



## Free Press Viewpoints

### Budget choices hard for county

County commissioners are faced with an unenviable task this year, trying to construct a budget for next year in the face of declining property valuations.

One thing they should avoid is increasing taxes in a year when most people, businesses and wage earners alike, already have trouble making ends meet.

The valuations, multiplied by the tax rate, determine a county's revenue. Most counties face some difficult times, with farm land and other real estate values down.

What to do?

Commissioners will need to look for places to cut. In Thomas County, Commissioner Paul Steele warned agencies they could expect to take "a haircut" in their budgets, with cuts in the 8 percent range for some. Valuation dropped just a little, nothing like the nearly 20 percent drop in nearby Decatur County.

That kind of warning could, and should, be in every county's future.

Commissioners may have to cut some employees — usually more palatable than cutting wages, especially if someone quits and isn't replaced. They could start by simply freezing pay, something many civilian workers already face.

In a year when even schools are taking a big hit and most teachers can expect to get no raises, county and city employees should share the pain.

Most are lucky just to have jobs today. Some states, including California, are talking about cutting workers' pay.

There are many places to cut a budget, of course. A county might look at getting rid of some of the vehicles it's added in recent years, or scaling back some programs. Equipment purchases might be deferred.

Commissioners certainly will have to say no to many requests for money. They will have to turn down pleas from social service agencies cut by the state and may have to reduce existing donations as well.

The counties just might be able to get by with fewer people and less spending, at least this year. Maybe for the foreseeable future.

Increasing taxes, that should not be on the table. A county can get more money, after all, only if it takes it from people who earned it. And this year, few Kansans will earn more than they did last year.

Farmers may have a banner year, after two good years, but assessment figures show that because of the state's screwball ag-land valuation formula, farmers will be paying a smaller share of the tax burden and homeowners and businesses a bigger share.

While farm income and farm land values are at near-record levels, ag assessments are down. It's almost impossible to explain the state's valuation formula, which uses an eight-year average of income to value farm land. Just say that it isn't working very well.

If commissioners do decide to raise taxes, they had better have a good set of explanations for the voters. Otherwise, they might have something resembling a tax revolt on their hands.

Our advice is to cut the budget deep and hard before that happens. — *Steve Haynes*



### Rodeo train won't mean bronc watching

A lot of friends, neighbors, relatives and virtual strangers have asked me where I'm going next.

I guess my almost two-year-long travelog has intrigued them. Or maybe they're just hoping to get rid of me for a week or two.

The answer is mostly nowhere. My biggest trips this summer will be a couple of excursions to Colorado.

We're heading for Denver to ride *The Denver Post's* train to Cheyenne Frontier Days, a huge, week-long rodeo.

The truth is, Steve and I will board the train, pulled by a steam locomotive, at Union Station at 7 a.m. and arrive in Cheyenne about noon. Then we'll board borrowed school buses for the trip to the rodeo grounds. Out there, we'll enjoy a barbecue lunch, western music and maybe even dance a little.

After that, while the hoard of traingoers heads for the rodeo, Steve will walk back downtown — it's only two or three miles — to spend his day at the depot watching the dozens of trains come and go.

I'll go and enjoy the vendors selling



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

everything from horse tack to maple syrup, and usually including Tom Ewing from Cedar Bluffs with his mountain man wares. A trip through the Indian village is always a treat to watch the dancers and listen to the story tellers.

Then I will head downtown. Cheyenne has a pretty fair bookstore, which sells excellent popcorn, and some nice Western wear places where I can look around and pretend that a calico dress is something I might accidentally want to wear sometime.

Then at 5 p.m., we're back on the train and headed back to Denver.

There will be a box supper in our seat and the trip back usually is faster than the trip out.

Except for the year that a freight train derailed ahead of us and instead of getting into the station at 9 p.m., we struggled in at 2 a.m.

That and a visit with our youngest daughter, who is flying into Denver at the end of the month, are the highlights of our summer travel.

Frankly, after spending most of two years on the road, being at home and watching my garden grow is a real treat. The green beans are coming on nicely and we've already had a mess of them for supper. The sugar peas have come and gone, along with the lettuce and spinach.

I'm hoping for a fall crop of those three, but for now I have to look to the tomatoes, green peppers, sweet corn, zucchini, yellow squash, spaghetti squash, carrots and broccoli for nourishment. We'll probably starve.

*Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansans.com*

### Only one in five needs college degree

So everyone needs to go to college?

The president is pushing to have everyone pursue at least a year of education past high school, but that is far from the cheerleading we are now hearing from educationists and business leaders promoting everyone going to college.

A higher degree does correlate with a higher salary. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the average pay for a worker is tied to the level of education they receive.

No high school diploma:	\$21,484
High school diploma:	\$31,286
Associate degree:	\$35,138
Bachelor degree:	\$57,181
Master degree or higher:	\$80,977

So why not encourage everyone to pursue a college degree and everyone will make a lot more money?

It doesn't work that way. Already, in this economic downturn, college-degreed engineers are losing jobs. About 2,000 licensed school personnel in Kansas are now unemployed, and the teacher "shortage" has temporarily shrunk as schools tighten their belts and class sizes grow.

More university graduates are having to take jobs well below their training. In an economic downturn, we have to weigh the costs. One thing that takes a majority of our tax dollars is education. As high as tuition costs are, for every dollar a college student personally pays towards their advanced education, Kansas taxpayers are putting in two dollars. Can Kansas afford to educate everyone at the col-



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

lege level?

According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Employment Projections up to 2016, presented in the Chronicle of Higher Education, the majority of jobs do not require a bachelor's or higher college degree:

On-the-job-training of one month or less:	34.3%
On-the-job-training up to a year:	17.6%
On-the-job-training for more than a year:	7.3%
Related work experience:	9.6%
Vocational certificate at postsecondary level:	5.4%
Associate's degree:	4.2%
Bachelor's degree:	13.0%
Bachelor's degree and work experience:	4.3%
Professional degree:	1.4%
Doctoral degree:	1.5%

This means that only a little more than 20 percent of U.S. jobs will require a bachelor's degree or higher training, about one out of five. Yet, the proportion of Kansas high school graduates who are pursuing college work is approaching 75 percent. Only about a third

of them succeeded in completing that degree in 5-6 years back in the 1980s and the same holds true today. The 25 percent who do graduate may face stiff competition for the jobs they want.

Kansas universities are being pressed to retain and graduate more students. Yes, we can make the coursework easier and inflate grades. But that does a disservice to the good students. When lower-performing students are graded equal to deserving students, it cheapens our university degrees.

Kansas needs good car mechanics, custodians, construction workers, appliance repair workers and the like. This is good and respectable work that undergirds society. And from the data from the Labor Department above, it is where we need four-fifths of our workers. It may be personally satisfying for a taxi driver to have a doctorate, but as a society, we must decide if we can afford to foot two-thirds of that cost at public universities.

If the current economy shows us anything, it is that we can no longer afford to give out gold stars and M&Ms for mediocre performance. It is time for a "C" to again be the average grade, and for college admissions requirements in Kansas to kick up a notch.

To do otherwise is unfair to the best students. Today, we just can't afford to do otherwise.

*John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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