

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Legislators must face tight budget

Kansas legislators face unpleasant choices when they go to work next month.

The state expects a deficit approaching \$147 million this year, with the number likely to top \$1 billion in the next fiscal year when it ends June 30, 2010.

That's without drastic cuts, of course, but the state Constitution does not allow the government to run a deficit. The so-called "cash basis" law requires the state to end the year in the black.

The last time this happened, the Legislature "solved" the problem mostly with smoke and mirrors. It shifted funds, changed tax-payment dates and shuffled things around. The result was a one-time wonder, a budget that at least looked balanced.

Those tricks can't likely be repeated, though. That leaves the incoming Legislature with the task of actually cutting spending. And we are not talking this time about cutting spending requests by state departments, as leaders in Topeka so often do.

The figures put out by state budget analysts require cuts from what the state will actually spend this year, and next.

What to cut? There are no easy choices.

Public education takes up about half the budget. The governor and many legislators have pledged not to cut education. It's popular, and they remember when they held school spending down last time, school boards sued for their "rightful" share.

State courts, ever mindful of increasing their power and diminishing the Legislature's, ruled that schools deserved more money. The justices cited a study paid for by the Legislature.

Cutting schools won't go far, except maybe as a last resort. If other programs all get cut, the schools might take a small hit.

Next up in size and threat to the budget are the so-called entitlements, welfare and medical programs which use a lot of federal money and come under federal rules. It's tough for the state to cut Medicaid payments to the poor and elderly, even at a time of dire need. And the feds might penalize the state for any cuts that run afoul of their rules.

Which leaves everything else. Transportation and higher education are the next-biggest pieces of the pie. Both are important parts of what the state does, and both face ever-increasing demands for money.

While transportation has its own "trust fund," it gets general tax money from the state as well. With the motor fuels tax increasingly less dependable, as fuel mileage declines and use of "alternative" fuels increases, the "gas tax" brings in less and less. That's one reason transportation needs injections of sales tax money.

Colleges already have been cut to the point where they get only about 25 percent of their money from the state. A recent program to fix up buildings has addressed the worst issues of "deferred maintenance" on campus, but universities and smaller schools still need money.

A lot of "minor" state programs will feel the knife, some the ax. And cuts may still be required for the big boys, schools, colleges, roads and "entitlements."

Nobody in their right minds would take this job on. We're not sure what that says about our legislators, but they do have some tough decisions to make.

Like all the rest of us, though, the state of Kansas will survive this downturn and live to face another. — *Steve Haynes*

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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

Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
ahaintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Marj Brown, Vera Sloan - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
j.stewart@nwkansas.com

Heather Woolfer - Advertising Sales
hwoolfer@nwkansas.com

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk
jestes@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Tammy Withers - Office Manager
twithers@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NORWEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager
Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Elizabeth Brock

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

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

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas 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.



Grandchildren will want to know

This is a time of year for digging out certain things. Christmas decorations, mailing lists, even special table linens. In almost any category, I could be called a collector. I'm not a specialist with a single eye-popping collection, though I certainly appreciate such dedication. Instead, I am enough of a pack rat that I collect a few of whatever takes my fancy.

In my lifetime I have collected china figurines, pretty pieces of colored glass and rocks, coffee mugs, quilts, books, you name it. At this season of the year, I start digging out my collection of Christmas decorations, mostly Nativity sets and tiny churches. I suppose you could call me a collector of collections.

Perhaps the most entertaining thing I collect, though, is people and their stories. More and more, I am drawn to history, as it represents a collection of real lives of real people. During the holiday season, especially, I am reminded of the reminiscences of parents and grandparents, the oral history that is most easily shared at family gatherings. The commonalities that many share, no matter what their circumstances, are spiced by the unique details that lift some to a higher achievement.

One story of my family came to mind recently in a discussion of early pioneers in the area. My mother's parents met in Hitchcock County, Neb. The story of the trip there, how-



Marian Ballard

• Collections

ever, is not so simple. My grandfather, Charles Smith, was raised in eastern Iowa. When he was 16, his father died and the family store was sold.

Overnight, he became the man of the family. They loaded their belongings in a rail car and moved to Stratton, Neb., where they homesteaded. He was a teenager, small for his age, but plowed the land with a team to provide his family with a living. He also was a country school teacher, which was where he met my future grandmother, Alice Taylor.

She had her own adventures. Her family originally homesteaded in Cherry County, Neb. Unfortunately, Cherry County is Sandhills country — a whole lot of grass and sand, and not a good place to farm. For homesteading, it was a disaster, though huge ranches now dominate the area.

When the homestead in Cherry County failed, my mother told me that the Taylors

bought a relinquishment (a homestead that had not been completed by fulfilling legal requirements) in Hitchcock County. Alice was the oldest child in her family and had just turned 18. Her parents had used their homestead rights in Cherry County, but she was legally an adult. Thus my unusual family history story: my grandmother was a homesteader. She filed a claim on a piece of land in her own name, fulfilling cultivation and residency requirements, with the help of her entire family, so that her family would have a large enough holding to support them.

There are other stories in my collection that yearn to be told. It saddens me that my mother and I never quite got around to getting everything written down, for the stories of that generation are unique in our history. Yet it is also a cautionary tale. The stories of every generation are unique. At this season of the year especially, I think of all the stories that will be forgotten.

There are stories of the Depression years, stories of the war years, stories of the '60s to be told. Each speaks of shared history, as well as individual responses to circumstances. Have you recorded your own stories? Polished writing does not matter when future generations just want to know what *really* happened.

Foster care is tough, rewarding

To the Editor,

To all the judges, lawyers, case managers, social workers, law enforcement personnel and anyone else who believes we do it for the money: Let me give you just a glimpse of what it's like to be a foster parent.

When the children arrive at our house, some are angry, some are scared, some are mentally ill and some are too new to be any of those things yet.

We work to build relationships with the child, their birth family, case manager, therapist, foster care worker, family support worker, teacher and other foster parents in the hopes we can get the best possible outcome for that child. We attend foster parent training, court hearings, case plans, parent/teacher conferences, school functions, doctor, dentist and therapy appointments and occasionally an emergency room or in-patient mental health facility.

We provide food, clothing, shelter, football shoes, cheerleading uniforms, dance lessons, voice lessons, band instruments and sometimes the only clean, stable environment they have ever known. We are on the job day after day with no vacation pay, no sick leave, no insurance and, in the 10 years I've been at it, no increase in reimbursement.

We've cleaned up feces, urine, vomit, ex-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

pectorant and blood left by children of all ages. We've listened to teenagers have temper tantrums and to the deafening silence of a baby who doesn't cry.

We cry with them. We cry over them. We grieve for them. We rejoice with them and sometimes all we can do is hope they have a good life later and hand them over to our guardian angel. We do all of this and hundreds of other ... important tasks raising a child we did not give birth to, for less than one dollar an hour. We do all of this because ... we care.

So the next time you have contact with a foster parent, I implore you to offer your best side and your best service. I'm moved and honored to be part of a group of people I consider amazing and wonderful. I know without a doubt they are the angels among us.

Susan Wegele, foster parent, Oakley

Parade impressive to veteran observer

To the Editor:

I went to the light parade in downtown Colby on Sunday evening, and I was very pleased at the amount of participants in the parade. All went to some work and expense.

I was most impressed with the amount of people who attended. I have been away from Colby for 20 years, but having grown up here, I so remembered the open house Christmas time of many years ago. It was always such a crowded place, with all business opened and prizes to sign up for in every store. There was a store in every building, with two dime stores, three drugstores, two department stores, three or four hardware stores, three or four mens and women's stores, tow shoe stores and some other places.

Sunday was such a fun time with the Colby High School band, and of course, our very special Santa and his helpers. Thank you to all who brought back some special memories for me.

Jean Oren, Colby

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715.

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

