

Three bites into a Washington Apple

There is something unique about a Washington apple. In the produce section at the grocery store, you pick up an apple and look at the outside for quality. Sometimes, though, an apple that looks good on the outside has worms on the inside. Despite all of America's goodness, apples from Washington, D.C. have worms destroying the core of the country: out-of-control spending and debt.

Between now and the end of May, Congress will have to act on three important measures to kill these worms once and for all: last year's budget (through a continuing resolution); next year's budget; and the debt ceiling. Let's think about these as three bites into the apple.

The first bite: the 2011 budget. Despite the fact that there has been a deadline since 1974 requiring Congress and President Obama to finish the budget by September 30, here America stands - more than six months later - facing a possible government slowdown because there is no budget. The failure of the last Congress to pass a budget for 2011 is surprising and disappointing given that Democrats controlled both chambers of Congress as well as the White House. It should have been smooth sailing to pass and sign a budget into law.

Instead, the federal government has relied on six short-term spending measures to keep the lights on. In February, just a few short weeks after the 112th Congress took office, the House passed H.R. 1, a measure to get us through the rest of 2011. Unfortunately, Senate Majority Leader Reid refuses to allow the Senate even to debate and amend the proposal. The money runs out on April 8, and Senate Majority Leader Reid is still dragging his feet over a \$30 billion difference in spending cuts. It's perplexing why \$30 billion is his concern when the country's debt hovers around \$14.3 trillion and we are in the third straight year of trillion-dollar deficits.

The second bite: the 2012 budget. The House faces an April 15, 2011 deadline to produce a budget outline for next year. The President offered his budget for the House to consider in February. The non-partisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) assessed the economic impact of the President's budget and it just adds to the country's debt, ensures trillion-dollar deficits, increases taxes, and fails to reduce spending.

The Republicans will offer a 2012 budget this week that is an alternative to the President's budget: a clear path to prosperity. In addressing the drivers of the country's debt as well as out-of-control spending, the Republican budget seeks to foster economic growth and job creation; repeal and defund Obamacare; and to ensure health and retirement security in a fiscally-responsible manner. Throughout this week, the House Budget Committee - of which I am a member - will be releasing the details of our budget.

The third bite: the debt ceiling. Sometime between now and the end of May, the federal government will likely reach its debt limit. There will be no more credit available. So, President Obama is begging Congress to raise the limit on our credit card. And, if passed, this would be the eleventh such increase since June 2002 (when it was set at \$6.4 trillion). Our debt limit now is \$14.294 trillion, more than double the 2002 limit. The only way Congress can justify an increase in the debt limit is with guaranteed and substantial spending cuts and/or a balanced budget amendment.

For the sake of Americans footing tax bills now and in the future, as well as the economic prosperity of our nation, let's hope that these three bites do not encounter the spending and debt worms that threaten to spoil our nation.

- Congressman Tim Huelskamp

Are we picking our battles wisely?

It would be easy to just shrug, and ask how much harm another military adventure could do for a nation that often considers itself the world's policeman.

But perhaps we should be asking, just what does the United States hope to gain by interfering in Libya?

To protect innocent lives? Perhaps, but as soon as we began bombing Colonel Gaddafi's forces, taking the pressure off the rebels, they began to advance on Tripoli. We did nothing to discourage them. So, are we on their side?

Maybe our goal is regime change, to get Mr. Gaddafi out, force him to leave the country.

We say that he needs to go. So do the European nations who back us.

Who would replace him? We do not seem to be sure, though we're told the CIA has operatives "on the ground" in Libya to keep an eye on things.

Who will rule? Freedom-loving Libyans? The Muslim Brotherhood? Al Qaida?

If the administration knows, they're

On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



not saying. Seems from here that if the U.S. is spending (already, we're told) more than \$1 billion on this little military action, we should know where it's headed. That's small change compared to the national debt, but still a lot of money to most of us.

Should we be changing the government in Libya, even while urging former allies in Egypt, Yemen and other Arab countries to step aside for change?

Because Muammar Muhammad al-Gaddafi is a bad man who kills and tortures his own people? Because his mercenary troops are killing them on the streets?

That kind of thing happens every day in Sudan, Somalia, the Congo, the Ivory

Coast. We have not stepped in.

What changed? Do we have other, less noble goals? The State Department is not liable to admit them if we do.

Do we have a plan for North Africa, for the greater Muslim world, that serves the interest of the U.S., of the peoples of the region, of world peace? If so, the administration ought to articulate it.

We cannot fight every fight. We should choose those that are important to us.

We are embroiled in two wars already. Our forces are stretched thin. The world's navies cannot stop unsophisticated Somali pirates from seizing international shipping and killing innocent civilians.

American troops are stationed in hundreds of spots around the world already. Must we return to the shores of Tripoli?

We are, supposedly, turning the combat role over to our European friends. We are, supposedly, not going to war in Libya.

If that's the case, fine, but we think the American people still need to hear what our goals and objectives are and have a say in this adventure. So far, they have not.

Agreeing to disagree on differences

This may come under the heading of "too much information" but I'm going to confess it! The Hubby and I are not compatible when it comes to condiments!

I prefer catsup, pickle and onion on my hamburgers. He likes mustard and pickles. I eat hot dogs straight (or with chili if we have it). He again likes mustard.

For him, it's kraut on brats and polish sausage. I'd rather not have any of that in my kitchen, period!

Fish? He's got to have shrimp sauce. I take that straight up also.

He has the crazy idea mayo gives him heartburn so he puts mustard on ham sandwiches. They make mustard at the plant where daughter Patricia works. She says all they put in mustard is mustard seed and vinegar. How can he eat that much mustard and not be able to take a little mayo?

He likes honeymoon salad. You know: Lettuce alone! I'm a little more complex than that.

Nowhere is the divide as great as when it comes to steaks. It's A-1 versus Heinz. You've seen the commercials where the guy burns his tongue licking a drop of A-1 off the grill. It makes me cringe, but on a deeper level I understand. I love A-1.

Another test of our marriage is whenever we do any home renovation. This is going on right now. I happen to have great faith in the hubby and think he could do most of this work himself. He, after all

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



most 40 years of marriage, has smartened up however. He realizes it is better to hire someone else than argue with me. (Not that even that really works!)

Last Friday he says, "The floor in the storm shelter/storage room is done, so I'll have to move things back in there so Jay can finish the rest of the floors."

"Oh no," I sez. "That stuff is not going back until the walls are painted. Plus it has to be sorted and cleaned."

He was agreeable. He even went with me to get the paint. Then he rigged up some lights and brought in a ladder! And they say chivalry is dead!

After I finished painting on Sunday, we moved the big storage pieces in place. Then I sorted and cleaned and carried stuff to the truck to be dumped. It was a nice day. I left the door to the outside open (it's a walk out basement).

Occasionally the dog would stroll in and check on me. It gave me peace of mind. If I collapsed from the exertion I figured she would run to the road and bark loudly until someone took notice. The hubby had gone to the field.

ELECTED OFFICIALS:

- ★ **Governor Sam Brownback**, 300 SW 10th Ave., Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-3232
- ★ **U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. roberts.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-4774
- ★ **U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002. moran.senate.gov/public/ (202) 224-6521
- ★ **State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, Room 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka,

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- ★ **U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. huelskamp.house.gov (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124
- ★ **State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka, Kan. 66612 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov (785) 296-7659
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Government shutdown depends on the numbers

A government shutdown, at this point (Wednesday), seems a real possibility. So I have decided as a concerned citizen I would come up with a solution to the problem. No, it doesn't involve firing all members of our political establishment, although right now, I think that might be a good idea. The real plus for the public is I won't even demand pay in return for the solution.

Start the shut down with congress. Did you know that until 1855, members of congress received a per diem for the days they worked (\$6/day)? Of course I'm sure most of our political workhorses would tell you they work 365 days a year. At \$6 a day that would equal \$2,190/year or based on the Consumer Price Index a little over \$58,000 in today's market. Do you know what our political geniuses receive in salary today?

Most Representatives and Senators receive \$174,000; the Speaker of the House, \$223,500; President pro tempore of the Senate and the majority and minority leaders in the House and Senate receive \$193,400.

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Lest you are worried about the extensive work demanded of our servants perhaps you would be interested in the number of staff allowed.

Initially House members paid for any staff out of their own funds and later were allowed one staff member:

When the House Office Building was completed in the early 20th century, House members were given office space and subsequently in 1940 allowed three staff; 1946, six; and by 1966 it had doubled to 12.

Now House members are allowed 18 full time staff with a possibility of some part-time as well.

The number of staffers for a senator

is based upon the population of their state.

But most critical to this discussion of government shutdown revolves around the costs behind maintaining these officials. Each congressional member is given money, members' representational allowances, (MRA) to run their office. Three areas for funding are allowed, personnel, official office expense and franked mail. Let's look at the dollar amount, excluding the elected official's salary:

In calendar year 2010, the House members MRA ranged from \$1,428,395 to \$1,759,575 with an average MRA of \$1,522,114.10.

The Senate report for the FY2010 shows a range from \$3,090,168 for the Senators from Delaware to \$4,873,149 for the Senators from California. The average allocation is \$3,343,867.27.

And we wonder why we are in fiscal trouble? <mailto:mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net>mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net Information from the Congressional Research Office and Sourcewatch.



Thumbs up to Kandis Jackson and Doug Sebelius for all of their work with the kids for Sunday's play at the Methodist Church. It was a great performance. Emailed in.

Remember to send Thumbs Up to: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com, call 877-3361 or mail to 215 S. Kansas Ave, Norton, Kan. 67654. There is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumps Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community.

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