

Opinion



**Free Press
Viewpoint**

Ugly money

By John Van Nostrand

As professional as he could say it, Rep. Jerry Moran is not a big fan of the federal government's proposal to offer rebate checks to Americans as a way to jump start the economy.

The measure has been approved by the House and is under review by the Senate.

What Moran couldn't say, or chose not to, is how can the government act in ways some of those same taxpayers can't? So we'll say it.

A taxpayer may have a bad few months, for whatever reason, with his own finances and has evidence the next few months won't be much better. He could go to his bank and ask for help, but the banker, too, knows about the problem and is hesitant to help any more than he already has. The banker does not want to add to the stress by offering more credit.

Our economy is in a similar situation. The difference is, the federal government demands to find a banker to offer the help with no regard to consequences.

Moran said the U.S. government can't pay for the stimulus package on its own so it will go overseas to borrow money. Moran suggested one of those sources will be Communist China, which adds the insult to the injury to the American economy. Many former American jobs are in China. Many items Americans purchase are made in China. Now we will ask China for money to pay American people? It's disturbing.

We get creepy over those payday-loan businesses that offer loans at astronomical interest rates. Some people say those places are sleazy and ruin families. But the feds don't have a problem going to China, where you are sent to prison for owning a Bible and can't say a discouraging word about the government. If you do...it might be the last thing you do. Talk about ruining families.

How much, really, will a one-time payment of \$800, for example, help? One person will pay off a credit card. Another person will make a mortgage payment. And there will be people, who are in a horrible financial position, who will make an unnecessary purchase and continue their debt.

While we pay back our "mastering the possibilities," the government goes, yet, deeper into debt for a band-aid fix. The best way to improve American economy is lower the taxes and create jobs.

But we will all take the check, right?

Don't buy the warm, fuzzy feelings Congress says are there because the checks are a bipartisan, cooperative project. The government's rebate proposal happened during an election year. What a coincidence! With the top job on the line, both parties will do whatever it takes to look good in election booths.

While our nation's checkbook still looks bad.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Colby's representative plans appearance

For those who might not be aware, Kansas House of Representative Jim Morrison of Colby and John Faber of Brewster will be two of six members discussing the past week's activities at the statehouse as part of a public affairs series "The Kansas Legislature 2008," which will be broadcast live at 8:30 p.m. Friday, on the Smoky Hills Public Television station.

Officials from the station are encouraging viewers to call the legislators during the program's call-in segment toll-free at (800) 337-4788.

Another interesting tidbit I read recently was about earth-friendly chocolate and what the environmental people had to say. I was shocked at some of the information gathered by Earth Talk, which is a nonprofit publication through the Environmental Magazine, published in Connecticut.

In one article, the author wrote that like coffee beans, the cacao seeds from which chocolate is derived, can only be grown successfully in equatorial regions—right where the world's few remaining tropical rainforests thrive.

The "Earth Talk" column went on to write: As worldwide demand for chocolate grows, so does the temptation among growers to clear more and more rainforest to accommodate high-yield single-crop cacao tree plantations. What are left are open, sunny fields with dramatically lower levels of plant and animal diversity.

Adding environmental insult to injury, most



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

cacao plantations use copious amounts of chemical fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides that further degrade the land that once teemed with a wide variety of rare birds, mammals and plants.

Another problem with chocolate production, although not specifically an environmental concern, the article suggested, is the conditions endured by workers that pick and process the cacao seeds.

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture has documented some 284,000 children between the ages of nine and 12 working in hazardous conditions on West African cacao farms.

In Africa's Ivory Coast, for example, where more than 40 percent of the world's cacao is grown, underage cacao workers are routinely overworked, performing often-dangerous farming tasks in a setting that some liken to slavery.

As a result of these and other related injustices, so-called "fair trade" advocates have

targeted large producers of cacao to improve working conditions and pay living wages that allow workers to get their kids out of the fields and into school.

Some cacao farmers have enlisted the help of scientists and environmental groups to find ways to produce chocolate more fairly and more sustainably. The nonprofit Rainforest Alliance, which works on similar issues with coffee growers, is now partnering with cacao growers in Ecuador to develop environmentally and socially responsible cacao production and processing standards.

The standards seek to maintain critical conservation areas, reduce pressures to convert more forestland to cacao plantations, and provide social and economic benefits to local communities.

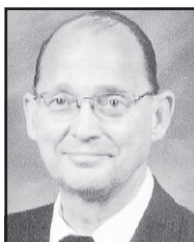
As a result, some 2,000 cacao growers in five Ecuadorian communities have now formed cooperatives that help find new markets for their products while overseeing adherence to fair labor standards and environmental protection measures.

Rainforest Alliance hopes to expand the program to other cacao growing regions of the world in the coming years.

As I said, I was surprised to read what goes on in some areas dealing with chocolate production.

Patty Decker is editor of the *Free Press*. Her column appears on Mondays.

What a week



Jim Morrison

• Capitol Review

Last week got off to a fast start on Monday with the House undertaking final action for the first time this session with the votes tallied on the new voting boards. It set the tone for the week that saw a new Attorney General sworn in, a bill introduced to facilitate a compromise on the Holcomb power plant, and an expanded gaming decision by the Shawnee County District Court. With the start of the session behind I am now preparing for the work ahead.

Four members of the House and Senate utility committees have proposed a bipartisan bill that was introduced in both chambers. The bill, which will be debated simultaneously, works to set limits on carbon dioxide production and paves the way for a new coal powered plant to be built in SW Kansas. Here is very brief overview of the measure:

Requires increased energy efficiency in new state and public school buildings as well as in state vehicles.

Prohibits construction or expansion of merchant, fossil-fuel burning electricity generating plants.

A merchant power plant is defined as an electricity generating plant with a nameplate rating of at least 300 megawatts and which sells less than 50% of its output to retail customers or to "load serving entities."

Creates the Kansas Electric Generation, Transmission and Efficiency Study Commission to look at issues related to electric service in Kansas.

Establishes CO2 emissions limitations for new electricity generation facilities using fossil fuels.

Creates a mechanism for offsetting CO2 emissions that exceed the statutory limitation.

Enacts the net metering and easy connection act.

This deals with solar powered units that are interconnected with a retail electricity supplier.

Customers will be billed for any electricity provided by the retail supplier in excess of the amount generated by the customer's solar generation.

Enacts regulatory requirements This would authorize the Secretary of Health and Environment to implement the federal Clean Air Act and would prohibit the Secretary, absent from statutory authority, from adopting rules and regulations under the Kansas Act that are more stringent than required by the federal act or rules and regulations authorized in that act.

Legislators are hopeful that the fine details of this bill will be worked out and that it will make it to the House floor for a vote in the next week or two.

Gaming On Friday, Shawnee County District Judge Charles Andrews, Jr. filed his decision declaring expanded gambling constitutional. This is a very big issue here at the Capitol. The governor used assumed gambling revenues to fund part of her budget. That decision will be appealed to the Supreme Court. Many House members are refusing to leverage state financing on funding streams that don't exist yet.

Budget As always, it is important for the budget to

stay at the forefront of our minds. Even if the gambling revenue becomes a reality we will still have to keep a close eye on the bottom line.

There has been some confusion as to how the Governor was able to end with a 7.5 percent balance in her proposed budget. The short answer is that, up until the last four pages, the governor's budget ends at 5 percent. She was able to meet the statutory requirements by removing \$147 million from K-12 funding. I hope we can meet funding obligations to the educational system while keeping our promise to hold the line on spending.

I will try to keep a running total and share it with you each week. It is important that everyone understands the fiscal pressure we are under this year. Currently, there hasn't been a bill with a significant fiscal note debated on the House floor.

Bills HB 2711 An act concerning the environment; relating to conservation and electric generation, transmission and efficiency and air emissions.

HB 2712 An act concerning rural housing; relating to creating the housing development grant program; exempting certain cities from certain requirements for rural housing incentive district financing.

HB 2641 An act concerning income taxation; relating to property taxes paid by certain taxpayers.

Thank you very much for the honor of serving as your Representative in Topeka. I take my duties seriously and am able to full-time dedicate myself to helping those who need assistance with several of the agencies or problems they have with state government. I really do enjoy helping and appreciate your continued prayers and help.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

