



## Does government want to help or hinder U.S.?

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 simply 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 ones many consumers had.

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.

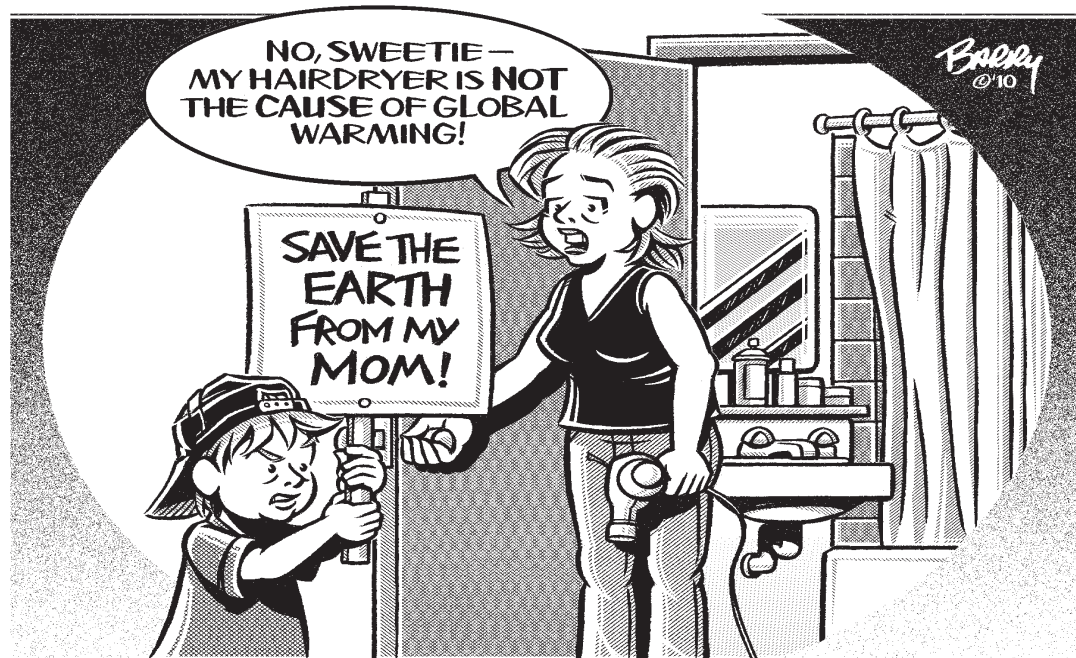
You'd think the government would want business to get growing, boost sales and hire more people. That's not happening, despite some new tax breaks designed to increase employment. Why?

Businesses are scared. They have no idea how a national health-care plan, once it passes Congress, if it passes Congress, will affect worker costs. They found that with the recession, their unemployment taxes took a steep jump. The 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



## District judges may be removed

### — Letters to the Editor —

Letter to the Editor:

It is important for the people of Cheyenne County and other rural counties to know that there are several bills moving through the Kansas Legislature that, if passed and signed by the governor, will likely remove the district magistrate judge from the Cheyenne County Courthouse and potentially from the courthouse in as many as four or five of the seven counties that make up the 15th Judicial District in Northwest Kansas. The same holds true with the other non-urban judicial districts in the state.

Kansas law (KSA 20-301b) currently reads, "In each county of this state there shall be at least one judge of the district court who is a resident of and has the judge's principal office in that county."

This law is the result of the promise made to Kansans in the late 1970s that "court unification" which was being proposed at the time would not result in any county in the state being left without a resi-

dent judge in its courthouse.

Before unification, each county had a county judge who dealt with misdemeanors and felony preliminary hearings. The county judge also served as probate judge, juvenile judge and presided over civil limited action cases. Unification did away with those titles and brought us the "district magistrate judge" who is part of the district court and has all of the previously listed responsibilities plus expanded jurisdiction over other district court matters as set out in the law. Pending bills in both the House and Senate repeal the one judge per county law and allow for location of the district magistrate judges in the larger counties through variously proposed methods of assignment.

What are being advanced as cost-saving measures are in reality plans for redistributing of judicial resources and further urbanization of our judicial system at the expense

of rural citizens. Rural Kansas counties can ill afford to lose their resident judges whose availability is important in all matters and critical in most such as domestic, children in need of care and criminal matters. The district magistrate judge is the one and only official in the county who has the authority to resolve disputes and domestic conditions before more serious consequences occur.

Cheyenne County residents and all rural residents in the state are urged to write, call, e-mail or visit your senator and representative, and the governor, asking for their support in opposing repeal of the one judge per county law.

Kari Gilliland, county attorney Michael Day, St. Francis City Attorney

Kevin Berens, Bird City City Attorney

Jim Milliken, attorney

## Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



For anyone reading this who doesn't care for the game of baseball, you can go to another article or column. But for those with me this is a wonderful time of year.

Pitchers and catchers have been in camp a few days and are now joined by the other position players. Spring training games have begun in Florida and Arizona with the season openers about a month away.

There is something completely

American about baseball in that it offers hope. Until the first contests start every team is in first place. Could this be the year that my team will win? Maybe the Cubs will break their 102 year drought? The possibilities are limitless.

Baseball is like our country in that anything can happen. A poor kid can rise to the top of a company, field or group if he works hard and catches some breaks.

The same can be said for a baseball team. If they play hard and the

pieces fall into place, the league pennant or World Series championship are possible.

Just like periods in our nation's past when we seemed to be down and out, a new day breaks and we fight back. And so goes another year of Major League Baseball.

I guess that's why it's called "The Great American Pastime."

## Schools need money in reserves

### — Letter to the Editor —

Letter to the Editor:

There is a lot in the news about how school districts have \$700 million sitting around in reserves. Various funds must have cash balances because, even in good economic times, money often goes out faster than it comes in. The Special Education Fund in particular, must have a healthy balance because school districts don't receive a penny of special education funding until three and a half months after the fiscal year starts.

Lately, many school districts have needed cash balances just to make payroll due to state cash-flow problems and late funding payments. Saying that these cash balances can take care of funding cuts is like saying you can absorb a pay cut from your job right after you've been paid because your mortgage and car loan haven't been deducted from your checking account yet.

The Contingency Fund (a.k.a. rainy day fund) is the primary reserve fund but that money can only be used once. For the past two years, school funding has

been cut during the school year after the vast majority of school funding is contractually committed. That's why it's important to have contingency money available. For school districts, keeping no reserve and when bad times hit, telling parents we're sorry but there isn't any money to suitably educate their children isn't an option.

Last year, the legislature passed a law raising the limit of how much money school districts can put into their Contingency Fund to encourage school districts to cut spending and transfer savings there. They knew more mid-year cuts were likely to come. Now, some legislators and others are pointing to that money as a reason why school districts can handle more cuts. Wow!

Are Kansans really naive enough to believe that school districts are closing schools and laying off thousands of teachers and other employees even though we have more money than ever

and just want to hoard our huge reserves? Some politicians and some people paying for television commercials are hoping so. Instead of political spin, we need an honest discussion about what's going on so we can reach informed solutions.

Education is the best — perhaps only — solution to ignorance, intolerance and poverty. It's also the only way to ensure the continued success of democracy. Without public education, the quality of a child's education would be based on the wealth of his or her parents. That's why the state's founding fathers made public education a required state expenditure in the Kansas Constitution. If we're going to imperil their vision and our children's education, we should do so while understanding the whole truth.

Dr. Darrel Stufflebeam Superintendent of Schools Rock Creek USD 323, St. George

## Reader questions tax increase

Letter to the Editor:

I recently attended the meeting with Senator Ralph Ostmeier and Representative John Faber.

First of all, let me say, I agree we need to keep our schools in both communities. The discussion about raising sales tax concerns me. Any tax generated in Cheyenne County might help the school situation, but any monies spent outside the county would help other counties or states and would do nothing for Cheyenne County. I realize that there are a number of items that cannot be purchased in Cheyenne County, such as clothing or shoes or etc., so it is inevitable that money will be spent outside the county.

It seems that we could find another way to help fund the schools. Could we possibly set up funds that anyone could donate to in each school district to help with expenses? Is there anything that could be reduced or suspended for a time? I know it seems that all cuts have been made that could be, but we as Americans,

seem to think that we must have the best of everything and never be denied anything. Maybe we could all keep track of expenses for a month and just see if there is anything that is not necessary for the education of our students. I know in keeping track of my personal expenses, I find that I can cut out a few things and never do without. A cup of coffee, or a soft drink, or eating out, are all enjoyable but not necessary for my well being. I really can do without a lot of things that are perceived

as necessary. Maybe we could just re-examine expenses and do without something and then, if possible, donate to a fund that could help with expenses that are necessary.

This is just food for thought. We need to all work together. After all, a house divided will fall and a house united will stand. Let's all look to see how we can help solve the problem.

Phyllis Carson Bird City

**GOD SAYS**  
**The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.**  
 Psalm 118:6, 8

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**Praise the Lord**

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