

Legislature begins dealing with problems

The Legislature convened yesterday when they began to tackle the many issues that need to be addressed in 2010, namely the budget. Last Tuesday, two Kansas senators held a press conference where they unveiled a plan to force the state to save money for a "rainy day."

- Sen. Laura Kelly announced the plan with Sen. John Vratil. The plan calls for:
- The state would be required to set aside up to 1 percent of general funds when revenues increase by 3 percent. If revenues increased by 5 percent, 1 percent would be set aside, and 4 percent would remain available to lawmakers. If revenues increased by 3.5 percent, .5 percent would be set aside.
 - Once the fund reached 7.5 percent of the state's general fund budget, lawmakers wouldn't have to set aside any additional funds.
 - Lawmakers could dip into the funds following any year in which revenues declined. Dipping into the fund would take a majority vote.

The state currently has no reserve funds, but lawmakers are supposed to have 7.5 percent of carryover funds each year. That has not been the case in recent years, and \$1 billion has been cut from the budget. The Legislature is looking at more than a \$350 million hole as they create the 2011 budget.

The 2011 budget isn't the only concern for legislatures as revenues have decreased for the last three years and are expected to continue to decrease.

According to the *Topeka Capital-Journal*, revenues are projected to decline by 5.1 percent at the end of the 2010 fiscal year. For 2011, revenues are expected to decrease by another 2.3 percent.

In 2009, budget cuts were made to every state department from education to the department of transportation. Few options remain for the 2011 budget, but raising taxes and continuing to cut spending are at the top of the list.

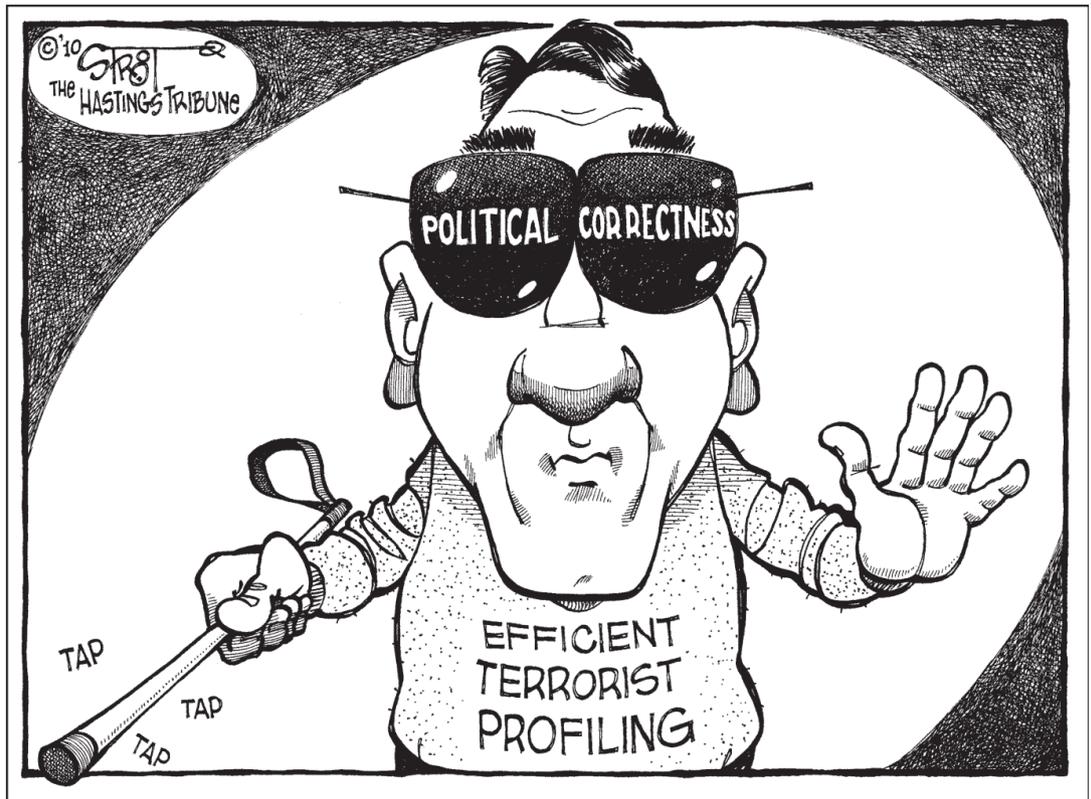
Gov. Parkinson commended the proposed Rainy Day Fund because it would help set aside money for future needs. However, the fund would do nothing to help the current problems.

The only way to immediately make up lost funds is to cut spending, as the Governor has already done several times. Education took the biggest hit when further cuts were made at the end of November. The latest round of school payments has been delayed again.

In *The Capital-Journal*, Gov. Parkinson said the quality of education will decline if further cuts are made. Never-mind the affect past cuts have had on schools with many having trouble meeting payroll and having to cut back on staff and other resources. Many have joined Schools for Fair Funding, threatening a lawsuit over the lack of funds.

Too bad the Rainy Day Fund hadn't been proposed several years ago.

—Erica Bradley



The January tax appointment

The house is quiet now, though still busy as January brings its own sort of frenzy, a quieter frenzy. Nancy pouring over the books getting ready for the January tax appointment!

Occasionally the silence is shattered by a few expletives "##* computer!" or screams of "Let me see your checkbook!" and "Why don't you fill in the payee?" or "How can you spend that much money on-----?"

There isn't much response from the living room. After 38 years of marriage you learn to ignore a lot. Saw a cartoon of an old couple; wife says to husband, "What did you say? I quit listening when we got married."

That's funny but in truth it doesn't help a person vent their rage if they think no one is listening. And much of the time that's all an angry person wants: someone to listen.

The eldest daughter is becoming very adept at diverting my ire. Several times over Christmas break when I got all worked up about an issue, she would look at me and say, "Mom, why don't you-----?" and proceed to give some helpful suggestion.

Annoyed as I was, I found that even more annoying. But I got the message. She doesn't want to listen to me!

The last advice she gave was write

Back Home Nancy Hagman



about it in the paper. Interestingly enough my annoyances must be more trivial than they seem at the time because I can barely remember them when I sit down at the computer.

But here are some I do. First, the media and celebrity! A news magazine did a whole issue on celebrity prompted by Tiger Woods. I barely read the article but I did look at the pictures. They were of people who have been involved in scandals and are evidently so well-known the captions did not identify them, nor could I. I have no idea who they were or why I should care about what they did. I'm guessing the only reason anyone does is because of the media's 24/7 coverage of them. Anything that gets that much airtime must be important.

Another thing I recently read referred to Fox News viewers as right wing nut jobs. Yes, Fox has a bias, but so do other news outlets. Each news organization must strike a chord with a large number

of people or it will not stay in business long. Many people are conservative. I'm conservative about a number of things. Sometimes I listen to Fox. I resent being classified as a nut because I watch Fox, attend church, live in the Midwest, eat meat, never felt the need to learn a second language because I don't travel and live 1,000 miles from a border, etc. Sometimes I listen to MSNBC. I just LISTEN: and no matter which side I listen to it often leaves me very, very annoyed.

Everyone has something to say. We may not like it. We can choose to take it to heart or not. We don't have to solve other people's problems. We don't have to give advice or take up their causes, but we need to be respectful.

If you don't agree but feel the need to say something try, "That's an interesting perspective." Or "I never thought of it like that."

If you are too busy to listen you can always grumble, "I have to work on the books because we have a tax appointment tomorrow and the husband forgets to fill things in on the checks he writes! SORRY!"

It never hurts to say you're sorry. Whew---the daughter is right, I feel so much better after writing about this!

Thanks for listening!



In case you have forgotten, the addresses for this column are:

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Agriculture is up to the task

Insight

John Schlageck

The end of agriculture in America is near. American agriculture will soon lose its competitive edge.

The high costs of producing food in America, compared with the costs in other countries, are pushing American producers out of business as competitors around the world develop enough to serve the same markets.

Overseas producers with lower input costs will increasingly be able to undersell American producers.

Other major factors that will change the face of American agriculture include energy shortages, exhausted land and limited water resources.

Opponents of today's agriculture suggest stripping away the romance and nostalgia surrounding agriculture and seeing it for what it is — a business.

They argue it's a type of business with limited potential for long-term profits because of its competitive nature.

Look at the big picture, they say. The whole world can produce crops in 2010.

But in America, the cost of feeding hungry mouths around the world has risen to the point where it is not profitable compared with alternative types of businesses.

Thus, the people, money and other resources invested in agriculture currently will be forced to leave for greener pastures.

Are these startling new revelations or are they predictions of those totally out of touch with the business of farming and ranching?

Critics of American agriculture contend that crop yields will not keep up with

duced tillage farming, farmers continue to build organic matter and improve the soil tilth. There is no reason to consider this practice will be discontinued.

New and improved crop varieties are continually coming down the pike. Production practices continue to evolve and improve.

As for the question of scarce water, this is always a major concern in farm and ranch country. Producers constantly chart rainfall amounts and monitor weather conditions. In Kansas, farmers are aware of changes in the Ogallala Aquifer.

They are tuned into water and the conservation of this vital resource. Some, especially in the western half of the state, are concerned about the potential of long-term climate change. If such a phenomenon should occur, there is the possibility Kansas could become more arid — more like New Mexico, for example.

Barring a major shift in our climate, crops will continue to be planted in western Kansas. Production could be less than now, but this land will be farmed and farmed wisely.

Without question, today's crop of agricultural detractors raises some interesting possibilities. But American agriculture is up to the task. This country has the minds, machinery and dedication to continue producing for people around the globe.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.