

Breaking the cycle to get out of debt

With this year's federal deficit expected to hit a record \$1.7 trillion, attention has been focused on the national debt and deficit spending as never before, from Congress to the "tea party" and with both major political parties.

The national debt is now \$14.35 trillion and climbing. States have \$1.18 trillion in debt and local government \$1.73 trillion.

Plus, the unfunded liability for Social Security is estimated at \$131.7 trillion. Everyone recognizes that the huge and growing debt threatens our economy and our way of life. No one seems to know what to do.

People made it clear last fall, however, that they want things to change.

And the truth is, any solution will be painful, as European nations have discovered. Spending is addictive. Every state or federal program, every grant and "entitlement," goes to someone. Government spending provides jobs, helps people live, feels good to those who get the money.

So how do we break the cycle and bring some sense back into state and national capitols?

Dr. Ed Flentje, a Washburn University political science professor in Topeka, made some suggestions in an "Insight Kansas" column last month.

Dr. Flentje recalls, as an advisor to former Gov. Robert Bennett in the 1970s, hearing the governor say again and again, "Spending is more responsible when the government that spends is the government that must finance that spending."

In other words, it's a lot easier for government officials at any level to spend money someone else has taken from the taxpayers. Yet that's exactly how the system works. Billions raised by the federal government are passed through to states for highways, schools, "homeland security," you name it. And much of that money trickles on down to the local level.

Have you ever heard a local official say, "We can get federal money for that," or "Well, it's federal money. Not our money?"

Of course, the city or county officials didn't have to raise taxes to get the money. The federal government just "gave" it too them. Never mind that the federal government is broke, deeply in debt and has no money to give. It can always borrow more.

Except it can't. The government has borrowed so much now, it's credit rating is threatened. Dr. Flentje says people have trouble understanding this system:

"This behemoth has become incomprehensible to the public, breeding cynicism, distrust and outright anger at government - national, state, and local government," he writes.

He says Alice Rivlin, the founding director of the Congressional Budget Office and former vice-chair of the Federal Reserve Board, has a handle on the problem. Though she held posts in the Clinton administration, most recently, she helped Rep. Paul Ryan shape the House Republicans' budget plan.

Nearly 20 years ago, he said, Ms. Rivlin proposed two steps to settle this hash:

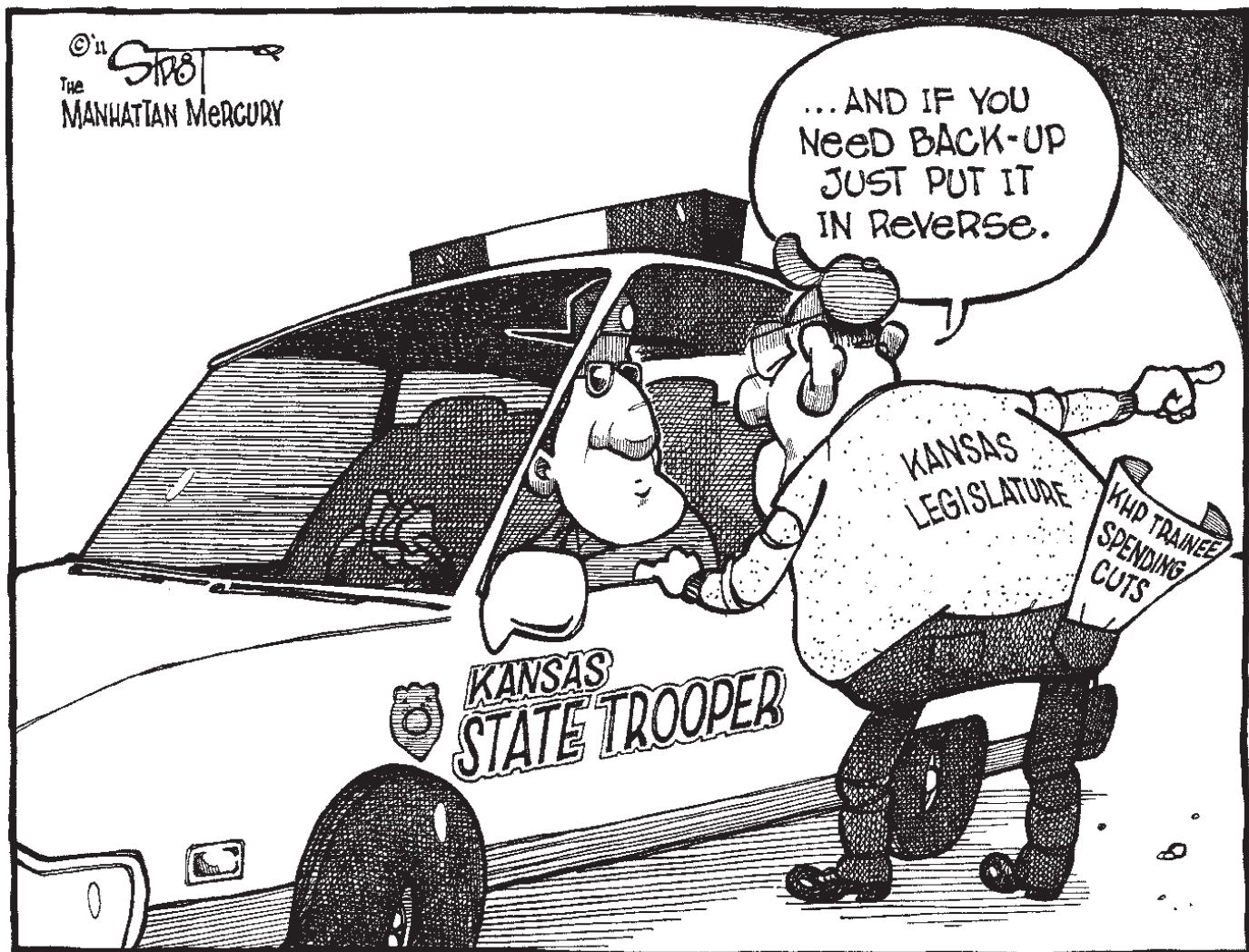
- "Devolution. The federal government should eliminate most of its programs in education, housing, highways, social services, economic development and job training."

- "The productivity agenda. The states should take charge of the primary public investment needed to increase productivity and raise incomes, especially to improve education and skill training and modernize infrastructure."

Wow. Put the responsibility for raising taxes with the people who actually spend the money. It may be an idea whose time has come. It's certainly as good a suggestion as we've heard.

And we can't wait to hear the wailing from all those who feed at the public trough.

Until we can face reality, though, our debt issues aren't going to vanish. It's simply time to get real. *Steve Haynes*



Is it that hard to just get it right

I've always liked fun little quotes and just came across one that seems apropos. "Before beginning an argument with a fool make certain he is not doing the same!"

Putting this thought in context takes us back to last year. Some e-mails circulated claiming in 2010 would there be five Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in certain months. This would not happen again for several 100 years.

Country comedian Bill Engvall tells of his decision to go to bareback riding school at age 40. He tells his wife and she asks, "Are you stupid?"

Here are some questions I'd like to ask anyone who believes there will not be five Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays in a month again in our lifetime: Did you go to school? Where did you go to school? Did you learn how a calendar works? And most importantly: Are you stupid?

But I deleted the e-mails, except for one. He was a classmate so I knew where he went to school and that he knew better! He graciously admitted his error.

But I worry: what is it that drives me crazy about those who so carelessly go through life. Those who never question anything they are told or read in an internet forum?

Our daughter, who is working on her PHD in education, is doing her dissertation on teacher burn out. She did some fun things over the weekend because as she could not bear reading anymore questionnaires from angry teachers.

One rant ran along these lines: it would only take 2 minutes to make copies were it not for beautiful storage units in the office. Everything is behind closed doors.

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



There are no labels because it would mar the finish. It takes 20 minutes to find a paper clip!

How can you teach when it takes 20 minutes to find a paper clip? I'd say he is hanging on by a thread. Is he really mad about paperclips, or beautiful storage units?

Thus it is with me. What is it about inaccurate internet forwards? I'm not a perfectionist. I don't think I'm smarter than everyone else (though there are a few of you-----)

As I say I let the calendar thing slide until it appeared in the newspaper as an interesting fact about 2011. The writer claimed there would be five Saturdays, five Sundays and five Mondays this October and it would not happen again for a couple of hundred years. I respect the writer and was very surprised that she hadn't thought it through, so I sent her an email. I was nice!

Just think of it is this way: October 31 is Halloween. How often is Halloween on a Monday? Every five or six years--- depending on Leap Year. It happened in 2005 and will happen in 2016. Go to the computer and type calendar in the search bar, you can find calendars for any year.

Do people think our calendar is like lottery balls? The numbers are just bouncing around and randomly arrange themselves

due to whims of a calendar god or something? Are you stupid?

Then I start with another set of questions: What is wrong with me? Why do I know this and seemingly no one else does? What is really bugging me? Am I about to snap?

The writer of the newspaper article replied, "I do not feel up to checking to see if what you are saying is true. I'll wait and see if anyone else has a problem with it and check into it then"

It's easy to see what bugged me about her reply! I am right! She is wrong! Why not correct the mistake?

However by arguing I knew I'd be the fool. Anyway you don't have to agree with me. You can be wrong!

On a related note, I loved the quote attributed to Martin Luther King in Mary Kay Woodyard's column May 6. So much, in fact, I nearly used it in my column. Just to check for accuracy I did an internet search as I was writing. Turns out King did not say the first sentence.

It makes me wonder who did. Why say something so beautiful and attribute it to someone else? If no one steps up to take credit how can we pretend I said it? In the interests of responsible journalism I know Mary Kay and everyone at the paper wants this corrected. We are neither stupid nor fools! So there is the quote by Nancy Hagman, "I mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one."

Or better yet; a quote often misattributed to Mark Twain but actually uttered by Clarence Darrow, "I have never killed a man but I have read many obituaries with great pleasure!"

When everything seems different but is the same

Several years ago a friend was visiting from Reno. He was active in his own community and was interested in attending a Norton City Council meeting. After the meeting, he said, "Not much different than home, just the number of zeros."

Many things in life are that way, the same, except for... In the seventies there was a movie, whose title eludes me, about a church. It was something Street Irregulars. Anyway I could easily identify people from our own church with the characters in the movie. Only the names had been changed. After living in various areas and attending numerous churches, I can attest to its factualness. You will find the same people in every church, regardless of size, geographic location or denomination.

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



Problems in our society are much the same. A peace activist friend was once bemoaning the inability of countries to function together peaceably. She couldn't understand why everyone couldn't just "get along". She, herself, however was in the throes of a nasty divorce and a neighborhood squabble. Peace begins at home.

I volunteered at a public school in Ala-

bama and I was stunned when we prayed before lunch. Ignoring a law because we do not like it teaches irreverence and arrogance and certainly does nothing to promote civility. If we don't like a law we have a time tested judicial process to help us overturn the decision and create one more to our liking. This type of disobedience lays the foundation for contempt of one another and for society in general.

There isn't a lot of difference from the small, seemingly singular event in our personal lives to the larger situations leading to conflict and war. Most of what comes back to haunt us not only in our communities, but in our individual lives, have their origin in simple acts of defiance. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

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THUMBS UP! Thumbs up: The community should commend your council people, city administrator and code enforcement people for a job well done on its recent clean up of the property here in Norton - it was way past due. 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. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community.

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