

Recovery could be hampered by Congress

After years of spending, the federal government has finally begun to stop piling more debt onto the massive deficit. The downside is the possibility that the recovery will halt, more layoffs will occur and the unemployed will fall through the cracks.

Last week President Obama urged Congress to approve \$50 billion in emergency aid to local governments across the country. The bill has not been voted on, but many senators (Democrats and Republicans) are threatening to vote against it due to the deficit.

Obama claims the economic stimulus package helped break the recession, a valid point since many states used federal stimulus money to balance their budgets in recent years. The stimulus helped fund various projects and prevent workers from being laid off. Unemployment remains a huge issue, with the rate falling from 9.9 percent in April to 9.7 percent in May. The small decline is a positive sign things are improving, but it does not prove the country is out of the recession.

A 9.7 unemployment rate still leaves millions of people looking for work. These people are likely to fall through the cracks as they could spend more than a year looking for another job. Health insurance, welfare and housing will become issues for them and will add to problems at the state and federal level.

Emergency assistance programs, like health care assistance, are liable to be stopped by a Congress who is more concerned about adding to the federal deficit in an election year than aiding the economic recovery. Emergency health care assistance for the unemployed ended May 31. Congress has been unwilling to renew it.

Hopefully people across the country will remember what their elected officials stood up for. After all, it is an election year.

-Erica Bradley



A real 'gully washer'

Next year the planning committee for our little town's annual city-wide garage sale should consult with local farmers to see when they would like it to rain. Almost every year we get "pounded" with rain the night before or the day of the sale.

This year was no exception with a real "gully washer" coming down during the night. The good news was streets had been newly graveled so travel was no problem. It was a little greasy off the beaten track and in alleys but the big portion of vendors had set up shop in the former school building. Made for great one-stop-shopping.

My ladies club held a bake/garage sale in one half of the new restoration shop Jim and son James built over the winter. Turned out that we were our own best customers. Veda brought brownies and for ten cents apiece we all had one. Margaret sent homemade cinnamon rolls and after selling some single ones to customers, Jim decided if he was going to get any, he better just buy them all. He also snatched up a nice jacket Joyce contributed and Kathy bought the fresh radishes Veda had picked that morning. Deanna brought a cute soup tureen and bowl set that a neighbor "cabbaged" on

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



I baked two pecan pies and threw in five dozen eggs.

It was so chilly we all grabbed for jackets and Veda's daughter, Carol, even wrapped up in one of the baby blankets she was trying to sell. It was unbelievable that, in the middle of June, we were trying to bundle up.

It was a lot of fun and as the day wore on I was sorry I hadn't put on a pot of stew. I did, however, remember I had the makins' for a batch of chili. So, with Jim's help (he browned the hamburger) I had a pot of chili on in no time. And as soon as the club members had packed up what didn't sell we sat down for a meal together. The one pecan pie and the few brownies that didn't sell became our dessert.

Spur-of-the-moment entertaining is the best. It always exceeds expectations.

Acts of kindness for hitchhikers

I was so glad to read of Carolyn Plotts' act of kindness to the French girls hitchhiking across Kansas. (Norton Telegram, June 8)

I have picked up hitchhikers a couple of times. Once on the way to Smith Center to the Norton-Smith Center game I picked up two young men standing by their car. They were decked out in Redman attire and the car sported Smith County plates. It was pretty apparent we were all going to the same place. They were Fort Hays College students, one the son of a Smith Center Football coach. The only thing I regret about the incident is any good karma that may have been coming my way because of the good deed did not translate into a win for the Blue Jays!

Another time I picked up a guy who obviously had car trouble a few miles south of Norton. He was a ways from his car, with his thumb out. It was a little before 8 a.m. on a cold winter morning. I was on my way to work and so was he. He drove a beer delivery truck and was plenty annoyed that he'd had to walk as far as he had. When I let him out he grumbled, "Off I go to deliver beer for all those people who wouldn't stop and give me a ride!"

In both incidents whichever of the children was with me were appalled. But I felt pretty safe about what I was doing. I wouldn't have done it if I was alone or I hadn't seen obviously disabled vehicles. And I'm not sure I'd do it today. I've read

Back Home Nancy Hagman



too much stuff on the internet! Most of the time those stories are disproved by Snopes but you never know—it could happen!

The reason I was glad to read Carolyn is still trusting (and apparently does not read Internet forwards) is because my daughters, Kate and Elizabeth, are in France. Somehow it just seemed that her actions might have a butterfly effect and if my girls needed assistance in France someone would be equally nice.

The girls are having their dream vacation this summer. Six plus weeks in Europe! Teachers, music and social studies, in countries with so much cultural and political history: They are having a ball!

Backpacks, Euro Passes, hostels, tour and travel books! The planning has been going on for almost a year.

And we old folks at home get a feeling of their adventures via their Blog—without ever leaving home.

From Normandy they wrote: "The French gave the US Pont du Hoc in honor of our rangers. American flags were there to greet us . . . Then we went

to the American Cemetery (once again on American soil). It was very moving. The museum was cool. I was proud to be a Kansan because they made a big deal about Ike . . . In town (Bayeux), everywhere there are Canadian, US and British flags. One restaurant even says "welcome to our Liberators!" We are loving it . . . Paris people weren't rude but Bayeux is like a group hug! It was the first large town liberated and they haven't forgotten."

I did ask the girls if they've found anti-American feeling anywhere (so far they have only been in England, Holland and France). They only had one unpleasant person (at the train station in Holland) to deal with but did not think it was directed at them as Americans. Kate said, "I think some people just hate their jobs!"

I'm sure the girls are loving their jobs as they allow summers off for such adventures!

We miss them but enjoy their adventures at the same time. (With everyone so far away I'd have empty nest syndrome breakdown if I had time.)

It is instead becoming a summer of heightened awareness as to how much little things like picking up hitchhikers mean. And the realization big things like the sacrifices of wars are necessary and, even decades later, appreciated. Our soldiers are heroes; we can and should be proud!

Gathering the grain

Insight

John Schlageck

It's 10 a.m. and the sun blazes down on a patchwork of golden grain that dots the High Plains near Seguin in northwestern Kansas. A blistering southerly wind pushes the heat index to the century mark.

On this late-June morning, a roar of combines signals the beginning of another wheat harvest. Cutting begins about this time each day and continues until midnight, or when the golden grain becomes too moist or tough to cut.

Fifteen-minute meal breaks are the only time off in a 14-hour workday. Although the days seem to last forever, technology has made life easy compared to the dusty, itchy harvests of yesteryear, when farmers sat on open-air seats and ate dust while sweat ran down their faces.

Today's monster machines look more like tanks rolling through a war game. All across Kansas, farmers pilot these 12-ton machines as easily as the family car. Modern combines come complete with contoured seats, soundproof cabs wrapped in tinted glass, air conditioning and stereo. Computers monitor the entire operation.

Equipped with dual brakes, power steering and automatic transmission these machines move through the fields at speeds of 5-miles-per-hour or more, depending on yield and field conditions. One machine can harvest 4,000 bushels of wheat on a good day.

Ask any farmer and he'll tell you there's nothing like cutting a field of wheat where the crop bunches up in

and weather. A storm with heavy rain, hail or damaging winds is every farmer's worst nightmare and the possibility of such natural disasters is ever present during harvest.

Still, harvest is an event of beauty—the culmination of nearly nine months of growth, rejuvenation of the land and the ultimate prize—an abundant crop of golden grain.

Seems like there are always moments of reflection when harvest is running smoothly, the crop is a good one and a farmer has time to stick his hands into a mound of wheat and pop a few kernels into his mouth. It's at times like this, he'll look out over the land he loves, where the machines are moving through clouds of dust and chaff.

"You gotta take what's given you in this country," they'll think to themselves while chewing the wheat that's by now turned to gum. "Some year, what you receive is better than others."

A Kansas farmer takes risk that tests the strength of his spirit. He faces harvest with the hope of bounty. He makes his peace with God and keeps that same peace with his neighbor. Faced with the annual trials of raising a wheat crop, this is the only way a Kansan would choose to live—with himself or anyone else.

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.

Man and machine race to beat the clock



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THE NORTON TELEGRAM

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002



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