner guests what they say about teachers: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." To stress his point he said to another guest, "You're a teacher, Bonnie. Be honest. What do you make?"

Bonnie, who had a reputation for honesty and frankness replied, "You want to know what I make?" She paused for a second, then began..."Well, I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make a C+ feel like the Congressional Medal of Honor. I make kids sit through 40 minutes of class time when their parents can't make them sit for 5 without an iPod, Game Cube or movie

rental.

"You want to know what I make?" (She paused again and looked at each and every person at the table.) I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them criticize. I make them apologize and mean it.

"I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions. I teach them to write and then I make them write. I make them read, read, read. I make them show all their work in math.

"I make my students from other coun-

tries learn everything they need to know in English while preserving their unique cultural identity. I make my classroom a place where all my students feel safe. I make my students stand to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, because we live in the United States of America.

"Finally, I make them understand that if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts, they can succeed in life."

(Bonnie paused one last time and then continued.)

"Then, when people try to judge me by what I make, I can hold my head up high and pay no attention because they are ignorant..."

"You want to know what I make?"
"I MAKE A DIFFERENCE. What do you make?"

(To become a part of this column, e-mail to tomd@nwkansas.com, fax 877-3732, drop in mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton 67654, or bring by the office.)