

Schools need to work with state on budgets

The 2012 legislative season is fast upon us. School budgets will be one of the big issues, what with the state's finances perennially tight and the Legislature having messed up the income tax system something fierce last year.

But before joining the fight, we'd urge the state's teachers, educators and school boards to take a deep breath and offer to work with the governor and Legislature to make some sense out of the tax situation.

Unless their purpose is simply politics — to make the governor and his Republican allies look bad — they have nothing to gain from picking a fight.

The governor has already said he wants the tax situation fixed. He's promised not to cut schools. As long as the Legislature will do something about the income tax, there's no reason to believe he isn't telling the truth.

In effect, he's offered an olive branch to the school interests, which consume about half the state's budget.

The tax situation became a mess near the end of last year's session when the Senate, under pressure to get something done on the income tax, a key plank in the governor's platform, passed a bill that included nearly all his proposed cuts but none of the "flattening" changes he'd proposed to eliminate "loopholes" such as the deductions for home mortgage interest

and other popular tax breaks.

Everyone, especially the Senate, just assumed the two houses would negotiate differences on the tax bill and come up with something they could live with. That didn't happen, however. The House just slammed the Senate bill and sent it on to the governor, who signed it.

That left the state with a projected shortfall in coming years, as much as \$700 million a year, assuming there is no fix for the income tax, although that figure keeps dropping as the economy improves.

This clearly was not what the governor wanted, but as one veteran statehouse reporter likes to say, "He signed it, so he's got to share the blame."

So true. And the governor has said the revenue system needs to be fixed. It'll be the big issue this year.

How well it's fixed and how education fares may depend on how well everyone who sees the need can work together. The governor has signaled his intent. The state's school boards appear to be ready to work with him. The teachers? So far, they've not come around, but they should.

This administration says it's a friend of education, and they might just get farther by joining in than by howling. — *Steve Haynes*

Lights never seem to go away

It's time to take down the Christmas decorations. Past time, really.

I know, a lot of people do that on New Year's Day. Christmas is over, right?

Well, not really.

In the church, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are the big celebration, but that's just the start of Christmas. The season runs 12 days, until the Feast of the Epiphany on Jan. 6. That was Sunday.

The church observes another season. Advent, leading up to Christmas. It's a time of sober reflection and preparation for the joyous event. Many churches don't decorate for Christmas until near the end of Advent.

So, a few years ago, we agreed, or Cynthia said, I can't remember for sure, that we'd leave our lights and stuff up until Christmas was over. She likes decorations and she really likes lights.

So, Sunday we were supposed to turn our outdoor lights out. Then she decided to leave them on until Wednesday "so the paper guy would have light in the morning." Might even take them off the bushes and roll them up — if they're not stuck in ice and snow. Some years that's been a problem, though in Kansas, it's not often we see a white Christmas.

The problem with having a white Christmas is that it usually turns into a white January, and then a white February, before it thaws. It just doesn't warm up much this time of year, especially when you have snow cover, which reflects the sun's light and heat back into space.

Indoors is another thing, however. Our son is coming home this weekend — he was busy painting his new house at Christmas — and Cynthia



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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thia decided to save the presents, his and ours, until he gets here.

So, the tree stays up, and all those lights and decorations on every flat surface and house plant inside. Except for the ones on the cedar chest in the dining room. They died. The lights on the house plants, the ones in the new bay window, the ones in the TV room stay on. So do the ones around the nativity set in the fireplace.

And the tree. So there.

After that, I guess, we'll put the decorations away. But it'll only be temporary, because, you see, she likes lights. I've told you that before, right? Or you've driven down Cass Avenue at night. You can spot our block.

Thing is, I think she has another set of lights ready to go out. Red and white ones to honor another saint's

day come February.

It's not exactly a religious holiday anymore, but when it comes to excuses to put out lights on long, dark nights, any port in a storm.

At least, I think that's happening. I spotted several bags full of red and white lights from the hardware store the other day. These are LED lights, so they shouldn't run up the power bill too much.

And there's no evidence of red-and-white decorations for the flat spaces inside yet. Not that I've seen, at least. No hearts or cards or red, heart-shaped wreaths.

Of course, there are no vacant flat spaces in our house until after the kid has been here and we open the presents.

Merry Christmas. Happy New Year. And, uh, Happy Valentine's Day, I guess.

From the Bible

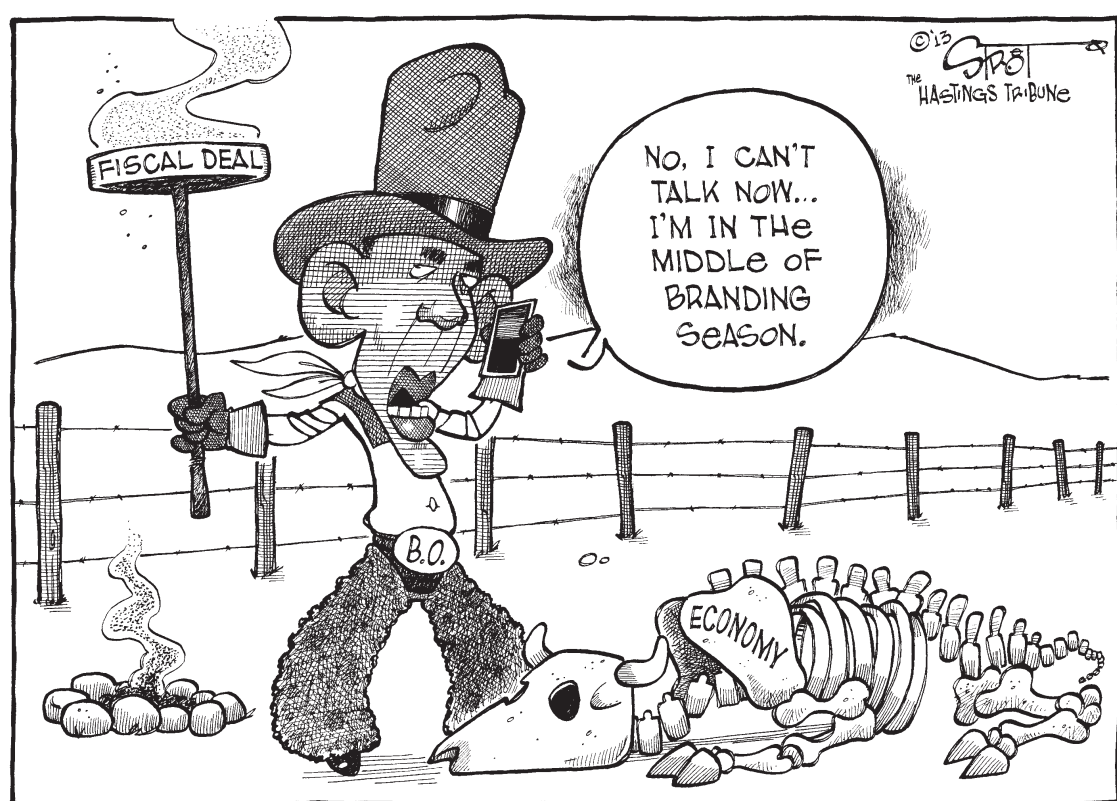
And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.

— Ephesians 3:9

In the U.S.A.

"Ours is the only country deliberately founded on a good idea."

— John Gunther
Aug. 30, 1901-May 29, 1970
Journalist and author



Lazy grooming not for her

One of my pet peeves has been the unkempt manner in which some people go out of the house. You know the ones I mean: their hair hasn't seen a comb all day, you're pretty sure they didn't brush their teeth and they're still in their pajamas.

It all stems from being raised on a farm. When farm kids went to town, we were made to not only dress up, but to clean up. You could be dirty from head to toe for life on the farm, but when it was time to "go to town," it was time to bathe, wash your hair and put on your best.

Town kids could spot a spit-and-polished country bumpkin a mile away and vice versa. A country kid knew who the townies were because of their disheveled appearance. That and the fact that town kids weren't being drug all over town by a mother with a death grip on their ear.

I wish I were more the Donna Reed type who looks like a million all the time, but to this day I make the distinction between what is acceptable attire at home and what is appropriate when you go to the store. I might look like the "wreck of the Hesperus" at home, but a quick trip to the store for bread and milk warrants a clean shirt and slacks, a poof of the hair and a slather of lip gloss. Maybe even a quick squirt of perfume if there's no time for a shower.



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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I hate to admit it, but I had a bad attitude about people who looked like they didn't even try to make themselves presentable. That is until I became one of them.

Saturday was one of those days. We slept in. I didn't dress, wash my face or even fix breakfast before I began working on the books for a nonprofit organization we are part of. The annual meeting is next week and I had a kajillion reports to create. I was totally immersed in my work. I didn't eat all day — just coffee. The day flew by and before I knew it, it was after 5 p.m.

The night before we had loaned our van to a friend who needed to take a load of kids to a wrestling tournament, and she called as she was on her way home. The thought came to me in a flash that if I met her at a certain intersection on the highway, it would save us a 30 mile round trip. I could ride with her into her hometown and drive our van home. She was about ten miles from

the intersection and we lived about 11 miles away.

It was a plan, but it required Jim and I to leave the house immediately. No taking a look in the mirror; no changing clothes; no combing hair. We met our friend and as I was getting out of the truck Jim said, "Hey, could you go by the store and pick up some bananas, potato chips, sour cream and cough syrup?"

And that is how I found myself at the grocery in my pajamas. I can't lie — they weren't even my pajamas. They were Jim's. He has the warmest, plaid, fleece loungers, and in the winter, I love to wear them. I prayed I could slip in, make my purchase and get out unnoticed. But no. Barely in the door and someone says, "Hi, Carolyn. What are you doing out?"

This experience has humbled me. I promise, from now on, I will cut people a little slack and not be so judgmental. Perhaps they had a day like mine.

Potatoes were too exciting

Christmas is over without a trip to the emergency room.

This is always a good thing.

Now you would think that when the kids left home, we would be able to stop worrying about those trips to the ER. (Somehow, Steve always seemed to get the shift that ended up taking one or the other of the munchkins to see the doctor, and usually for stitches.)

This year, however, it was our granddaughter who probably saved both of us from getting some really nasty burns.

It all started out with our regular Christmas dinner. Even though there were just the two of us this year, we had steak, twice baked potatoes and green beans, our traditional dinner.

Steve suggested that I put the potatoes on early so that they could be well baked and ready to be removed from their skins, mashed and returned to the shells in time to put them under the steak, which would be under the broiler. Normally, we like to cook steak outside on the grill. This year, however, the weather was not cooperating with our little charcoal grill, so it was inside for the steak and potatoes.

I picked a dozen nice Colorado



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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bakers, pricked them all over with a knife and put them in the oven at 350 degrees. In an hour to an hour and a half, I figured, I could pull them out and get them and finish preparing them for twice baking. I always fix 10 to 12 potatoes when I do twice bakes because: 1. They freeze well. 2. It's just as easy to bake 10 as two, and most importantly 3. They're a pain in the tush to make but we love them, so making a dozen means I get to enjoy them six times and only have to make them once.

After about an hour, I checked the potatoes and one had exploded. Not just a little like they sometimes do. No, this potato exploded all over the back of the oven. It looked like someone had thrown a pot of rice in there. I was horrified, and called Steve to inspect the mess. There wasn't much we could do, so we

checked a couple of the close ones.

They needed another half hour. So, we got on the computer and called our granddaughter in Augusta, Ga., to see how her Christmas was going. She's almost 3 and she was on a present-and-sugar high, running around in circles. She only stopped long enough to say "Hi," and she was off again.

Her other grandparents were there. We were jealous. But we enjoyed watching the chaos, then went in to check the potatoes.

A second one had exploded! And this was one that we had just checked. We would have both been in a world of hurt if it had decided to go off in our faces.

Luckily, we had plenty of potatoes left for dinner and the freezer, and the oven needed cleaning anyway. Boy, did it need cleaning.

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Monday the start of a new session

Monday, the newly elected Legislature will gather in the Capitol for the start of the 2013 session.

This will be the first time in six years that all legislators will have an office in the Statehouse. Because I am now the Education Budget chair, I will have my own office. I will be in Topeka getting training on running a committee and setting up my office.

If you have an opportunity to travel to Topeka this session to see the Legislature in action, or if you would like to see the Kansas taxpayers \$340 million investment in the Capitol renovations, I would enjoy showing you around. If you could give me a few days notice prior to your arrival, it would help me plan my schedule to try to have a little more time to spend with you.

Although I disagree with much of the expense associated with the renovations, the fresh look, additional space and furnishings in the Capitol are impressive. The inside is now completely finished



Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy
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and the outside is to be finished by December.

There will be many bills discussed during the coming session, but it appears the headline issues will be taxes, government spending (the budget) and education finance. I would sincerely appreciate your thoughts and will post my contact information as soon as I have everything updated.

Kansas Revenue Update: Tax-only revenues in November came in \$2.5 million above estimates that had been revised by the Consensus Revenue Estimating Group earlier this month. The good news is the amount of individual income taxes

collected was \$3.5 million higher than projected for November, which puts the total to \$55 million more than was collected last year. A question we are all asking is what is going to happen when the income tax goes away?

Sales tax collections fell short of projections in November by \$29 million, but they were above last November. The sales tax is \$27 million ahead of what was brought in during July to November 2011.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering northwest Kansas.