

## Free Press Viewpoint

### Budget questions need timely answer

The Kansas Senate leadership doesn't sound confident that the state's budget problems will be solved by the end of the general session this week, and that doesn't bode well. We're \$500 million short next year and that needs to be addressed and quickly.

Speaking on television over the weekend, Senate Vice President John Vratil said the legislature could use the follow up session, which begins April 28 to sort out the budget crisis.

With one week to go in the general session, it's looking like they'll need more time. Tuesday, April 6, is the last day the legislature can consider bills except for those that have been vetoed or are big spending and appropriations bills and legislators have indicated they want to wait for the latest revenue estimates, due out in a couple weeks.

Delaying this isn't good for them and it isn't good for the state. They have had three months and the entire interim (in which many legislative committees meet) since the last session to come up with a solution. They haven't. What if it takes another three months, that puts us at the end of July, well into the next fiscal year. It's a complicated issue and deserves a lot of careful study, but did they think they had unlimited time to decide?

Every school district across Kansas, as well as every other state agency, has been waiting to hear what's being handed down to them. They need to know.

The legislature needs to come together and find a solution before the end of the session; at the very least, they need to do so before the end of the fiscal year. We need to start off next fiscal year with a plan to combat this \$500 million shortfall they're expecting. On top of that, there had better be a plan in place if revenues decrease even more. The proposed "rainy day fund" is a step in the right direction, but money will only be put into that if tax revenue increases above a certain level, and that's not going to happen any time soon.

Several budget fixes have been proposed. The House Republicans are promoting a budget that cuts significantly from education while saying tax increases would harm business. Governor Mark Parkinson proposed several new taxes while saying more cuts would hamper state services. The Senate seems to be treading water between the two extremes. Vratil, a Republican senator, went so far as to say a tax increase is likely.

The Colby Free Press would like to know what residents and taxpayers in our area think. Would you be willing to pay any of the statewide taxes proposed such as on liquor and tobacco? Would you be willing to pay a flat sales tax? Or would you rather see state agencies reduce their budgets?

Write to us at 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail us at colby.editor@nwksansas.com. And don't forget to write your legislators. - Kevin Bottrell

### Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area.

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### 'Pet pothole' goes along with roads

On my way to work the other day, I looked ahead a block and turned at a different corner than usual when I saw city crews working on my pet pothole.

You know the one I mean. You know it's there, yet every day you forget until it's too late to avoid it. Plus, it seems to get a little larger every week through the winter, until by spring you could lose a truck in it.

This is not a slam against the guys out there with the shovels, or even the person who sends the guys out there with the photos. It's just a fact of life; where you have roads, you have potholes.

Actually, I appreciate the quality of streets in Colby. For several months while my family lived in Kansas City, we could have started a hubcap store with all the evidence left behind by cars coming down Minnesota Avenue in a hurry and hitting the lane-spanning holes that really were big enough to set an entire car in, in spite of sawhorses with flashing lights.

All of which got me thinking. It seems that perhaps the single most important factor distinguishing a civilization might just come back to potholes - or at least the roads they live in.

Ancient civilizations rose, in large part, where there were roads. We might not have recognized the infrastructure, which was probably a footpath or a camel path, or even a sea, but without people traveling beyond their own villages, there would never have been a need for writing, or trade, or any of a myriad of things we have today.



Marian Ballard

#### Collection Connections

Culture developed, at least in part, because common practices varied from village to village and region to region. People felt the need to explain themselves and to justify their own practices or assimilate those of others.

Empires have come and gone on the strength of the roads. The Roman Empire built highways out of stone which still exist today. They sent armies out on the roads, and brought tribute - booty or taxes - back. It's been said that the reason Christianity spread so quickly and so far was because Roman roads made travel far less difficult. All you had to do to travel from city to city was get on the road, point in the right direction, and start walking.

The U.S. was also built on the strength of its roads. In the beginning, the most reliable way to get from point A to point B was on the water. The colonists, after all, came from the British Isles. Water was an old friend. Ships along the coastline and barges on the rivers were easier than hacking a way through a wilderness - which is now probably the New Jersey Turnpike or U.S. Route 1.

That didn't last. With the Louisiana Purchase, a whole new river system opened up,

and canals were added to help it out. Landlubbers made trails here, there and everywhere, often following rivers.

The Natchez Trace, made when bargemen took goods downriver and went back upstream by land, from the Gulf coast up the Mississippi and the Ohio, is a trail worn so deeply into land without rocky features that it must look like one big pothole from end to end. The Oregon Trail, along the Platte, wore wagon ruts deep into the terrain. The Santa Fe Trail headed across Kansas to the southwest. The Deadwood Trail prospectors followed into the Black Hills during the gold rush can still be seen today, as can many others. Roads endure, and the potholes and ruts may last the longest.

Oddly, the road that really opened up the continent, the railroad, making it feasible to settle in places like Colby, has suffered the most. While it still hauls enormous amount of freight, the Interstate highways and the airlines largely supplanted it as a way to move people. We became a nation driven by automobiles. In most places, including Colby, it's very uncomfortable to live without a car, because things are just too spread out.

We need transportation. We need roads. We're stuck with potholes.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

### Tumbling pests romanticized

Traveling to Sherman, Norton and Grant counties the last couple weeks, I became reacquainted with an old friend, nemesis, nuisance that is very much a part of the western Kansas landscape.

While being buffeted about by 40 mph northerly breezes, countless tumbleweeds rolled across highways U.S. 24, 36 and 160. While I missed many of them, I occasionally nailed a two-footer and bumped a few others out of my path.

Tumbleweeds first gained notoriety when the western group the Sons of the Pioneers romanticized them in song back in the late '30s. I remember seeing my first ones in the early '50s.

In the early spring, summer and fall, when winds howled across roads in my native Sheridan County, tumbleweeds raced across the flatland. Incidentally, I recall singing along with the Pioneers and I still remember the song well.

This plant today is as much a symbol of the old Wild West as Wyatt Earp, cattle rustlers, the coyote and the rattlesnake. The image of the lonely rider and the ghostly shape of the tumbleweed bounding in silence across the endless plains has inspired a certain misty-eyed nostalgia even in folks who have never journeyed west of Kansas City - except to travel through our state to ski in Colorado.

In truth, this weed is a blasted nuisance. Even its Latin name (*Salsola pestifer*) identifies it as a menace.

The tumbleweed is also known as the Russian thistle. This plant was brought to the continent in the 1870s as a contaminant in shipments of flax seed imported to western



John Schlageck

#### Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

Canada. By the turn of the century, the weed had a foothold from coast to coast.

The tumbleweed can survive and grow almost anywhere. It remains one of the hardiest plants in the United States. Unfortunately, no one has found a good use for this thorny weed.

Tumbleweeds can cause problems for farmers and ranchers. This nuisance weed clogs irrigation ditches, catches and accumulates litter, disrupts traffic, causes fires, poses a health threat to some livestock and even breaks down fences on windy days.

In Kansas and other western states, thousands of man hours are spent each year clearing tumbleweeds from ditches and railroad tracks. In the spring, farmers fight the weeds with herbicides, and in the fall, the dried plants are sometimes burned.

Fighting tumbleweeds is a constant battle. Nearly every breezy day, they bound across the prairie and every spring they sprout by the millions.

Although tumbleweeds have been in this country for nearly 150 years, no one has found a reason to cultivate this plant. One thing is certain; this nuisance weed is here to stay unless our plant scientists can find a use for or method to eradicate the tumbling, tumbling

tumbleweed. So why not romanticize them?

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

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