

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Tight budget leaves health care unfunded

Those who wanted the state Legislature to approve meaningful health care reform were somewhat pleased with a compromise bill that passed on Wednesday, but at the same time the state budget squeezed out the money needed for most of the health programs.

Rep. Jim Morrison (R-Colby) said he did not feel the health reforms really met the needs of Kansans, and he was not surprised the money was left out.

Morrison said he was disappointed with the way the session had gone, adding that he felt it was a major loss for western Kansas not to get approval of the power plants proposed for Holcomb.

The representative said he found himself unable to support the budget, adding that it was the first time in his career he had voted against one.

Morrison had said he did not feel the state Health Policy Authority had presented a good plan to help cut the cost of health care for people who need it.

Authority Executive Director Dr. Marcia Nielsen said she was pleased with passage of the compromise bill, but that without money, not much has changed.

"So much time and so many resources were invested in the process of developing health reform, as instructed by the legislature last year," she said. "To have a compromise on health reform without adequate funding will be difficult to explain to Kansans who care deeply about these issues."

Morrison disagreed, saying he feels the authority was trying to expand a government insurance program. He said he feels the state should encourage more free market in the health insurance area and help people find ways to cut costs without expecting the government to pay for it all.

"Health reform is a major multi-year undertaking," Nielsen said, "and the Kansas Health Policy Authority is committed to pursuing the goal of a healthy Kansas for all Kansans."

"The problems in our inefficient and expensive health system get worse as the economy tightens. Kansans expect all of us to step up to the plate and work together on common-sense solutions."

The authority presented a 21-point program after spending a year gathering information around the state, and the compromise bill included nine of the initiatives it identified. However, only one — a coordinated school health program — was actually in the state budget, for \$550,000.

The authority had proposed a 25-cents-per-pack increase in cigarette taxes to pay for its proposals, but the Legislature did not want to raise any taxes in an election year.

Health care reform continues to be a big-ticket item for employers and employees alike, and as the economy tightens more people may have to drop their insurance in order to feed their families.

Neither the state nor the federal government will be in a hurry to turn on a tap of money to pay for health care, and continued economic stress may make it tougher next year to get the state legislature to begin funding the health reforms passed this year.

Undoubtedly, health care reform and health insurance costs are a major issue in Kansas, but across the nation people are looking to the presidential candidates to see if there is a national solution.

— Tom Betz, editor of the Goodland Star-News



Colby kicks off summer

Most area students have either completed the school year or will be done Friday until next fall. Either way, summer vacation is almost here.

It will mean lazy days at the pool, baseball, softball, joining a summer reading program or even a job for many of our youth.

Last Saturday was also the end of Colby's American Youth Soccer Organization for the spring season. A grand finale for 15 players in the 14 and under age group will be a trip to the Tri-State Games in North Platte May 30-June 1.

Soccer has been a real success story in Colby and when I was told about this tournament, it sounded like a wonderful opportunity for some of the players.

Daniel Morris, who has been volunteering a lot of time to AYSO and the sport in recent years, said he and Terrilyn Fleming will be the coach and assistant coach respectively for this event.

This will give some of our soccer kids a chance to compete with hundreds of other youth from Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado, but they are in need of donations to make the



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

trip possible.

Daniel was telling me in addition to the costs of getting 15 players to North Platte, the Colby team is also required to bring three referees, equipment, uniforms and pay for meals and lodging during the three-day weekend.

I wasn't aware that North Platte has 16 soccer fields and most Saturdays more than 1,000 young people are playing.

It's my understanding from Daniel, they already have some donations from Shelbourne Reynolds, Fotogirl Photography, Wal-Mart, Stephens Construction and Colby Bowl and Fun Center.

Without the help of those donations, the team wouldn't have even been able to pay

their entry fee.

The team still needs help - even if it's a small donation - it will help our youth and Colby will be represented.

All proceeds from the tournament will go back into the Tri-State American Youth Soccer Organization to help with training and promoting the sport.

Years ago when soccer was introduced in Colby, our sons took part and enjoyed it. They also took advantage of swim club, the recreation programs and other summer activities.

If not for all the people who volunteered to these events possible - by either donating time, coaching or money - our young people would have missed out on some great summer fun.

What I remember most about summer vacation was the ice-cream truck, book mobile and swimming. Not that those things weren't fun - it's just that today our kids have more variety.

To find out more about helping with the soccer team, give Morris a call at 443-3325.

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

Lawmaker investments not so green

By Lindsay Renick Mayer

When environmental lobbyists and eco-friendly citizens come a-knockin' on lawmakers' office doors, Democrats (and some Republicans) can detail efforts to pass legislation that directs taxes collected from the oil and gas industry towards renewable energy initiatives. But the politicians probably won't mention that while they're encouraging the country to invest in alternatives, they themselves aren't doing so with their own money. According to the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, members of Congress have more money invested in each of the top five oil and gas companies, individually, than in 305 green stock companies combined.

The most recent personal financial disclosures show that members had at least 45 times more money invested in the oil and gas industry (at least \$20.6 million) than in public companies that provide "green" products and services (at least \$452,100). This includes companies that develop renewable energy projects, manufacture energy efficiency products, recycle material or create wind or solar products. The amount of money members have plunked down on these green stocks, as listed in the newsletter Progressive Investor, has actually decreased 23 percent since 2004, while their investments in oil and gas have increased by 30 percent.

"Every purchase that we make, whether to buy a car or a piece of clothing—and that includes stock in our portfolio—we're making a strong statement about what we want," said Rona Fried, editor and publisher of Progressive Investor. "If you invest in clean energy stock, you're making a statement that that's where you want to see the world going. If you

invest in fossilized companies, you're going to be stuck with the dinosaurs."

Democrats, who have tried repeatedly in the last year to pass legislation that would tax oil companies and use the money for wind and solar energy subsidies, had even less money invested in green stocks than Republicans in 2006—at least \$59,300 compared to at least \$392,600. (Members of Congress annually disclose their investments in ranges, making it impossible to determine their exact value.)

Of course not all members of Congress agree that renewable energy is the way to go—and even if they do, they might not be comfortable buying stock in such companies yet, because the industry is young and the stocks can be volatile, Progressive Investor's Fried said.

Indeed, between 2004 and 2006, lawmakers were not getting rich off of their green investments. On average, individual lawmakers earned at least \$2,700 on these investments over the three-year period, through dividends, capital gains, royalties and interest, the Center found. They made an average of \$24,200, however, on their investments in the oil and gas industry. Because the most recent personal financial disclosure data available is from 2006—2007 reports are due mid-May—it's still impossible to say whether members have become more or less invested in these companies in the last 15 months.

Then Again some investments in alternative energy aren't considered to be healthy. Last year President Bush signed an energy bill that doubled the use of corn-based ethanol, a controversial biofuel that is driving up the price of food worldwide. In 2006, lawmakers had at least \$825,400 invested in the companies that stand to profit the most from corn-based etha-

nol production, including agribusiness giant Archer Daniels Midland. Democrats owned 75 percent of those investments (though Sen. John Kerry and his wife, Teresa, own 60 percent alone).

Democrats may have less of their own money invested in green stocks, but those companies have invested more in the campaigns of Democrats than Republicans. Of the total \$242,900 that the companies' employees and PACs have given to federal candidates, parties and committees so far in the 2008 election cycle, 68 percent has gone to Democrats. The oil and gas industry, however, has traditionally supported Republicans. This election cycle, Republicans have received 73 percent of the total \$11.5 million from the oil and gas industry.

Addressing global warming and investing in clean technologies and renewable energy is not a partisan issue, said Doug Stingle, membership and outreach coordinator of the Midwest Renewable Energy Association. "This is something that everyone should be invested in. It's not an ideological issue," he said. "If global warming severely alters our ecosystem in such a way that we can't live our lives, it won't matter if you're Republican or Democrat. It's beyond that."

Lindsay Renick Mayer writes for Capital Eye, the online newsletter and blog of the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan research organization in Washington, D.C., that tracks the influence of money on elections and public policy at its website, OpenSecrets.org. Distributed by minutemanmedia.org

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.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Joe Falkoff - General Assignment/Sports Reporter
jfalkoff@nwkansas.com

Jan Ackerman - General Assignment
jackerman@gmail.com

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Sales
jstewart@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Kathy Arendt - Circulation, Classifieds
karendt@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Becky Foster, Jim Jackson, Kris McCool, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Cheryl Holub, and Amanda Campbell

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail within Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

