

Windfall money should be returned to taxpayers

Gov. Sam Brownback proposed a long-overdue reform last week, putting forth a bill that would bar local governments from spending any windfall they get when property valuations take a big jump.

The governor's proposal would require a city or county, or other taxing district, to lower its levy when total property valuation goes up, rather than keeping taxes the same and reaping a windfall of uncontrolled spending.

The alternative would be taking the increase to a vote of the people.

This bill may not be popular with city and county officials, who often like to have more money to spend. But it should make Kansas taxpayers — burdened with high and rising property-tax bills — happy.

These officials told us a few years ago, when the Legislature eliminated the old "tax lid" law, that they would be responsible. The result has been continued growth in city and county spending across the state.

In our area, the responsibility shown by county commissioners and city councils varies. Nearly all budgets have grown with or faster than the rate of inflation. A study by Nor'West Newspapers a couple of years ago showed that some had remarkably high increases, while others were far lower.

Temptation to spend a "windfall" is great, because the money is almost "free." Tax rates do not have to be increased, and for the most part, individual taxpayers see no increase the first year.

However, most windfalls are temporary.

When the underlying cause goes away, so does the newfound wealth. This happened in Decatur County a few years ago when a boom in oil production caused the county's valuation to shoot up. The commissioners spent the money, but when valuation dropped the next year, had to make some painful cuts.

This year, in a similar situation, they were more cautious, but still spent some of an oil-valuation windfall. Now they propose to give county employees a 4 percent pay raise.

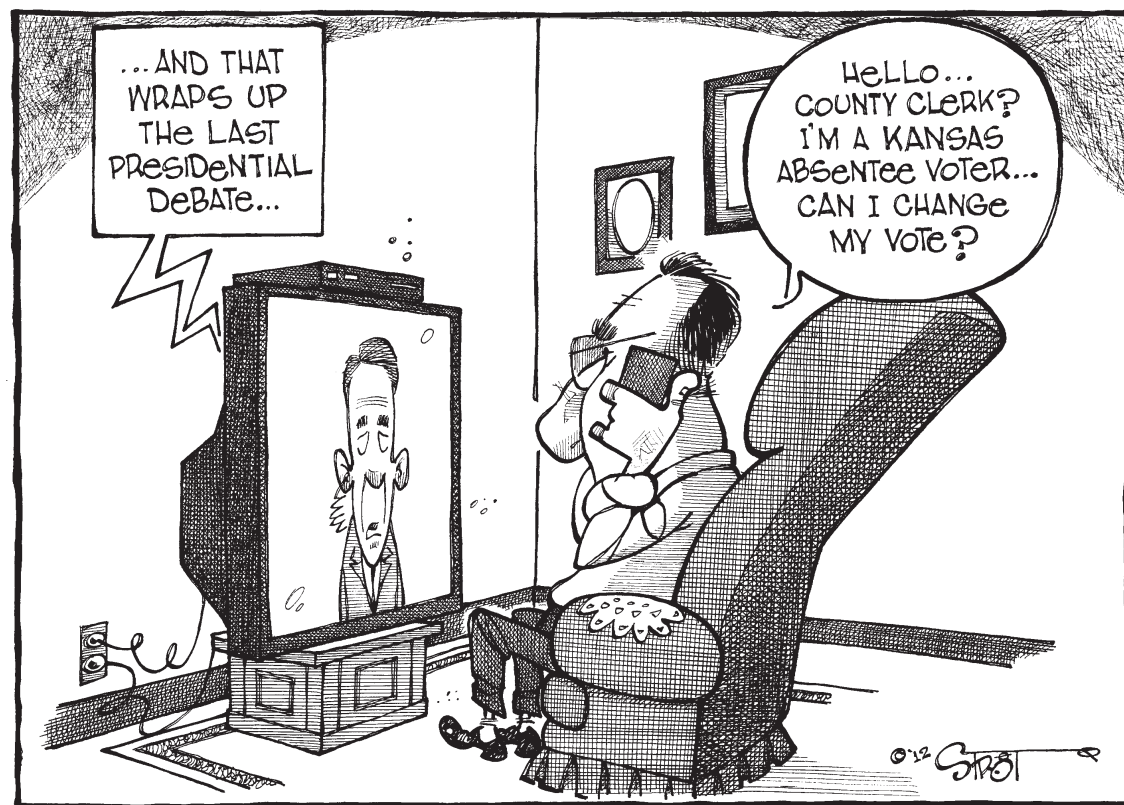
We see nothing wrong with putting an increase in spending in such a situation to a vote. If the need is as great as commissioners or council members sometimes feel, then they should have no trouble convincing citizens to vote for it.

If, on the other hand, people see public employees with better insurance and higher pay than they have, it might be a hard sell.

Either way, it's democracy at work, a reminder to everyone that the taxpayers support government, but only as much as they want and need — and that may be less than those spending the money would like.

The cap on property-tax collections would be flexible enough to exempt new construction, the governor said, protecting cities and counties from being squeezed by actual growth.

Good for the governor, we say. Now, let's see if the Legislature, which includes a lot of former local officials, will keep the people's needs in mind when it gets its hands on this bill. — *Steve Haynes*



Woman backs pool project

Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

As a hometown girl, I take great pride in this little town nestled in the Sappa Valley, and so my concern for the future of Oberlin runs deep. I did not realize how great Oberlin was until I left for college. I yearned for a trip back home, and jumped at each opportunity.

Our people care. The saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," rings true in this town. We watch out for one another and

care for each other's well-being. This is why I am writing this letter. I have moved back by choice and now have married a farmer — so we are here indefinitely. We have become involved with our church and the Booster Club, and partake in many of the cultural and recreational activities this area offers.

Although we have no children yet, we make decisions that support the future of Oberlin citizens. I encourage voters, young and old, to make a decision for the future of Oberlin on Tuesday: the decision to vote YES for the new pool.

Molly (Coleman) Olson, Oberlin

Group gives ideas for future

To the Editor:

Monday evening, Oct. 22, was one of those times when conflicting schedules made keeping commitments difficult. In spite of those conflicts, 25-plus individuals attended a Community Conversation sponsored by Decatur Tomorrow.

These citizens took time to look forward and envision our community as we would like to see it in seven years. Here are the three primary areas they chose to focus on: bringing in more business, better communication within the community and building a stable medical community.

Within these three areas, they had many new and creative ideas to build the growth and stability of Decatur County. During the next couple of weeks, the Decatur Tomorrow Steering Committee will be contacting nominated residents to organize Action Teams to put those ideas to work. Other residents will be recruited as the needs of the Action Teams develop.

How can you be involved? If one of these three general topics are of interest to you, please contact any of the Steering Committee members listed below and volunteer. The committee made over 75 phone

calls and contacted civic and social organizations throughout the community to invite people to the conversation. If we missed you, don't be discouraged. Volunteering is always the best way to get involved.

Join us in making Decatur County the very best place to live and work in Kansas!

Decatur Tomorrow Steering Committee
Mike Gawith, Jeff Leitner, C.J. Peters, Christina Gizzarelli, Grace Randal, Mary Long, Carolyn Plotts, Norma McCallister, Ruth Miesner and Deanna Castle

It's been a catch-up week

Looking back over the past week, all I see is a blur. We didn't go anywhere or do anything. Did the laundry and a little yard work — that's about it.

We're still unpacking from Mexico and trying to catch up on our rest. Which, I know, is impossible. You can never really catch up. Doesn't keep me from trying, though.

-ob-

This column appears on the editorial page, yet I seldom "editorialize." Like everyone else, I have opinions on many subjects. Most don't seem worthy of an entire column, so I'm content to drop little "opinion bombs" along the way.

One opinion that probably garnered the most reaction (including those on abortion) was my stand on spanking. I'm all for it, even though I believe children can be raised without it.

My main thought is that children need consistent (not to be confused with constant), fair discipline. A spanking is not a beating. Adults don't need to prove they're stronger than a little kid. But sometimes, a swat to the seat of learning will get a child's attention.

Speaking of abortion; I'm against it. If you're pregnant, it's a baby. I am in favor of birth control. If you don't want a baby, don't get pregnant. And there are lots of ways to avoid that.

Another opinion: I do not believe in UFOs. Some people believe we've been visited by aliens from another planet. No. Those are your in-laws from Roswell.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
cplotts65@gmail.com

I think if we weren't the only ones in this universe, God would have told us. He didn't say, "On the sixth day I created a man on planet Earth and a little green man on Mars."

Here's another: Washing machines really do eat socks. If you looked at my folding table, you would know this is true. I have about five odd socks laying there, waiting. Waiting for some miracle to produce their mate.

I have no idea where the matching socks may be. Under the bed; in a suitcase or down the drain.

This is more a motto than an opinion: The amount of clutter is in direct proportion to the area of flat surface.

This I learned from my mother. Bless her heart, she could stack more stuff on a coffee table, a shelf, a dresser or a window sill than anyone I know. I have to fight my tendencies in that direction.

So, if you're looking for in-depth, contemplative columns on deep topics like world peace or global warming, you better look elsewhere.

If, however, you don't mind a light-hearted look at life through my rose-colored glasses, I'm your girl. If a cause crosses my path and

I feel strongly about it, I'll share it with you. I don't expect total agreement, just consideration.

Thanks for letting me share a little bit of my life with you. Perhaps, through it all, you'll see what I see: That we're all no better or no worse. Just people trying to make sense of and get along in this world.

From the Bible

And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they called the blind man, saying unto him, be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way.

— Mark 10:49-52

Thanks for the red, white and blue

To the Editor:

Citizens of Oberlin, thank you for painting Oberlin patriotic! Did it make you feel "grateful" when you looked at the displays? IF it made you want to get out and VOTE, then the project was a success!

The Presidential election has never been as important as it is this year. Educate yourselves before you vote.

Encourage your friends and families to read and listen. Offer your neighbor a ride to the polls. Vote as if your family's future depends on it. It does.

Need a ride? Call Sharon Addleman at 475-2123.

We all appreciate the high-school students who painted the fire hydrants and the grade-school children who chose to make posters. There are so many beautifully decorated business windows that it was tough to decide who the winners were. All over town, flags are flying and a few yards were decorated. We hope the photos of the winners will still get printed in *The Herald*. Visitors to town are impressed.

For awhile, we hope that all of these efforts have made you smile. We hope that it made you "Proud to Be an American."

Painting Oberlin Patriotic
Kem Bryan, Sharon Addleman,

Mary Ann Erickson, Ruth Miesner and Marcia Lohofener

In the U.S.A.

America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.

— Abraham Lincoln
Feb. 12, 1809 - April 15, 1895
16th President

Hays woman supports senator

To the Editor:

I would like to encourage all voters of the 40th Senate District to view the debate between Sens. Allen Schmidt and Ralph Ostmeyer by going to www.shptv.org/index.php/events/383-kansas-candidates-2012 or watching it on KOOD (PBS) at 2 p.m. Sunday.

By watching this debate, it is clear to see that Sen. Schmidt is well educated on the issues (clearly understands the educational system in Florida that was discussed in the last legislative session) and is articulate in speaking on them. Sen. Schmidt

has a genuine concern about bringing jobs and housing to our rural communities here in Northwest Kansas and works on committees that are instrumental in making this happen. He understands that we need strong schools, as well, to draw people back in order to grow our communities. He is a veteran who retired as a colonel in the Army.

It is obvious that he gained much experience in his 32 years of service and used that as an effective senator in the 36th District. He operated his third-generation dairy farm for 13 years and served as president of the

Kansas Dairy Association.

I urge the voters of northwest Kansas to not vote by party only this election, but to view this debate and really know how each candidate stands on our important issues. Voting in a strong leader that will stand up for northwest Kansas, not just a person with the right initial behind their name, is the key to survival of our rural schools and communities that we know and love.

Please view this debate before placing your vote on Tuesday.

Kathy Rome, Hays

Secretary asks you to vote 'yes'

To the Editor:

Vote yes on the watercraft constitutional amendment Nov. 6. The airwaves and our mail boxes are full of information about the candidates in the upcoming election, but this is an important constitutional amendment that — if passed — will allow for fairer taxation of watercraft (boats) and make Kansas watercraft taxation competitive with surrounding states. Some voters may ask, "Why should I care?"

Property taxes on watercraft in Kansas are so high that they discourage boat ownership, limiting families' opportunity for water recreation. Compared to surrounding states, Kansas watercraft taxes are so high that many Kansans register their boats illegally in neighboring states, so Kansas counties lose property taxes. The high tax rates also reduce in-state boat sales, affecting our marinas and boat dealers and reducing state sales tax revenue.

The Legislature showed biparti-

san, overwhelming support — 121 to 2 in the House and 40 to 0 in the Senate — for placing this amendment on the ballot. The amendment may be difficult to understand because the ballot includes the entire article of the constitution that is affected, not just the change. The only change is the addition of the words "and watercraft." Adding just those two words will give the Legislature

the opportunity to create a fairer tax treatment of watercraft. You can give them that opportunity by voting yes.

This change is good for Kansas and Kansas families, and we encourage you to vote yes on the amendment.

Robin Jennison, Topeka
Secretary, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism

Man favors stores' stance

To the Editor:

I am greatly encouraged by and admire the stance that Hobby Lobby has taken in filing a lawsuit against the mandate in Obamacare that would force the Christian business to provide the "morning-after pill" and "week-after pill" in their health insurance plan.

The penalty for not complying could be up to a staggering \$1.3 million per day. As an employee at Hobby Lobby, I am honored to work

for a company that is willing to take a stand for righteousness.

Whatever you believe concerning contraception, or abortion-inducing drugs, can you at least agree that the government has no right to force any organization to violate their convictions? Hobby Lobby should indeed be commended for refusing to be silent in light of such a draconian example of government overreach.

Nicholas Heald, Park City

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