

Congress to blame, too for our fiscal mess

Are we perhaps overlooking someone when it comes to blame for the financial mess our country is in? From our little corner of the world, we would most likely point to the elected people in those hearing rooms on Capitol Hill so smartly perched in those softly padded chairs behind those mile-long looking half-moon shaped desks.

Members of the House of Representatives.
Members of the United States Senate.
Congress in short.

There they sit, looking like they had just been prepped for a fashion parade, ready to pounce on the suspects seated 40 feet away. And then to question the guests' need for money, while trying to convince themselves they had no part in this American tragedy.

We have always been under the impression that we send those people back to Washington to look after our (the nation's) best interests. Had they been looking they might have been able to head off what is rapidly turning into a nightmare.

"Mercy, I never saw this coming!" they would plead.

We would suggest to every member of the House and every member of the Senate to make sure their respective desks in their respective chambers also contain a mirror they can look into and then point to the face looking back at them.

The current question is: should we bail out the auto industry? You bet we should! And any member of Congress who tells you otherwise is still not paying attention or just doesn't get it!

Millions of people will be directly affected by the collapse of the Big 3. And while Congress had little trouble dishing out 700 billion *no-questions-asked* dollars to Wall Streeters, they are now twisting and turning like dancers of the rock'n roll era when confronted by the auto industry for help of some kind.

Certainly the current CEO's of GM, Ford and Chrysler need to also accept blame for their financial woes, and perhaps they should be required to step down before Congress hands over any more of our money.

But in the end, Congress will remain blameless for any part of this overall mess. These Capitol Hillers need to apologize to each and every American for their total lack of responsibility. Additionally, this may be a good time for Congress to recall what their oath of office demands — accountability and responsibility.

They get an "F" for both.

And for that matter, maybe all of us are also to blame, too, for continually sending them back there.

— Tom Dreiling

Thumbs Up

To... The Living Nativity committee. What a great memory to share with our families. (e-mail)

To... the Norton Theatre, for bringing the Christian movie "Fireproof" to Norton. It is about God's role in strong marriages. So get a babysitter, grab your husband, and go! (e-mail)

To... Sarah Durham, great column, great project. (telephone)

(To submit a name of names, please e-mail tom.d@nwkansas.com, call 877-3361 or 877-6908, fax 877-3732, mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave. 67654 or stop by the office. Thanks for your continuing input. -td)

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Let's hear it for the chickens!

I could write the sequel to, "Revenge of the Killer Tomatoes." It would be called, "Revenge of the Killer Chickens." At least that's what the headless opossum I found in the chicken coop would call it.

Something had been terrorizing our chickens. Digging marks by the fence of their pen, strewn feathers and empty egg shells in the nests were evidence. Saturday night, I guess the chickens had had enough.

Sunday morning I fed and watered the flock, as usual. But, upon entering the coop to gather eggs, I noticed a hairy lump of something in the corner. It wasn't moving and upon closer inspection I could see the unmistakable tail of a 'possum. It's a good deal he still had his tail, because, obviously, the chickens had sought their revenge and took it out on his head. Perhaps, they figured there was strength in numbers. At any rate, the score now stands: Chickens - 1; 'Possums - 0.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



A perfect example of "Pecking Order".

-ob-

Like lots of men, my husband won't go to the doctor unless he's almost in his death throes. That's why, when he came home from work at noon on Thursday and agreed to see a doctor that same afternoon, I knew he was really sick.

The diagnosis: bronchitis. The cure: lots of rest and a cocktail of antibiotics, cough suppressants and an inhaler.

He came home from the doctor's visit, changed into sweats and warm socks and promptly went to sleep. And, except, for

violent fits of coughing, that's about all he has done for the last three days. Putting on clothes to go to chapel on Sunday is the most activity he's been able to accomplish in days.

-ob-

I started my Christmas baking Friday. My vision was to have dozens of spritz cookies, in all colors and sizes, baked and boxed by nightfall. A blow-out in the barrel of my Super Shooter cookie press dashed my dream.

Jim has assured me that he can fix it "good-as-new." I hope so. Otherwise I don't know what I'm going to do with the 25 pounds of flour and sugar I have stacked in the kitchen waiting to be converted into Christmas confections.

-ob-

I don't mean to frighten you, but, I just realized there are less than two weeks left until Christmas. How did that happen? I sure hope you're farther along with your preparations than I am.

Looks like new tax on ag operations

The Environmental Protection Agency's proposal to regulate greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act could wind up being essentially a new tax on agricultural operations in Kansas and across this country.

What's the story?

The EPA wants to regulate automobile emissions, but they first have to make a finding that greenhouse gases endanger public health and safety and should be classified as a "pollutant."

"Greenhouse gases" are those alleged to contribute to global warming. The major greenhouse gases are carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxides, while hydrofluorocarbons comprise a smaller amount.

The problem under this plan?

Most livestock and dairy farmers would be impacted immediately and would not be able to pass along the costs incurred. Steep fees associated with this action would force many producers out of business. The net result would likely be higher consumer costs for milk, beef and pork.

According to Agriculture Department figures, any farm or ranch with more than 25 dairy cows, 50 beef cattle or 200 hogs emits more than 100 tons of carbon equivalent each year. More than 90 percent of U.S. dairy, beef and pork production would be affected under the EPA proposed rules.

Permit fees vary from state to state but EPA sets a presumptive minimum rate for fees. For 2008-2009, the rate is \$43.75 per ton of emitted greenhouse gases. This proposed fee would mean annual assessments of \$175 for each dairy cow, \$87.50 for each head of beef cattle and \$20 for each hog.

Insight John Schlageck

But it isn't just livestock producers who face the uncertainty of these proposed regulations. Increased costs in fuel, fertilizer and transportation are also likely to occur if these regulations are put in place.

Agriculture is no different than any other industry in that it is susceptible to potential economic and social changes. However it is vastly different than most other industries because it has little or no ability to pass increased costs of doing business to consumers.

"Agriculture profitability is dependent on today's global markets that are controlled by individuals and entities completely outside of agriculture," says Ottawa County producer Steve Baccus. "With this understanding, we are concerned about the proposed rulemaking and its potential negative impact on an industry that consistently struggles to stay financially stable in a highly volatile world market."

Baccus who also serves as Kansas Farm Bureau president made these comments on behalf of more than 40,000 farmers and ranchers in a letter to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson.

"The EPA is getting ahead of its headlights," Baccus says. "If the feds feel compelled to regulate greenhouse gases from sources other than combustion engines, they should provide a new regulatory framework and rules first."

Baccus is referring to the ruling in Massachusetts vs. EPA, which specifically

addresses tailpipe emissions from new vehicles, but EPA has considered this as a potential launching pad for regulations pertaining to several other mobile and stationary sources of greenhouse gases.

The proposed rules would be ineffective because of the global nature of greenhouse gases. Reducing a ton of greenhouse gases anywhere will make a difference, but if a ton is removed in Kansas and replaced by a ton in China, then no net effect occurred.

An agricultural tax and regulation of greenhouse gases under the Clean Air Act will impose restrictions and added costs on the U.S. economy without reducing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, if the rest of the world doesn't have to play by the same rules.

Another aspect of the EPA proposal that is discussed briefly, but really doesn't acknowledge the full breadth in the notice is the positive impact agriculture may have on greenhouse gas emissions.

No-till farming practices, methane capture and rangeland/grass management has the potential to store millions of tons of carbon annually. Given the right market-driven or voluntary, incentive-driven environment, agriculture could hold at bay the increases in greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere while technology is developed and made more affordable to reduce or prevent releases from industry.

(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.)

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