

Free Press Viewpoint

Budget cuts offer only temporary fix

With the Legislature deadlocked and the state desperate to pay for increased caseloads in human and health services, what we used to call welfare, Gov. Sam Brownback has ordered cuts to balance the current budget.

That's not an option. It's required by Kansas law, which prohibits the state from running a deficit.

In making \$56.5 million in cuts, the governor had to take \$50 million from schools to keep the social welfare operation going. That's not going to be popular, and it leaves a lot of budget problems hanging.

The Legislature could have solved this problem, and should have, but the still-liberal Senate refused to compromise in a battle over money for special-education programs. As with other decisions, the state would have been better off if the Legislature had done its job.

We suffered when the Legislature abdicated authority over the school budget several years ago, cramming in an additional \$1 billion a year to satisfy the state Supreme Court. Then over the last few years, everyone from schools to taxpayers had to pay for that decision as ever-declining state revenues required the state to take all of it back – and more.

Gov. Brownback has found, as did Gov. Mark Parkinson before him, that expecting the Legislature to make tough decisions is a waste of time. Gov. Parkinson was forced to make dozens of painful cuts last year, despite a 1-cent increase in the state sales taxes he pushed through, when the Legislature refused to act on the deficit.

Now Gov. Brownback, who rode a large majority into office on the promise of building the state's economy by growing private business and jobs, finds that he, too, must be the adult.

Many senators apparently do not realize that the new era requires sacrifice. They are fighting to save school budgets from the axe and even want to save the state Arts Commission from a well-deserved fate. They seem oblivious to the fact that the state is flat broke, that we've had to cut schools back to 1992 levels and still may not be able to balance the budget.

(And right here, let's just say that our Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer is not part of the problem in the Senate. He's pushed for fiscal integrity when the liberal block back east has not.)

There's not much left to cut but the sacred cows, so we might as well get to it. And every program is someone's sacred cow.

The governor points out that the rescission bill he proposed at the start of this year's session would have solved the state's current budget crisis and left the state with a few million to play with as next year's budget goes into effect July 1.

Rep. Ward Cassidy from St. Francis points out that had the rescission bill passed, the state would have \$37 million in its ending balance June 30, rather than nothing under the current plan. That is the price of delay, and it is more than enough money to solve the special education problem.

It won't happen, though, thanks to a stubborn and intransigent few.

The Senate needs to stop defending the tax-and-spend policies of yore and get with today's program, which requires responsible spending, living within the state's income.

That's what Kansas taxpayers voted for last fall, and that's what they expect now. – Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the Free Press, its staff or the owners.

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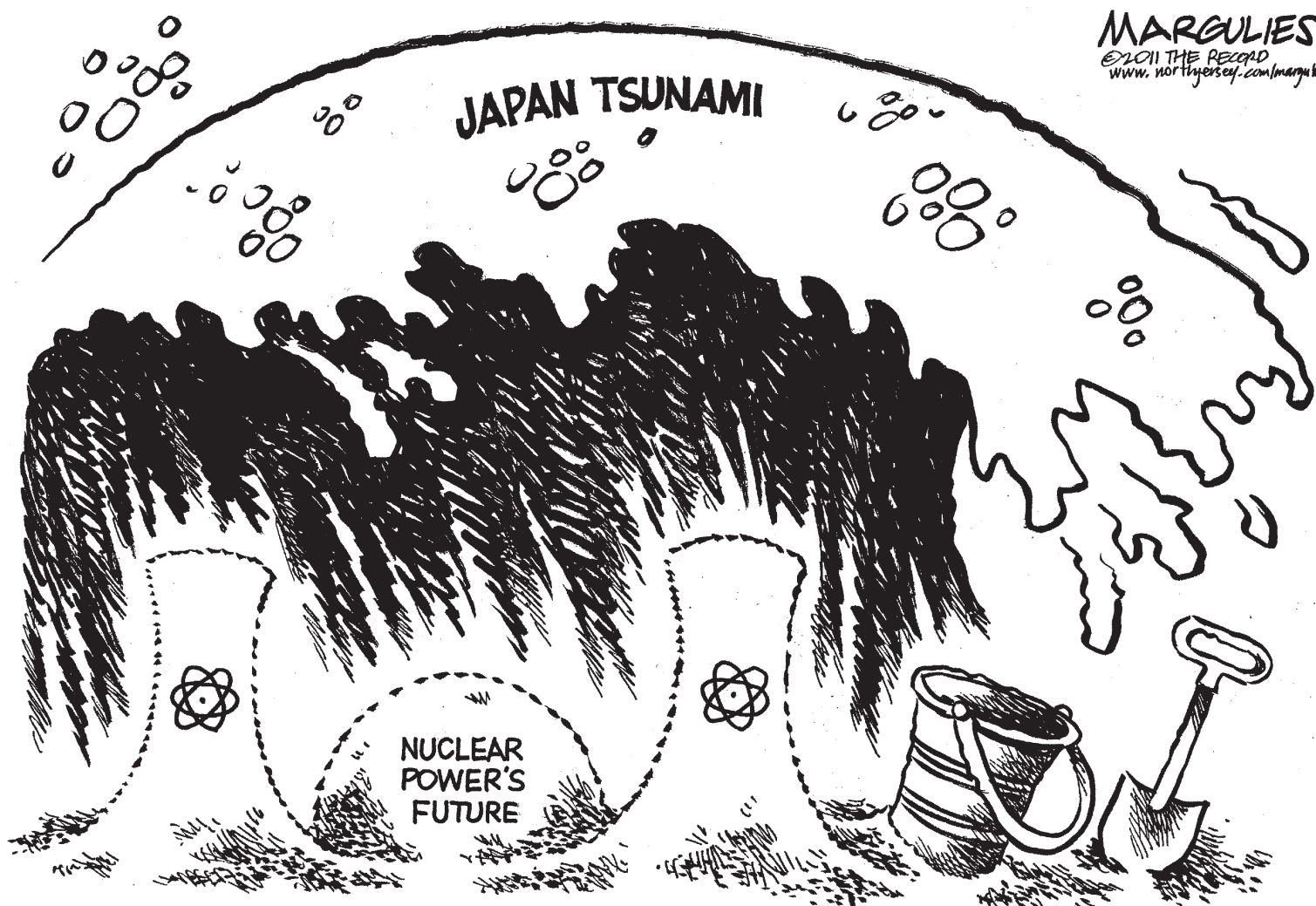
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MARGULIES ON THE RECORD www.northwest.com/margulies

It's spring down south – so there!

Grab your rotten tomatoes. You're going to want to toss them at us.

We just returned from almost two weeks in the South. It was sunny and mostly warm and we missed the last two snow storms.

Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah. Seriously, it was nice down there, but early spring – not so warm you want to wear shorts, though we did see lots of those on campus.

We started out heading through Wichita and Oklahoma and on to Russellville, Ark., where we had a late supper with a cousin of mine at the only restaurant still open at 9 p.m. – Ihop. After a supper of eggs and bacon, we continued on to North Little Rock for the night. The Holiday Inn was brand new, and all the chemicals in the carpets and the glues they use set Steve's allergies off something fierce.

The next day, we headed for Oxford, Miss., home of the University of Mississippi. Our friend Will Norton, once the dean of the Nebraska School of Journalism, is now the head of that school at Ole Miss. He had invited us to stop by next time we drove through the South, and we took him up on it.

It was spring in Mississippi. The co-eds were wearing shorts and the pear and plum trees were in bloom. Daffodils sprouted everywhere, in yards, on campus, by the roads and highways.

Back home, my daffodils were covered under a blanket of snow that day.

Dean Norton showed us the campus and took us all over town, showing us where William



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Faulkner had lived and written and out to the cemetery, where he and his wife are buried.

At the grave, there were a couple of empty Jack Daniels bottles. Apparently, it's the custom down here to polish off most of a bottle and pour the rest on ol' William's grave, since he was the town's most famous writer and drunk.

From Mississippi, we went on to our destination – Augusta, Ga., – the home of Taylor Morgan Blake, our one and only grandchild. Oh, and our two daughters.

We spent a week with our children, enjoying the early spring weather and just a little rain before heading out again for home.

This time we stopped for supper in Birmingham, Ala., where a friend took us to her favorite little Italian place. Our friend, Jennifer Stevenson, was the last American to win an Olympic gold medal in diving.

After supper, we hit the road for Tupelo, Miss., the boyhood home of Elvis Presley, for the night.

We missed seeing either the King's boyhood home or the statue of him at age 13 in Tupelo,

and didn't bother with a side trip to Graceland. We both like Elvis well enough, but aren't ardent fans. Besides, we were getting tired of traveling and wanted to get home to our cats and dog.

When we hit Memphis the second morning, we still had a long way to go.

The last night on the road was spent at Clinton, Mo.

Before we got to Missouri, however, we stopped at Mammoth Springs, Ark., to stretch our legs, get a map and view the springs, said to be the 10th largest in the world.

It's a neat little state park. The spring isn't really that spectacular. It just looks like a pond with a water flow. The only thing is, nothing flows in and a complete river flows out.

The last day on the road, we had lunch with our son in Kansas City – barbecue, naturally – and listening to the Jayhawks clinch the Big 12 Tournament title.

It was a successful trip, but even if the weather is better and there are flowers in bloom down south, we're really glad to be in our own bed, in our own house with our own cats and dog.

And, like the children the week before, they all seem to be glad to see us.

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

Let the sun shine on government

Each year, a week is set aside to remind citizens how important "transparency," or openness, is in our participatory democracy.

Our country was founded on the principle that government is of the people, by the people and for the people.

As Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his middle 19th century classic, "Democracy in America," the system of self-government we chose for ourselves is unique because we relied on each other, rather than royalty, to chart the course for our nation.

Tocqueville was fascinated that in America, we elected "people like us" to make decisions on our behalf, but we also decided that for democratic rule to succeed, we had to be participants in our own governance.

Sunshine Week, March 13 through 19 this year, is a reminder to elected officials and to those they serve that for America's system to work requires an informed citizenry. This means unfettered access to the information necessary to keep us abreast of just what government is attempting to do on our behalf.

Sadly, while our political leaders often talk a good line when it comes to transparency, they fall short when the rubber meets the road.

In Topeka, for instance, the city is embroiled in a controversy about the apparent theft of scrap metal from a city construction site. The scrap reportedly was sold and the money shared by a handful of city employees.

The city manager and his team decided to handle the incident as a "personnel matter" rather than a crime, leaving the even city council in the dark for six months. Had "transparency" been the rule and not the exception, this controversy most likely would have been handled in a few days. It has continued to boil for six weeks and counting.



Doug Anstaett

• Kansas Press Association

When the duly-elected city council members were blocked by city staff from access to documents about the theft, the council was forced to vote 9-0 to subpoena documents that had been withheld for "personnel" reasons.

What is wrong with this picture?

Each week, the attorney for the Kansas Press Association gets call after call from newspaper reporters and editors fighting roadblocks to information access thrown up by public officials. Whether it's access to agenda packets, minutes or notice of meetings or the abuse of closed-door sessions, transparency seems to be no more than a campaign pamphlet bullet point for some public officials.

On Thursday, a bill will be heard in the House Local Government Committee that would give cities, counties and school districts the "option" to name their own government-run website rather than the local newspaper as the official publication for public notices.

Never mind that a third of Kansans don't have access to the Internet. Never mind that the Internet has been proven time and again to be unreliable and susceptible to hacking and manipulation, while printed newspapers are verifiable, permanent, more likely to be seen and independent from government.

It's ironic (maybe appalling is a better word) that this bill will be heard during National Sunshine Week. It illustrates that far too many

of our elected officials don't understand why they alone should not be in control of public information.

Why is "sunshine" important? "Publicity," said Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, "is justly commended as a remedy for social and industrial diseases. Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants, electric light the most efficient policeman."

Brandeis was right. If we are to remain a free nation and able to compete with the rest of the world in the 21st century, citizens must be well-informed. For us to be well-informed, government must operate in the light of day.

Doug Anstaett, executive director of the Kansas Press Association, is a veteran Kansas newspaper man and an award-winning editorial writer. He lives in Topeka.

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