

Opinion



**Free Press
Viewpoint**

Huge debt mounts while parties spar

One thing that seems certain, no matter who becomes president, is that the national debt will continue to grow over the next couple of years.

That's a frightening prospect, with the debt now estimated at \$10.3 trillion and growing at a rate of \$3.45 billion a day. That's nearly \$34,000 for each American, man, woman and child — and growing at more than \$11 a day.

While both major parties will give lip service to balancing the federal budget, the deficit for this year is estimated at \$438 billion. That's likely to grow for a couple of reasons.

One, the Democrats will have control, maybe even "veto-proof" control, of the House and Senate. The temptation to pass pet spending bills and "economic relief" projects will be just too much to resist.

And two, both parties will be running scared of the economy. They will pass any bill aimed at rescuing us from disaster, whatever it takes. And witness the recent bailout bill, which grew from \$400 billion the government didn't have to nearly \$600 billion the government didn't have.

A round of vetoes isn't likely, from either Sen. John McCain or Sen. Barack Obama. And priorities in Congress favor spending over thrift, since spending for a member's own state or district, or for a member's backers, is what earns approval and keeps congressmen in office.

Many go to Washington with a fine set of ideals, but few can resist the allure of spending, either pork-barrel projects for the home folks or big programs to rescue the economy, help the poor and the downtrodden — or corporate America.

Spending is the quickest route to a campaign war chest these days, and for most congressmen, staying in Washington becomes the main, sometimes the only, goal.

Money is the fuel that corrupts the system, and it gets worse every year. It's not likely to change soon.

For one thing, few in Washington see a problem. Members' interest is mostly in staying there, not in reform.

Until Americans wake up and realize what we are doing to ourselves, that won't change. Until we give the president a line-item veto so he or she can excise the worst spending excesses, Congress will keep passing bills loaded with pork, using untouchable "earmarks" for everything from bridges to corporate tax breaks.

Until we start caring about the deficit, Congress will assume things are just fine. It would be easy to argue that at \$10 trillion, the debt it's so huge it's beyond our comprehension already.

But in tough economic times, the lure of pumping up the economy may trump fiscal responsibility. Who's going to vote against a better economy, no matter the cost?

This nation is digging its own grave. We're spending our grandchildren's income and our great-grandchildren's while borrowing to finance our need for foreign oil. We're sending what's left of our wealth and our jobs abroad to fill SUVs and run air conditioners.

It's not just Congress that's bought into this corrupt and debilitating system. It's all of us. And until the American people demand better, things are liable to continue this way.

There's little to show that who wins and who loses in next month's elections will make much difference in what happens, for neither party has an answer or a plan. — *Steve Haynes*

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Let's see, mud, asphalt? All the same?

"It's on a state highway, so you shouldn't have any trouble," my husband said.

Boy, talk about your famous last words. You'd think that after 40 years my husband would know me better.

It seemed like a good idea to go to the church social, pick up some supper to take home and maybe get a couple of pictures for the paper.

But, the church was in a small town, which can be reached by going down a nice paved state highway. Or, you can turn too soon and take the dirt shortcut.

I wasn't trying to take a shortcut. I just thought that was my turn. In my defense, it was paved for the first 100 yards or so. After that it was a dirt track that had just enough rain on it to have a two-inch deep layer of slick, sticky mud.

Of course, I noticed that the pavement ended, but I was moving along real well. I figured it wasn't probably one of my best ideas of the year and I'd probably have to wash my car when I got home.

Yeah, that was a good thought. Not smart, but comforting.

Which is how I got about a mile and a half down the road before I got stuck. The car just started to go slower and slower and finally, it wouldn't go forward any more.

I tried rocking it — putting it in reverse then drive quickly. But it did no good. I was stuck in the middle of the road — which I figured



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

was better than being in the ditch.

Still, I had to do what I hated the most. Call Steve for help.

Of course, he was 30 miles away and it would take awhile for him to arrive and he warned me, he wasn't sure he could maneuver on that road even in his four-wheel drive.

While I was waiting, I tried backing up. While I couldn't go forward, I could go backward, slowly and sometimes sideways. I was only a hundred yards or so from the pavement when he got there, and together we pushed, pulled and dug the car back onto the blacktop.

Steve suggested I go to the car wash while he went home to fix dinner, since we weren't going to make that church supper.

Good idea, but the automatic car wash was out of order. The manual one had one bay closed and one bay busy. While I was waiting, I checked my purse for quarters. I had two, plus three dollar bills.

The clean car rolled away and I discovered the coin changer was broken. The wash took

five quarters for each round.

I called Steve again. He had two quarters and two ones. He suggested I go to the office and trade my bills in for quarters from the pop fund.

The pop fund had three quarters and the cash drawer another dozen. I bought them all.

Back at the car wash, I washed twice and rinsed once, using all the quarters I had scrounged at the office. The four left weren't enough for another go around, so I drove home.

When I got out on the highway, though, the front end wobbled like crazy. Steve said I probably had mud stuck to the wheels, unbalancing the tires.

I ended up taking the car to the shop to beg the guy, who does my service work to de-mud the underside so I could drive at more than 45 miles an hour without shimmying all over the road.

My children say they are getting me a global positioning system for Christmas. But then, they've only known me for 30 years.

Steve's getting me about 10 rolls of quarters.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansan.com.

Farmers guard their water sources

Longtime McPherson County farmer Brad Shogren knows all too well about challenges facing farmers when it comes to water.

These problems can be as numerous as the weeds in a spring field after a one-inch rain. They range from too much moisture to not enough. They also include soil erosion from gully-washing rains.

As fewer and fewer farmers farm and more and more people inhabit our larger towns and cities, producers are feeling the squeeze from an unquenchable thirst for water for industrial and municipal use.

Water sources farmers and stockmen have relied on for decades are being eyed by neighboring communities. Lakes, streams, rivers and underground aquifers all come up on the urban radar.

Shogren has farmed in the Smoky Hill River valley for more than three decades. He and his son Tracy operate a family farming partnership. They run a diversified grain and livestock operation below the Kanopolis Reservoir.

One third of their farmland is irrigated with renewable water in the nearby Smoky Hill River and Sharp's Creek.

"We've been farming out here for years and using water from these natural sources to water our crops," Shogren says. "We've developed a system of farming that uses our water resource wisely. We've invested plenty of capital on irrigation units that efficiently use water from our creeks and rivers."

Two years ago, Shogren and his farming neighbors were blindsided by a proposal from the Kansas Water Office to deviate from the standard release schedule of Kanopolis Reservoir. This change would have affected the way farmers used water out of the river — specifically for irrigation.



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

As the McPherson County farmer tells the story, the state was in the process of changing how Kanopolis is operated. This change would have affected down steam water rights issued by the state over the past 50 years.

Shogren and his farming neighbors scrambled to learn about Kansas water law and how it affected them.

"During the last two years we've educated ourselves and worked with the Kansas Water Office to help them understand how vital water is for agriculture in our valley," Shogren says.

They had the opportunity to lay out their case for irrigation farming in the Smoky Hill Valley. The farmers detailed the contributions they'd made to the local economy with added production from irrigated crops.

The McPherson County producers also explained the investment they'd made in their communities, not only financially but with their multi-generational family operations.

The farmers talked about the multiplier effect and how more dollars were infused into the economy because of the increase in sales of fertilizer, fuel, herbicides, seed, equipment and other agricultural inputs.

This group is working to promote a long-term water supply for the Smoky valley.

"One of the biggest things we're trying to convince the Kansas Water Office is to keep

this water here," Shogren says. "We don't want to see it shipped back to Russell or down to McPherson. We're close to Salina. What if this city in our region needs water in the future? Where will this water come from if it's shipped out?"

Like most of his fellow farmers in the Smoky valley, Shogren is convinced Kansas has a "pretty good" set of water laws — laws designed to look after the best interests of all Kansans.

That doesn't mean such laws never have to be revisited or tweaked occasionally as water becomes more and more scarce, Shogren says.

Keeping that in mind, Shogren and his neighbors will remain vigilant concerning water usage in their part of Kansas. They'll also continue to serve on boards and keep each other up to speed.

Shogren has served on the McPherson County Conservation District board of supervisors. He's also been recently selected to serve on the state conservation committee. He also served on the Kansas Farm Bureau Natural Environmental Resources committee.

"We all understand the importance to watch out for our agricultural interest," Shogren says. "We also want to learn more by attending meetings that impact our livelihood and share with others. We know water will always be important to our vocation of growing crops that provide food."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

