



Free Press Viewpoint

Lowering debt begins at home

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback struck a blow this week for fiscal responsibility when he opted out of the early innovator grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The move was obviously political, as Brownback has been an outspoken opponent of the new healthcare laws. However, the move is also a good first step in changing the attitude of accepting any and all federal money.

The United States is \$14 trillion in debt with no end in sight. Before 2008, the federal government on average financed 1/5 of the budget of every state, according to the White House Office of Budget Management. Various stimulus efforts during the recession increased this to 22 percent in 2009 and 25 percent last year.

Now, \$31.5 million – the amount of the early innovator grant – is not a large amount in a government that deals in trillions, but giving it back is a step in the right direction. After all, if someone who was \$100,000 in debt handed you a hundred dollar bill, would you take it? Or would you say, “here, you need this more than me.”

Everything we’ve heard out of Republicans over the past few months has been about budget cuts. If they are serious about cuts and debt reduction, then we also have to examine the demand for federal money.

We have a conventional wisdom in this country that when we elect someone to, say, the legislature, that he or she is going to go there and do good things for our district. That legislator is supposed to secure money to repave our highways or help get a major aviation contract for a hometown company.

This happens at every level of government. There’s a lot of federal and state money out there, why shouldn’t we get our share? That’s how people get re-elected. When someone asks for our vote a second time, we want to know what they’ve done for us.

That’s the culture we need to change. We need to change our expectations of our elected officials. That’s the toughest part of the equation. Politicians don’t need to change, voters do. Voters need to stop asking what a politician can do for them and start asking what he or she can do for the country. We need politicians who will work to find out how much federal money we can live without, what the bare minimum contribution is to keep everything working.

The bottom line is, if we ask for less, the government has to borrow less.

So the next time an official comes around campaigning for re-election, ask him or her: “how much money have you refused?”

– Kevin Bottrell

Write us

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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. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

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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.

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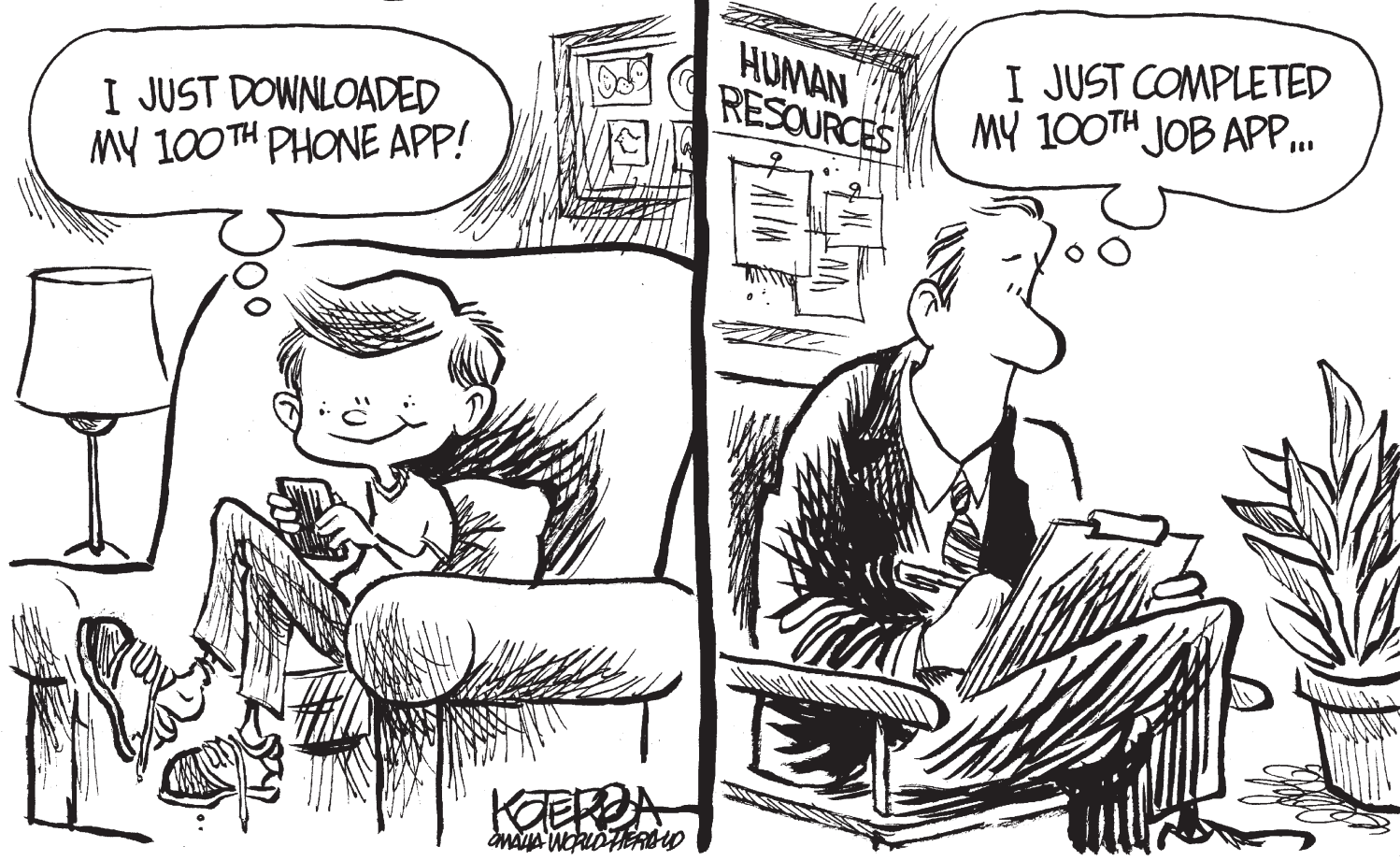
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.

The GREAT DIVIDE...



End of summer doldrums overwhelms

For every reason, and no particular reason, I've been feeling overwhelmed this week.

The summer doldrums are over, I officially – OK, officiously – declare.

For weeks, it seems, summer reduces us to only a few local activities. Farmers and businesses dealing with tourists are pretty busy, but the rest of us take a break. Picnics and races seem to be about all that's going on. Then comes the bluegrass festival and the fair, and then all of a sudden the summer is over.

Oddly, I never used to feel this way. Even when I had kids in school, I thought of August as being the real vacation time of summer.

No more. Here at the Colby Free Press, life can be measured in news cycles. When the schools and the Legislature are in session, there are many stories coming in, many opinion pieces being submitted.

In the summer, there are no school menus to print, no school concerts to see, no discussions of curriculum or budget shortages to worry about. While swimming and ice cream socials make a pleasant alternative activity, there's just so much you can do, newspaper-wise, with swimming and ice cream socials.



Marian Ballard

Collection Connections

Summer programs are often over by mid-July.

The budget fight in Congress, while distressing, at least provided newspaper copy, though it probably would have taken a demonstration at Fourth and Franklin to make it really personal to most of us – I can relate to \$100 a lot more quickly than to \$1 trillion. It was too hot for demonstrations in this neck of the woods.

The sad fact is, the weather has been the “hot” topic for most of the summer. Between the tornadoes and floods east of us and the hot, dry weather we shared with everyone south of us, concern over what had happened, what would happen, and what it all means has dominated the conversation. That's probably not over, but at least we've had a breather this week.

Meanwhile, the summer news slow down is over and we have entered the “back to school” time of the year. There are stories about enrollment and about sending a healthy, well-fed, well-equipped and immunized child back into the fray. There are stories about sending teachers back into the fray, too, particularly in this time of worries over tight budgets. (Yes, I know “concerns” is the politically correct word of choice; I also know that if I were a teacher I would worry.)

School is beginning in Brewster, our neighbor to the west, next week, with other districts hot on their heels. There will be books and backpacks, lunches and buses on everyone's mind. With the start of school, the rest of the community seems to get down to business as well, so there will be meetings and gatherings and conferences and concerts.

It's great to have things picking up. If only I were ready to give up the summer doldrums.

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.

Tea Party Patriots win debt limit deal

I do not usually write on themes getting extensive attention in the media but the establishment press has overlooked a big story in the debt limit debate. Every one has covered who lost: the President, Congress and both major political parties but almost no one identified the Tea Party Patriot movement as the clear victor.

Remember the over 2400 separate and spontaneous gatherings of Tea Party Patriots in 2009, geographically spread throughout the nation and proportionately held April 15, July 4, and Sept. 11, with about 800 such gatherings held each date. These gatherings, with no national leadership or direction, led mostly by moms with homemade signs, was perhaps the showing of greater anger against the federal government than in any single year in our history – certainly in my life time.

Remember as well the two Tea Party assemblages of over a million in Washington, D.C., during that same year crying out “President Obama! Can you hear us now?” “CAN YOU HEAR US NOW? Yes, the establishment media had trouble covering these stories then too, but they still happened.

The Tea Party movement resulted in the election of a few candidates committed to Constitutional limited government, the free market and fiscal responsibility – the Tea Party's core values and actually those of the U.S. Constitution as well. Values perceived by them as having been largely abandoned by the leadership of both major political parties.

All this is conceded but how does this translate to a win for the Tea Party Patriots on the Debt Limit Deal? True to the Constitution and their election promises, these patriots bucked the weak-kneed Republican Party in the House of Representatives and the spend-happy Democrats in the Senate and forced both to talk about the following previously ignored concepts. What is the proper role of government? How do we get a Balanced Budget Amendment to curb our addiction to debt? Are raising taxes always the only answer? And given gov-

Other Opinions

Harold Pease Liberty Under Fire

ernment's addiction to growth, will they ever have enough?

The promises to vote on a Balanced Budget Amendment, to not raise taxes and to actually cut future spending, are each a part of the finished agreement because of the insistence of the Tea Party members of Congress. As a group only the Tea Party saw the looming financial problems ahead if we did not seriously live within our means and scale back our debt. Now! With our debt credit downgrade and near stock market crash of this week can anyone seriously question Tea Party philosophy now? Still, there are voices in the land aimed to discredit them.

Republicans have shown themselves to have no fire in their bellies and have thus caved in to the run-away spending plans of their adversaries every time. Sometimes, as under the Bush Stimulus, they have shown themselves as leading the charge for debt enslavement. In short, modern Tea Party Patriots gave the Republican Party enough fire so that they did not cut and run so easily.

Did the Tea Party get what they wanted? No! Definitely not! Were that the case they would have had an actual Balanced Budget Amendment, actual spending cuts, and our credit rating would not have been downgraded. Reducing the rate of increase is not the same as reducing spending.

The deal did nothing to stop the growth of our debt and resulting bondage of our children. In fact, it did just the opposite. Still, opponents were forced to listen and give some attention to the Tea Party Patriots – a huge victory espe-

cially given their small size and government's nature to spend without restraint. We just need more of them in Congress. Returning to the Constitution is the only answer and they are the only ones saying it.

Hopefully, more Americans will see the Tea Party Patriot movement and our defense of the Constitution as the same thing. Until now they have been a somewhat lone voice in the wilderness as far as Congress was concerned but with this victory should merit our greater confidence lending to greater support resulting in even bigger victories to come.

Dr. Harold Pease is an expert on the United States Constitution. He has taught history and political science from the perspective of applying the writings of the founding fathers for over 25 years at Taft College. To read more, visit www.LibertyUnderFire.org.

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