

What we need is a sensible tax solution

On the
Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



There is one thing the Kansas Legislature must do before it adjourns "sine die," and that is to fix the state's tax system so it works as intended.

The 2012 Legislature left the system in a terrible mess. It adopted income-tax cuts proposed by Gov. Sam Brownback but not the corresponding adjustments – such as eliminating some tax deductions, or loopholes, and retaining the state's sales tax at 6.3 percent.

With the balancing moves, the state would have enough money to finance its current spare budget. Without them, experts project a \$267 million "shortfall" in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Everyone agreed on the problem, but no one could agree on how to plug that hole. The Senate passed a tax plan believing the House would agree to a conference committee to hash out the shortage, but that didn't happen. The governor signed the bill, apparently feeling the Legislature would have to come to its senses.

So far this year, however, there's been no change in the mood of either chamber. The House is reluctant to keep the higher sales tax. The rate is now 6.3 percent, but is scheduled to drop to 5.8 percent. House members say voters were promised the sales tax passed under Gov. Mark Parkinson during the Great Recession would be temporary. They still seem to feel that way.

The Senate, like the House, now is controlled by conservative allies of the governor, and in theory, he should be calling the shots. From here, however, the members of both chambers seem to be a lot more independent than critics claim. Getting them together could be a real trick.

And while we're comfortable with the current level of state spending, hardly anyone thinks another \$267 million in cuts won't hurt.

Compromise? So far, no one is talking about it. We think, however, that's what voters would like to see. And we're not real picky about how it's done. Right now, public schools are nervous, universities are sweating another round of cuts, the highway fund has been robbed twice already and advocates for the disabled, mental-health care and prisons, and a host of others are clamoring for more money.

A combination of retaining some sales tax and adjusting some tax rates makes sense. The governor has pinned a lot of his hopes on his plan to eliminate the income tax, but even he did not plan to do it this year. With a big start made, there's no hurry to polish it off – at least not for most of us.

Better to adopt a sensible plan, than wait a year or two and see how things go.

Sensible. Legislature. Governor.

That may be asking for a lot, but we think it's vital to the state's future.

– Steve Haynes



The reading bill and the future of our kids

Victor Hugo once said, "He who opens a school door, closes a prison." The words by the mid-nineteenth century French author of *Les Miserables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* should impact those who propose various cuts and changes to the State of Kansas educational system.

Governor Sam Brownback, in his State address, introduced his so called reading bill. It proposed holding back those third grade students who failed to pass a state approved reading test. (Kansas legislators have now changed that to first grade and given parents the final say. Interest in the bill is declining.) We all agree strong reading skills are necessary for academic success, as well as life success, but the path to become an accomplished reader is varied.

A paper published by the National Association of School Psychologists states "educational research fails to support grade retention as an effective intervention." The nationwide estimated annual cost of retention is

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\$13 billion. In Texas alone, in 2006-2007, the cost of retaining slightly over 200,000 students was over two billion dollars. Within the year they repeat, children may improve, however it often begins to wane as they advance in their scholastic career. It is an expensive and unsure way of improving a child's education and in many cases has been linked to a higher drop out rate. Not a cheap or necessarily successful solution.

After the numerous alterations to the reading bill, Republican Representative Ward Cassidy of St. Francis, the House Education Budget Committee Chair, described the Senate bill in this way,

"All it really does is draw attention to the plight of reading."

The long term effects of being unable to read are overwhelming, both as an individual and a society. The non-profit agency, Kids at Risk Action (KARA), reports 85 percent of the juveniles appearing in the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate. Nationwide, 60 percent of all prison inmates are as well. In the State of Kansas, 42 percent of the 8100 inmates have completed the 11th grade or less. Education matters.

School funding in our state continues to be problematic. Any cuts undermine a child's future and the communities in which they live. Governor Brownback seeks a change to the state constitution which would allow only legislators to determine school funding amounts.

The choice is simple; fund the child; feed the inmate. Just because you serve as a politician doesn't mean you know the best way to educate a child. Mail to: mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Determination is needed to beat fear and terrorism

Some random things I've seen on t-shirts: "I'll sign up for anything if it involves getting a free t-shirt!" "Date a runner, every other athlete is just a player!" "13.1. I don't go all the way." My eldest daughter is a triathlete. She swims, she bikes and she runs.

Becoming a triathlete was not an easy thing, especially the swimming part. It used to puzzle me when watching kids at swimming lessons: some knew how to dive in, exhale and inhale at the right moment while some spit and sputtered every time their head went under. Kate fell somewhere in between. She never quite got the rhythm of it.

So in her 30's she took swimming lessons so she could swim distances. She purchased a couple of pricy bicycles. She became a triathlete!

Holcomb, where she works, has a very strong Recreation Center. Several of her friends are hit with the same fitness bug. They go around to races, near and far.

This is the thing about races: while they do keep track of times and, of course, someone will have the best time, everyone participating wins. Sometimes without even passing the finish line they become conquerors, they vanquish the foes.

At triathlons everyone cheers for everyone: the truest form of sport.

The Rec has a supportive trainer who has helped Kate along the way. Elizabeth, on the other hand, has decided to become a Marathon runner.

This Too
Shall Pass
Nancy
Hagman



No trainer, she just down loaded information from the internet and began to train. Last year she ran the half marathon at Oklahoma City (13.1 miles--she didn't go all the way.) Patricia also ran.

Who knows how they finished. The point is: they finished! They got the t-shirt! They are more than players!

In the fall, Elizabeth began training in earnest for the whole marathon. An injury caused her to reassess; she had to scale back to the half marathon. This year Kate will run with her. Patricia will be crossing a finish line of her own: a journey into motherhood.

One of the first things we thought of after the tragedy at the Boston Marathon was how will this affect other races? The OKC Memorial Marathon is a tribute to those who died in a bombing!

I am so angry this has happened---- AGAIN!

In his first press conference after the Marathon bombing, President Obama promised he would not rest until we found out who did it and why.

I said to the hubby, "They may find out who did it but they will never find

out why!" Usually I have a very short temper; then I get over it. To my surprise with every passing day I am more outraged at this recent bombing.

How dare they? How dare they kill innocent people? A child? Cripple people? Runners! Hold a town hostage to fear! Forever mar an international event where people come together in joy and celebration!

I was reading "A Mighty Heart" the story of the 2002 kidnapping and execution in Pakistan of Wall Street Journalist, Daniel Pearl, when the bombing occurred. It was written by his wife, Mariane, who was expecting their first child at the time of Danny's death.

Mariane says "People need to know the truth. If we want to put an end to terrorism, terrorists will have to face opponents as determined as they are themselves."

There is NO justification or explanation for terrorism.

I am pleased the OKC Memorial Marathon will be held tomorrow, April 27 (unless a credible threat is discovered).

To cancel it, to retreat from life because of fear allows the terrorists to win. We have nothing to apologize for.

Think of the runners. The swimmers: exhale and inhale.

They do not do it for the T-shirts or a medal or applause. They do it because they are determined; as we all must.

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