



Now is the best time to cut our state budget

A tussle between the conservative Kansas House and the more moderate (but hardly liberal this year) Kansas Senate over how to handle a bill making cuts to the current state budget is deadlocked, putting off an agreement on savings.

That is not good. The bill needs to pass this week, because every day counts. A month's delay, threatened by the dispute between houses, will cost the state a month's savings. That could amount to millions.

House members want to cut right way. Some claim the total should be closer to \$50 million or \$55 million rather than the \$35 million sought by Gov. Sam Brownback.

Senate members are worried about losing federal money for special education. They want to lock in an extra \$25 million to guarantee that the federal government won't punish the state for not providing enough.

The governor has suggested passing the \$35 million in cuts now and dealing with special education later, when the budget situation is more clear and the state knows how much is needed. Some suspect it could be a bit more than the \$25 million.

We say cut now while the budget stroke can be as broad and deep as possible. A month or two months from now, any given level of cuts will produce fewer savings. And everyone knows the state faces a shortfall in this year's budget.

Any deficit left undealt with will just come out of the ending balance the state has to begin next year's budget July 1, meaning even deeper cuts next year. It

will hurt less to cut a little more a little sooner.

And as the governor suggests, the time to deal with special education will be when the figures needed to make an intelligent decision are in. Not while holding up the entire show in Topeka.

It's an issue that needs to be dealt with, but as part of the bigger puzzle of how much the state can afford to spend on schools.

Public education, kindergarten through high school, already gets more than half the budget. Teachers and administrators want more, of course. Some have suggested raising the sales tax yet again to raise money, but voters have spoken on that subject: they said, "no," electing more conservatives to the House and to state office.

Despite the cries of teachers and others, the state will spend more on education next year than last. The problem is, the increase is going to teacher pensions and other programs, not to classrooms. That's too bad, but teachers are not offering to take pension cuts, either.

Gov. Brownback lamented that situation, which forced him to cut the budget for teaching kids once again, even after a tax increase last year.

But people have said the state must start living within its means. In this case, a "suitable" budget for education will be one the state can pay for, and in the end, that should be something we all can live with.

With another tax increase out of the question, this issue needs to be settled quickly so the state can start saving, and the Legislature can move on to figuring out next year's budget.

— Steve Haynes

Legislative News

By Ward Cassidy



120th District Representative

It is hard to believe we will soon be at the half-way point of the 2011 legislative session. Feb. 25, is "Turnaround Day" which is the day bills must be passed out from their House of Origin. Following turnaround, the House and Senate then begin work on the bills that have been passed out of the other Chamber. There are a few exceptions, such as when an exempt committee passes a bill or when the Speaker requests a bill to be moved forward.

Today we got a copy of all the bills to move forward from the House and Senate. It is hard to believe the volume. I am just now getting used to tracking what is going on in the Senate. The first six weeks I was busy learning the process and working on my committees.

They tell me the week of Feb. 21, through Feb. 25, will be long hours on the House Floor debating dozens of bills. Among the issues that will be taken up are: Repeal of the In State Tuition for illegal immigrants, proof of citizenship and photo ID requirement to vote, increasing the speed limit on four-lane highways to 75 mph, late-term abortion ban, tax bills, pay-check protection for workers, and a number of other bills that will run a wide spectrum of about anything you can imagine.

One of the most interesting surprises you quickly learn, as a new legislator, is that every good idea you want to address has a cost. Every time a bill is drafted the division of the budget creates a fiscal note.

These notes represent a careful calculation as to the dollar cost of the proposal including the number of full- or part-time employees. The review also examines how the bill could affect the duties of the agency or local government referenced in the bill. These are shocking as it seems often the better the idea, the higher the cost. Another fact is the cost will increase from year to year.

The Republican majority are very carefully examining fiscal notes. There is a strong consideration to not pass any bills that have strong fiscal impact and we are being even more cautious of the effects on local governments.

This week I saw an example of a bill that would protect Kansans from the crime of identity theft but we had to carefully review the fiscal note. House Bill 2008 would change the severity of the crime from a non-person to a person felony which will require prison time. Prison time has a cost and the projection of this bill would require an additional twenty beds in our overburdened corrections system. However this is a crime which is very costly to individuals, businesses and communities alike. Last year more than 2,000 identity theft crimes were reported at an average of about \$40,000 per incident accounting to more than \$80 million in damages. We really need another prison in Kansas and ways to keep good staff in the system.

An item I mentioned, in an earlier article, was making Sudafed a prescription drug failed to make it out of committee, for many different reasons. Mainly, that the reporting being done has been effective and that it would drive up the cost to the average consumer.

The biggest development of the week was the Workers Compensation Bill. There were several concerns issued early on in our district but the final compromise was ap-

proved by many of our county commissioners. It had been 17 years since the existing statutes were revised.

There are so many events taking place in Topeka and I can't update you on all of them. I very much appreciate the help I am getting from our commissioners, county clerks, school superintendents, hospital administrators, and the constituents of the 120th. I am working diligently to express your concerns and trying hard to communicate. I have answered every letter and e-mail and truly appreciate the team work we need to have to fight for Northwest Kansas.

Two quick plugs for Northwest Kansas - our economic development directors are excellent and are a vital entity to promote our communities. They all help me every way they can and I am trying to do the same for them.

I heard all the budget presentations of every higher education institution in the state this past week. The president's of Fort Hays State University, Colby Community College, and the Northwest Kansas Technical College are doing a fantastic job of keeping their costs to our children down and still providing a quality education. More importantly their graduates are finding jobs.



News From the Past

15 years ago - 1996

St. Francis capped a busy week by coming in No. 1 Saturday in the Northwest Kansas League Wrestling Tournament. The Indians outdistanced Scott City 151 to 124.5. Individual winners for St. Francis were Scott Jenkins, Kelly Gabel and Bill Gabel.

In the event of an emergency Kansas Cellular customers can now dial 911 and reach an emergency dispatch unit according

to Gary Rogers, emergency preparedness coordinator.

A gathering of 130 persons registered at the Kansas Day festivities in Bird City on Jan. 29. Historians Mark and Mildred Berry who reside at the state line north of McDonald were guest speakers at the afternoon program.

John Stannard, county agent, has announced that he will be leaving Cheyenne County to take the county agent position in Russell County. John came to

Cheyenne County in 1989.

At the school board meeting, the board voted to install an elevator at the grade school.

John and Marge Schorzman have opened a new boot repair business on College Street in St. Francis.

The cast of The Music Man performed before a full house both Sunday and Monday evening. Jerry Renk portrayed Harold Hill while Julie Wolters played the librarian, Marion Paroo.

Casey's Comments

By Casey McCormick



I'm sure we are not the only parents who are caring for a kid's pet.

You know how it goes, "If we get it (dog, cat, horse, monkey, etc...) I'll take care of it!" Right.

It usually doesn't take too long for the novelty to wear off. The youngster begins to spend more time doing the other things in life that bring more entertainment than

dog chores. Then who gets to take care of the feedings, walking, vetting, bathing...?

Now don't get me wrong. We love the dog and it has become just as much of a family pet as our other two.

And if the day comes when our son wants to take the animal with him. Well, I'm sure we're gonna miss that dog.

Along a similar vein, a friend told Lezlie and me about how their college-age daughter was coming home to dog sit while they went on vacation. "It's nice to have her do something for us for a change."

So again. There is hope out there.

Community has a great hospital

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor,

We are indeed, very fortunate to have a wonderful hospital, great providers and staff in our community. What a dedicated, caring group of people they are! In the last two years I have, literally, spent hundreds of hours in emergency rooms, ICUs, and pa-

tient rooms at various hospitals. This, in addition to a long nursing career, has given me plenty of experience in evaluating the care that is given to patients. I can say, without a doubt, that you cannot get any better care

anywhere than you can here at our hospital. We should all be grateful to have a facility like this in our community. I know I am.

Joy Andregg
Bird City

Honor Roll

New and renewed Herald subscriptions: Ray Lee, Wheeler; Charles Rogers, St. Francis; Ralph Duell; Goodland; Ron Loudon, St. Francis; Alan Archer, McDon-

ald; Eugene Bier, Rudolph, Wis.; Natasha Wilson, St. Francis; Brad Figgins, St. Francis; Gary Cooper, St. Francis; Mike Goodale, Hays; Floyd Jensen, St. Francis; Pam

Bolin, St. Francis; Robert Klie, St. Francis; Naomi Holliman, St. Francis; Betty Meads, Indianapolis, Ind.; Bill Keller, Pratt.

GOD SAYS
The poor is hated even of his own neighbour: but the rich hath many friends. He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.
Proverbs 14:20, 21

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Morning Worship 10 a.m.
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Church 332-2254,
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Worship 10:30 a.m.
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Wed. AWANA Club 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

St. Francis Community Church
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204 N. Quincy Street
www.sfccfamily.com
Pastor: David Butler
Sunday School 9:15 a.m.
Worship Service 10:30 a.m.
Potluck & Communion - Every 2nd Sunday
Wednesday Bible Study 7 p.m.

Peace Lutheran Church, AFLC
202 N. College
Pastor Ken Hart
332-2928 Pars. 332-2312
Sunday School 9:30 a.m.
Worship 10:30 a.m.
Communion 1st Sunday of the Month

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Praise the Lord