

No viable solution for state funding crunch

The 2010 Legislative session is almost over without a viable solution to the state's financial problems, although several plans are floating around the House and Senate.

The Senate favors a plan to cut \$100 million from various state services while also implementing tax increases. The House favors a plan to cut funding without raising taxes.

In some ways the representatives' refusal to raise taxes is understandable. The economy has not fully recovered, millions of people are still unemployed and countless families are struggling to pay their bills every month. But the members of the House need to remember they are cutting funds to the most vulnerable citizens in the state.

Public education has suffered drastic cuts in the last year. Some districts are considering consolidation, some have already proposed the idea after several rounds of funding cuts. This means students will have to be bused longer distances to receive the education required.

Many schools have maintained their budgets by making their own cuts, but some are having problems meeting their payroll and other bills. Further cuts would require more school closures as well as other problems for districts.

The House will debate a bill this week which seeks to reduce funds to education and raise mill levies for counties across the state. This bill eliminates state funding while putting the burden on taxpayers by increasing the mill levy for property owners.

Other services have also seen funding cuts. Social services has seen cuts, an impact on the disabled and elderly.

Government employees have also seen funding cuts. Judicial employees are facing furlough days, and many state departments have implemented hiring and wage freezes.

Funding cuts have already taken a toll on the lives of Kansas citizens. The only solution is to take in new revenue, which would have to come in the form of increased taxes.

It has been said a 1 cent sales tax increase across the board would solve the current problems. Critics say this affects the poorest citizens who are already struggling to buy groceries and pay their bills.

Our elected officials need to come up with a way to fix the budget without refusing to bring in new revenue. Whether the solution is raising the sales tax or cutting funding and increasing the mill levy, the burden is on taxpayers.

-Erica Bradley

No more costly delays for tankers

Dear Editor:
After more than a decade since the process began, great strides have been made recently in the Air Force refueling tanker acquisition process.

If all parties act in good faith and resist foreign lobbying, Kansas workers will be in a great position to build the next aerial refueling tanker-an American-built tanker that will best meet the needs of our service members.

The decision by Northrop-Grumman/EADS not to bid in the competition because its refueling tanker cannot meet requirements required by the Air Force comes as great news to Kansas workers and American taxpayers.

A study just released shows that the Boeing KC-767 refueling tanker will create between 62,000 and 70,000 new U.S. jobs over the life of the contract.

Kansas engineers and machinists will play an integral role in the tanker's production, which will inject a significant level of economic activity into our state's struggling economy.

Even in the international competition persists, we believe the American-built refueling tanker will prevail based on the merits. Boeing's KC-767 is simply the most reliable and survivable refueling tanker.

America's ability to project power around the world hinges on the aerial refueling tanker fleet. In the world we live in today, our service members should not



be forced to rely on decades-old technology and equipment to carry out the will of the nation.

Although the contract has not been signed, we believe we are on the path to victory for Kansas workers and our troops.

We will continue to be engaged with the process as it moves forward and will urge the Department of Defense to act swiftly.

There should be no more costly delays in awarding the tanker contract to The Boeing Company so we can get thousands of Kansas workers back on the job - and most importantly so that our warfighters can begin to rely on a modern aircraft with the latest technology and safety features.

Senator Sam Brownback

Senator Pat Roberts

Congressman Todd Tiahrt, Goddard

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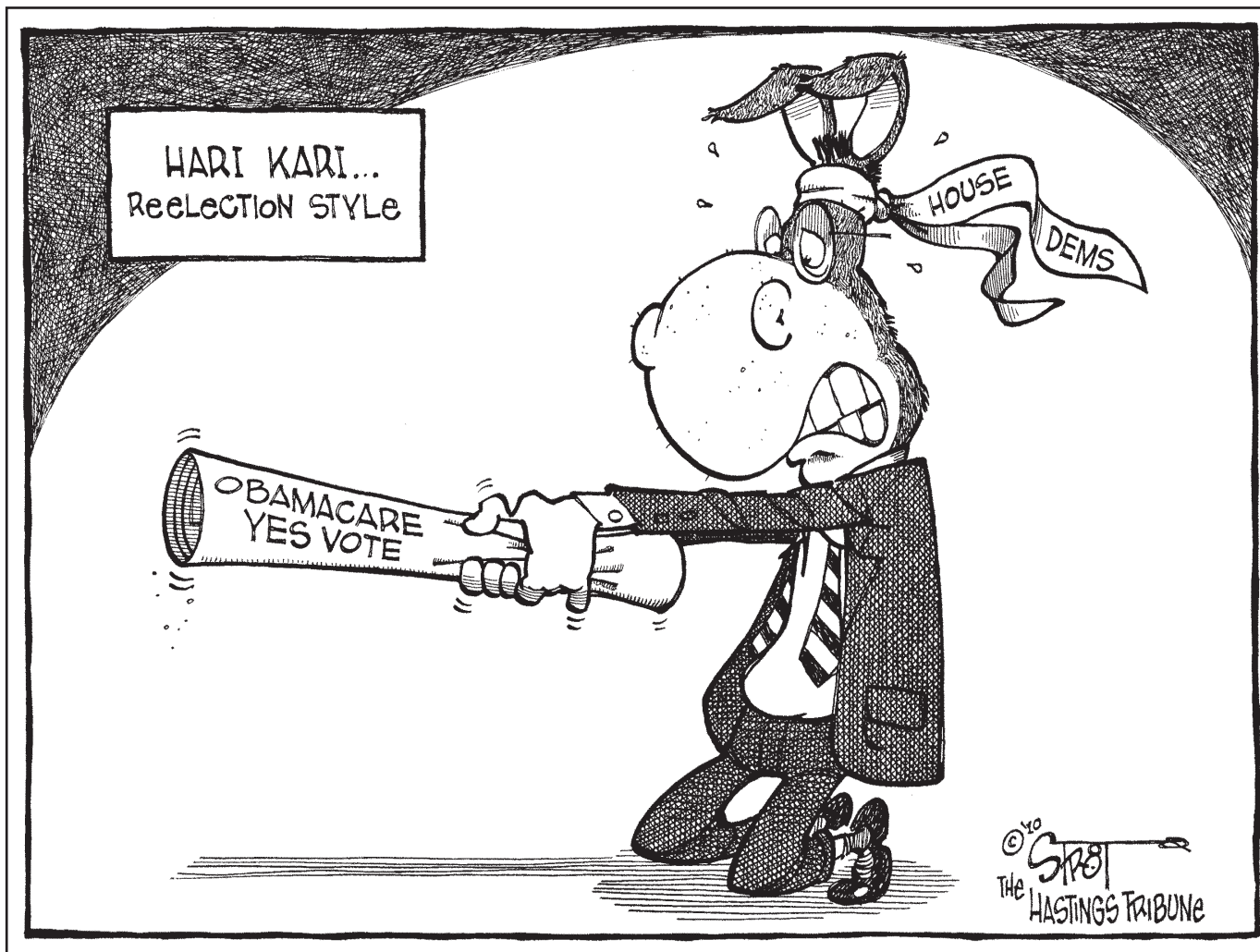
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We've been gone forever

It seems like we've been gone forever. In reality, it's only been two weeks. However, we've managed to cover a lot of miles in that time. By mid-week it will have been all the way to Mexico and back.

Bottom line is: my daughter, Halley, is recuperating beautifully from her surgery. In fact, she's back in her own apartment. Every day finds her getting stronger.

The only thing that remains is to transport all the things she left at her sister's house back over to her apartment. There's her laptop, a suitcase of clothes, her cell phone charger and some groceries she brought over. Plus a brand-new mini-grill for hamburgers we found at a neighborhood re-sale shop for two bucks. Hey, a girl's gotta shop.

Halley admitted to me that she had originally thought she would go through this without telling anyone. She said, "What was I thinking? There is no way I could have done this alone."

She added, "Even though I felt bad you had to sleep in a chair, Mom; it made me feel good, when I woke up in the night, to see you there."

It doesn't matter how old our kids are,

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



that's just what moms do.

-ob-

Jim and I managed to rendezvous in San Antonio with our kids and grandkids there.

He stopped there after completing the mission trip to Mexico, and I brought our granddaughter, Taylor, with me to spend a day with our girls, Jennifer and Becky and granddaughters, Angelia, Chantelle, Alexandria and Aniston. We also saw a picture (sonogram) of our first great-grandchild. And, it's a boy! His mother, Angelia, has already named him, Kayden. I hope I spelled that right.

We've had all girls for so long, we might not know how to take care of a little boy. But, we are committed to learning. We've already told Angelia that we'll be back in July after he's born. Angelia

has been stockpiling layette items and is getting everything ready for Kayden's arrival. She's going to be a great little mother.

-ob-

Like the rest of the country, we've been glued to the television watching the voting on passage of the health care reform bill. But, now that it's passed I still don't know what it all means.

I was really proud of Mr. Stupak for sticking to his guns regarding the abortion language in the bill. When the president issued the order prohibiting federal funding of abortions I thought to myself, "Well, I can live with that." And, evidently, that was Mr. Stupak's opinion because he immediately cast a "yes" vote.

Now, commentators are telling us a presidential order doesn't change a thing. Other political analysts are telling us the whole bill is unconstitutional. And, this morning, about 40 state attorneys general are lining up to challenge the bill.

If elected officials can't understand it, how is John Q. Public supposed to. All we want to know is, "How will this affect me?"

Ecology and economy

Insight

John Schlageck

Farmers, ranchers and landowners must continue to have the opportunity to use fire as a range management tool while maintaining the economic viability of the Flint Hills.

Discussions are ongoing which will impact the future of pasture burning in this region and adjacent land. In past years, smoke generated from Flint Hills burning has created temporary air quality issues in local areas and some downwind metropolitan areas.

These air quality violations primarily occur during years with heavy fuel loads (abundant growth from last year's grass and plants) and a shortened burn season due to climatic conditions, like 2009.

This has raised the eyes of regulators. Farmers, ranchers and landowners understand the importance of this issue. They're working toward possible solutions and alternatives

At stake is the ability for ranchers to burn their land in the spring, which rids the pasture of old-growth thatch and young woody growth from the landscape. By conducting such annual burns, the pastures produce re-growth of the native prairie grasses that provide nutritious forage for livestock as well as benefits for birds, plants and other animals that inhabit the prairie.

"Grass is the economic engine that drives the Flint Hills," says Steve Swaffar, Kansas Farm Bureau Director of Natural Resources.

"Revenue generated by stocker cattle shipped to the Flint Hills each year amounts to millions of dollars. Suspension of burning as a management tool would be economically devastating to the region and the state."

It is vital these cattle eat the nutritious, tender grass to put weight on each spring

ecosystem.

While agriculture remains the number one contributor to the Flint Hills economy, tourism and recreation also bolster the local and state coffers.

A healthy Flint Hills region provides additional benefits including soil erosion control, carbon sequestration, water quality, recreation opportunities and wildlife diversity.

"Farmers and ranchers understand and use these fires wisely," Swaffar says. "They have a long history of managing the prairie for economic and ecological purposes."

They also understand the health issues associated with pollutants produced from range burning and they're committed to look for solutions to alleviate as many of these concerns as possible."

Livestock producers hope for a workable plan for mitigating smoke during future burn periods. It is essential any form of smoke management plan should not reduce the number of acres already preserved by fire management and cannot create a system unworkable for ranchers.

For generations, farmers and ranchers have lived in harmony with the prairie ecosystem within the Flint Hills.

These livestock producers have been good to the Flint Hills and in turn the grassland has returned the favor. They look forward to working in harmony with their urban neighbors who may be impacted by this proven land management tool.

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.