

Does Obama really want the economy to recover?

Some days, we wonder if the Obama administration really wants the economy to recover.

Of course, the government has spent billions on bailouts, job programs and public works, but while the right hand gives stimulus, the left hand takes it away.

Example: The whole thing started with the mortgage scandal and the resulting bust in the homebuilding and resale markets. You'd think the administration, and the Democrats running Congress, would make restarting the housing market a prime concern.

Instead, they've got their foot on the industry's neck.

In the wake of the "subprime" lending scandal, the government ratcheted up controls on home lending. Though interest rates are at record lows — and one key Federal Reserve rate is at 0 — few banks are making home loans. It's tough to qualify and in the end, bankers are afraid to make loans.

The result: nothing. No one is building houses. No one is buying them. Because there isn't any money.

Or take consumer credit.

You'd think the government would want consumers to be spending more and saving less right now.

But most spending today involves credit cards. Most credit cards come from big nationwide or regional banks, outfits like Bank of America or Chase.

A couple of things came together to kill expansion of consumer credit. One was a bill passed by Congress tightening rules for credit-card issuers. Congress gave banks a year to get their houses in order, and they used it to purge their lists of marginal or non-performing accounts.

The bill threatened to increase the banks' costs by limiting fees and interest rate hikes. In response, banks got rid of their least desirable customers and made cards hard to get. Essentially, right now, you can get a credit card if you don't much need one and can afford to pay high interest.

While that wasn't the intent — Congress wanted to "protect" consumers from supposedly unconscionable rates and behavior by banks — it was the outcome.

Then there's business.

You'd think the government would want business to get growing, boost sales and hire more people. That's not happening, despite some new tax breaks designed to increase employment. Why?

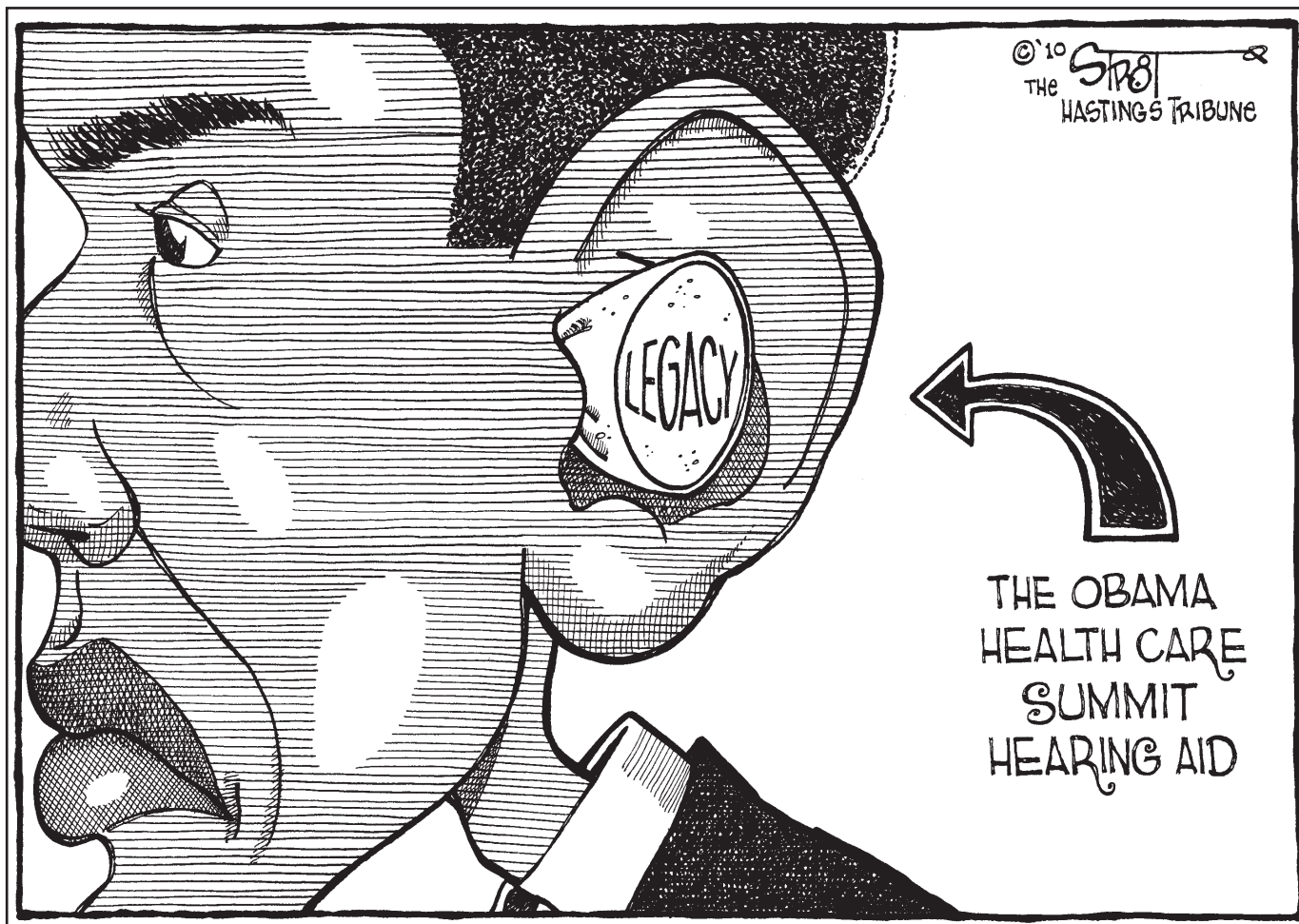
Businesses are scared. They have no idea how a health-care plan, once it passes Congress, if it passes Congress, will affect worker costs. They found that with the recession, their unemployment tax premiums took a steep jump in most states. Tax breaks turned out not to be very attractive.

And no one knows when the recovery will really take hold. Until that happens, no one has any confidence and no one is hiring.

Maybe the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. Maybe the Democrats would rather have programs, like health care and the credit-card "protection" bill, than jobs.

Maybe the jobless really aren't the priority. But they should be.

— Steve Haynes



Reunion having repercussions

My husband will probably be glad when my high school reunion is over and done with for another five years. It's having serious repercussions on his life.

The problem comes when an old classmate calls and I get so engrossed in our conversation that I totally lose track of time.

Sunday night, Georgia called, and before I knew it, the clock said 8:30 p.m. and I had never even given a thought to supper for Jim and James.

When I saw James rummaging through the fridge looking for anything edible, remorse overcame me and I begged off the phone, promising to call her back soon.

James was an easy fix. He soon had himself some left over barbecue, mac and cheese and a piece of banana cake. Jim, on the other hand, was not so easy. He doesn't like to eat late and his idea of late is 6:30 p.m. I apologized; some leftover potato soup satisfied him.

-ob-

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



of the key phrases I have learned and have actually used is: "I'm sorry what I said (or did) hurt you. I promise to try to not let it happen again. Will you forgive me?" That is a mouthful for me, but it's getting easier and easier to say it. I don't choke on it anymore.

-ob-

I hesitate to publicize a health issue my daughter Halley has, but I've already told all my friends and most of the family, so it's not really a secret. Besides, the more prayer warriors I can recruit, the better.

Halley called Friday to tell me she had been to a doctor recently and had just received the diagnosis of a large uterine tumor. She quickly added that she had been assured it was benign but would require surgery. We'll look on the positive side.

Like Halley said, "It's not great news, but it could have been a whole lot worse."

Now comes the hard part. Waiting to set the date for surgery.

Smart business

Insight

John Schlageck

While food safety will always be the cornerstone of our production process, allegiance is making inroads into why and where consumers buy their products.

Sure, the majority of today's shoppers enjoy and often take for granted the expanded menu in supermarkets.

They look forward to shopping in a meat case filled with dozens of new cuts, pre-packaged, oven or grill-ready, custom portioned, "natural" and pre-cooked products.

Today's shoppers can't wait to get their mitts on the marinades, dry rubs, cooking bags and other specialty items designed for time strapped, two-income families.

There's also another growing group of consumers who are purchasing products based on trust and nostalgia. This notion of nostalgia, or pining, harkens back to the good old days — a time when events and lives were perceived as simpler, more wholesome, just downright better.

Many in this new group of consumers want to share in the story behind the product they are buying. They wish to establish a direct link and cultivate a relationship with the producer who provides them with tomatoes, asparagus, corn or that special leg of lamb for the upcoming Easter holiday.

There is a growing number of shoppers who yearn to develop a trust with producers who they believe and demand will provide them with a quality, consistent, wholesome product time after time.

Tapping into this ever-changing consumer landscape, today's food producer — especially those located near large-population, urban areas — must not miss the opportunity to reach the hearts, minds and stomachs of consumers who feel strongly about their food.

Some consumer-savvy producers are already honed in on this concept. They've retooled their farming operation from a conventional commodities-only business to one that includes pick-your-own sweet corn, pumpkins, flowers and strawberries. They're giving people what they want.

Others now provide home deliveries of fresh produce and sell their produce at local farmers' markets. Still others have added a corn maze, day-on-the-farm activities, ice-cream socials and chuck-wagon cookouts, while inviting everyone from school-aged kids to wedding rehearsal parties — all to enjoy the farm and ranch way of life.

This new direction in farming is being driven by farmers and ranchers who are attempting to be less dependent on cheap land and vast acreage. This pioneer is tapping into the population surge and wealth of consumers who shop online, drive a couple cars including a pick-up and don't mind paying a premium for the

food they feed their families.

Another common element of this non-traditional farmer is the belief that this shift in production style may not make them rich, but will keep them out in the open spaces, running their own business and doing what they enjoy and want to do.

A large percentage of those willing to try something new are younger farmers. In many cases, a young farmer is often considered someone who has yet to reach the half-century mark.

For some, traditional farming became too expensive. Others decided traditional farming was no longer worth the effort. Whatever the reason, any farmer will tell you that farming is a difficult process. Still most would agree they are glad they bought their land, and glad they're doing what they enjoy and want to do.

No doubt, more and more farmers will be looking at a different direction to stay on their land in the future. The land will continue to be farmed. There will no doubt be fewer farmers but those who are determined to stay in this business of agriculture will have to find innovative ways to farm.

John Schlageck, of the Kansas Farm Bureau has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He 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.

Your political connection

★ Governor Mark Parkinson, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232

★ U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; fax (202) 224-3514

★ U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

★ U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn HOB, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; fax (202) 225-5124

★ State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Room 262-E, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7399

★ State Rep. John Faber, 181 W. Capitol Building, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7500

Windows 7 versus Vista

Windows 7 or Windows XP... the decision is difficult. Since the release of Windows Vista and the frustrations that have arisen from Vista, many are skeptical of the new Windows 7 Operating System and potential problems. I have sincerely enjoyed the release of Windows 7, and I have been using it before its official release. I have seen many improvements over Windows Vista, such as speed. Since there are still a few that use third party applications that are not completely supporting Windows 7, using it for all environments is not always a good choice. You could be a good candidate for Windows 7 if the following is true: You do not use old software (software designed for Windows 98, Windows NT, etc.), you do not use old printers, scanners and digital camera equipment and you are willing to upgrade your applications such as Quicken, Mi-

Computer Corner
Shawn Mortensen



crosoft Money. It is always best to check with all of your software and hardware manufacturers if you are considering the switch. The internet is a great tool to research Windows 7 support of all of this software and hardware. Microsoft has extended support of Windows XP until 2014, however, if you can make the change to Windows 7, I find the features useful and plentiful to many home and business users.

Send comments to mortensen@ruraltel.net

Letters to the Editor:
e-mail ebradley@nwkansas.com,
or write 215S. Kansas Ave. 67654

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Office hours:

8 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732

E-mail:

nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

STAFF

Dana Paxton.....general manager
advertising director
Dick Boyd.....Blue Jay sports
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