

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Level of levy isn't the whole tax story

More often than not, the goal of city councils and county commissions in Kansas when doing their budgets is to maintain their property tax mill levy.

That goes for when the economy is good and for times like these, when it can require serious budget-cutting.

Maybe consistency is good. People know what to expect on their property tax bills, right?

Actually, there are a couple problems with the hold-the-mill-levy mentality.

One is that the levy is only part of the equation for figuring a homeowner's property taxes. The value of the home assessed by the county appraiser is the other. So even when the mill levy stays the same, property taxes tend to rise because property values tend to rise.

You might think that property values also could decline, depending on the market. But even as housing markets around the country have crashed, home values in Hutchinson have held up, even risen over the last year.

The other problem with the hold-the-mill-levy approach is spending. It sets up local government for budgets to expand more than they should (in good times) and for extreme budget-cutting when the floor drops out of revenues.

Just look at the city of Hutchinson. During the good years leading up to this one, labor expenses for the city grew from about \$9 million in 1998 to more than \$20 million in 2008. That means that in 10 years, the city's payroll more than doubled.

That is astounding growth. What are all the positions that the city has now that were not needed just a decade ago?

That isn't to pick on the city of Hutchinson. The story is much the same for Reno County, for other cities and counties and for state government. When the economy is good, and tax revenues are healthy, government grows in size almost unconsciously.

We wish local bureaucrats could cleanse themselves of the hold-the-mill-levy mentality. It is more than OK to lower the mill levy when revenues are flush — to pass along true savings to property owners — and it then would be more acceptable to raise the mill levy when times get tough.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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 or Fax (202) 225-5124

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 SW 10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
jstewart@nwkansas.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales
hwoofter@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design
kballard@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Tammy Withers - Office Manager
twithers@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

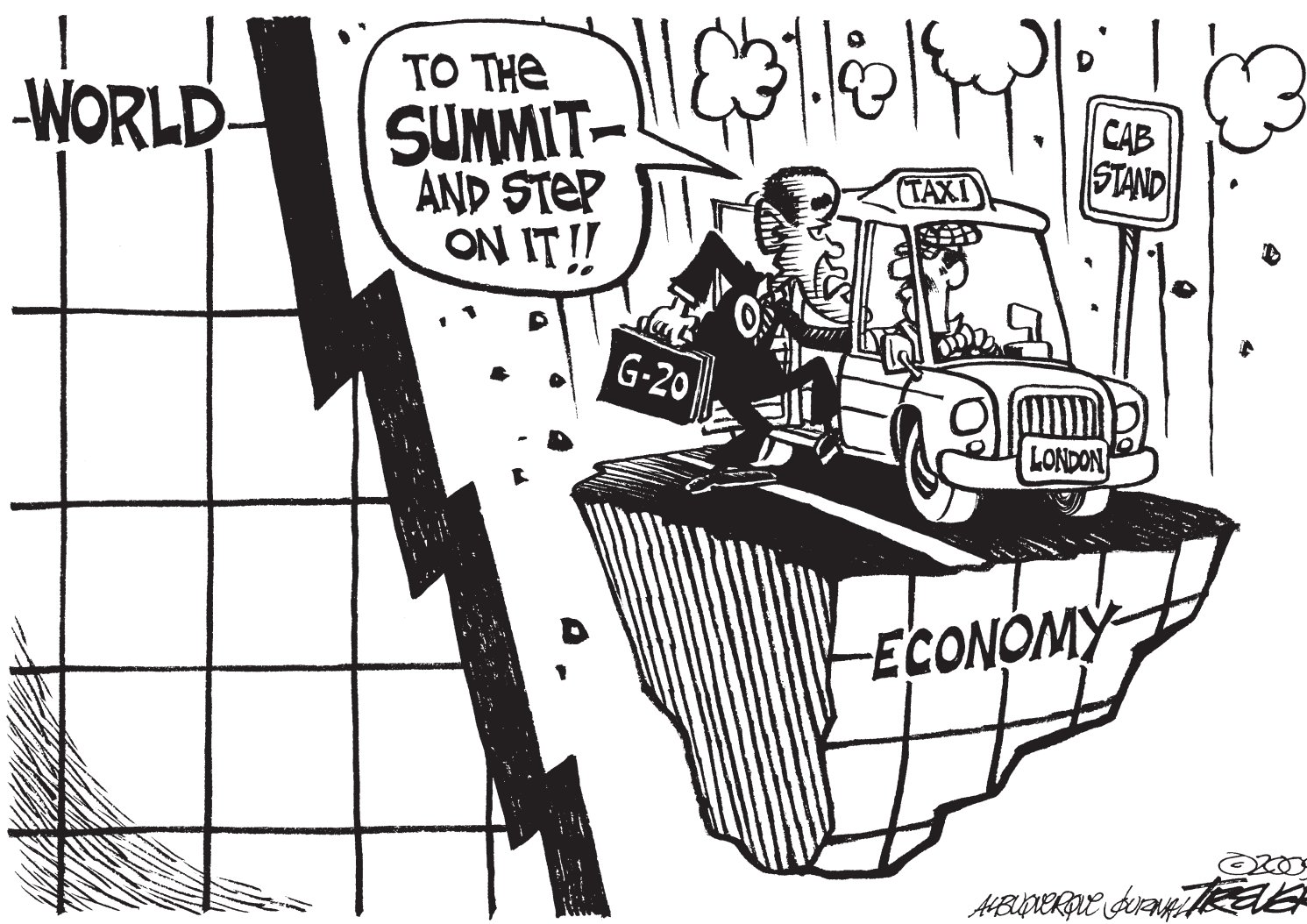
Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Daniel Spillman

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 Nor'West 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 \$50, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.



Talk about big money blows her mind

Today it was announced on Cable New Network that our country's deficit is estimated to rise to over 1.8 trillion.

Whoa, that's more zeros than I can even imagine. Where will all of this money come from? Will the government just print more money, and if they do, will it be worth any more than the paper it is printed on? This just 'befogles' (my new favorite word) my mind.

Well, I'm no mathematician. In fact I don't even like to think about numbers. Just working on my income tax gives me a migraine.

It is my understanding that this whole mess was started by banks giving home loans to people who they knew would never be able to pay for them, so why are we giving the banks money they don't deserve?

They also keep talking about helping these banks get rid of the houses they have foreclosed on. That just blows my mind; why aren't we helping those people get their houses back from the bank, or giving them one of the



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

houses that got foreclosed on that they might be able to afford?

I have another idea that might have prevented this whole problem in the first place. I think the government started at the wrong end of the population when they were handing out money.

While searching the Internet, the closest I could come to finding out how many tax returns were filed last year was that 155 million were filed in 2007. Now remember, I said I am no mathematician, but if the government sent out \$1 million to every couple who filed a tax return in 2008 and \$500,000 to every single person (and I would put in a clause that cou-

ples filing separately would be considered as a couple in this situation), perhaps everyone would be able to either pay off their mortgage or at least pay it down considerably. Those who don't have mortgages could have bought a new car, shopped for Christmas, gone on vacations, bought new clothes or saved a little.

Wouldn't that have put a lot more money in circulation and helped out the banks that are now in default, and kept business from going bankrupt?

Don't ask me how much that would cost the government. I told you I'm no mathematician, and my calculator doesn't go up that far. You figure it out, and we will print your results in the *Free Press*. I think. I'll have to ask my boss.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. It is one of her favorite things to do.

Reading is a gift easily shared

To the Editor:
I volunteer at Trees for Life, the Wichita nonprofit that sponsored the "Love in Your Attic" book drive at the Dillons store in your area in February.

"Love in Your Attic" was a special drive to gather books for children in Liberia. There is only one book for every 27 kids in Liberia, so children learn by repeating chants after their teachers.

When children don't have books, their futures are compromised. Educating children in the developing world is the most productive way to break the shackles of poverty.

We in the United States are not that many generations removed from illiteracy ourselves. Several summers ago, I visited my father's younger sisters. I told them how fortunate we were that my grandparents were literate and handed that legacy down to us, their 11 children and 27 grandchildren. I mentioned my late grandfather who drove 16 miles each night to bring the newspaper home.

My aunts looked at each other in surprise. "Your Grandpop couldn't read!" they said.

I was stunned. "Then why did he buy the newspaper?" I asked.

"He had Grandma read it to him after all of you went home at night," they said.

In three generations, my own family had moved from illiteracy to literacy. My grandfather hid his secret well. He was an intelligent man. He was a master cabinetmaker who did repair work for the White House and President Eisenhower's farm near Gettysburg, Pa., where we lived. We were proud of him. But my Grandpop couldn't read.

We in our country are blessed with education. We have the capability of helping others who need the life-saving skills of literacy. Children in Liberia are a case in point.

Statistics in the developing world reveal the impact of basic literacy: Farmers in rural Pakistan, when schooled to the fourth grade level, produce 8.7 percent more. A study of 18 developing countries in Asia determined that farmers with four or more years of primary education averaged 13 percent more crops. Ad-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

ditional years of schooling increased not only the farmers' yields but had a positive spillover effect on the yields of their neighbors, too.

This "positive spillover" effect was happening in my family when Grandma read the newspaper to Grandpop every night.

I applaud the Kansas Dillons stores for launching the "Love in Your Attic" drive. Thanks also to their many shoppers who searched their attics and closets to find good used books for Liberia's children. You not only gave your love, but you are empowering a generation of children by giving them hope for the future.

Dr. Jeanne Jacoby Smith
Retired professor of English/curriculum and instruction, McPherson College

Should drugs be legal?

To the Editor:
The war against drugs has been many years in the making and largely ignored here because the U.S. government has been engaging in wars in other regions instead of helping our neighboring country, Mexico.

Helicopters will soon be in the fray, and security is to be beefed up along the border, but Mexico's drug cartels have grown large and strong, infiltrating at least 230 of the largest American cities.

Soon, the United States will have to fight these cartels without the help of Mexico because the government of Mexico is caving in. It simply does not have the capacity to handle all of the crime. Thousands (not hundreds) of troops are needed at the U.S. border.

Europe, Asia and other continents have got to start taking care of the countries on their

side of the globe so that we here in the United States can take care of our own business.

My first experience with the danger of drugs was when my husband, son and I lived in Whittier, Calif., during the 1970s. A neighbor girl who was employed by the telephone company knew some kids who were using drugs. They were afraid she'd tell the police. At least, that is what we figured when a huge rock was thrown into this neighbor's front window, breaking it to smithereens. We heard the car wheels squeal as it sped away.

We moved to another location in Whittier, and when we were attending a Lutheran Church, the congregation held a meeting to inform the members about the proliferation of drugs in the community.

If you have ever lived in California (especially a large city), you have either been robbed or burglarized or know of someone who has had that bewildering experience.

I know of a family whose son was an innocent altar boy as a child, a well-behaved kid. He joined the Navy and did duty in Vietnam, where he became acquainted with drugs being smuggled around and the trade going on. Most of his family used drugs since it was easily available from him.

He did not use a bank for his money and was knocked in the head and robbed of thousands of dollars that he carried for this business.

He really didn't think drugs were harmful and thought that what he was doing was OK, except that it was against the law! About a year after he was hit in the head, he died of a heart attack in his sleep.

"If they can send a man to the moon" — as the saying goes — why can't they invent a pain killer that has no bad after-effects?

My mother had a painful leg injury before she died and a doctor couldn't give her anything that would stop the pain. Once I took a pain killer, and the aftereffects were alarming.

If I thought drugs would kill pain and I was in pain, I'd get some if I could.

Should drugs be made legal? I think I'd vote "no," but I'm really not sure. I keep trying to find the answer.

Edna Hatcher, Colby

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

