



Other Viewpoints

Lobbyist spending only half the story

Kansans aren't so naive as to be shocked – shocked! – that lobbying goes on at the Legislature. The shock is what a growing, recession-proof industry it's proving to be, and that state law makes Kansans guess the motivation behind the wining and dining and the money behind the media campaigns.

As Brent D. Wistrom recently reported, lobbyist spending was a record \$1.4 million in 2010, way up from the \$475,000 spent in 2002 and even the \$939,000 spent in 2006. Judging from the \$648,000 spent through August, lobbyists pulled it back a bit this year.

But the steep increase since 2002 – despite no change in the rules, which bar legislators from accepting gifts worth more than \$40 or entertainment worth more than \$100 from any one entity in one year – has left both inflation and common sense in the dust. And the numbers don't even include lobbyists' salaries, administrative expenses, travel and lodging, which needn't be disclosed under state law.

Carol Williams, executive director of the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission, said it isn't that lobbyists are spending more these days on food and entertainment. "The big change is coming in how these organizations are communicating with the citizens to urge action or nonaction on the part of the Legislature," she told the *Eagle* editorial board, pointing to mass media and direct mail efforts.

Industry groups, local governments, universities, hospitals, law enforcement, nonprofits and other entities aren't spending money lobbying legislators and residents out of a sense of public service. They have desired outcomes in mind.

And while the public can find lobbying statistics at the Kansas.gov website, the searchable information doesn't shed light on what the state's more than 500 registered lobbyists are lobbying for or against, as it would in a state such as Wisconsin.

Nor do entities have to declare who (and whose money) is behind them; in 2007, for example, something called Know Your Power spent nearly \$406,000 lobbying against a new coal-fired power plant, without most Kansans knowing the campaign was bankrolled by an Oklahoma natural-gas company.

And sometimes the goal is obvious but illogical: The beverage industry spent hundreds of thousands of dollars last year, including on a radio and newspaper campaign, lobbying against a pop-tax proposal that never stood a chance of passage.

As Gov. Sam Brownback once said, "Lobbyists are children of God, too." Nobody understands pending bills and the legislative process better. Most of the "special interests" that lobbyists represent are of special importance to Kansans, whether or not they realize it.

And let it be said that a lawmaker's acceptance of a free lunch or green fee from a lobbyist isn't evidence of vote buying. As the most-lobbied legislator of 2011 as of August, state Sen. Terry Bruce, R-Hutchinson, told *The Eagle*: "If you can't eat their food and tell them to their face 'no,' you shouldn't be up in Topeka."

But state law shouldn't leave Kansans to wonder what lobbyists want and whose money they're spending. For now, it does.

– The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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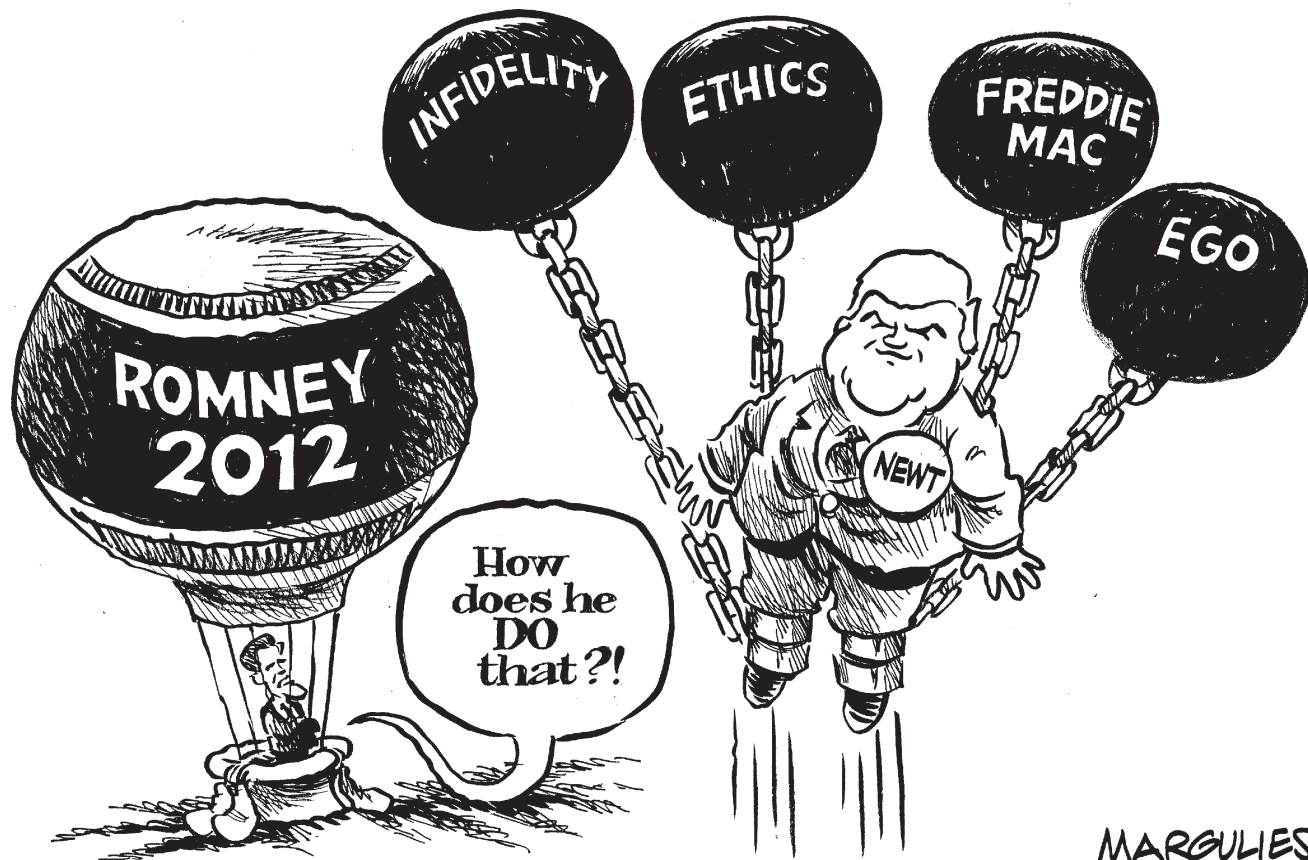
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W.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



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Christmas memories of childhood best

So many times the memories that are the strongest are not the most positive ones. I have to tell you though, my Christmas memories are the best. I was a great kid, filled with wonder, curiosity and just plain anticipation for the "big day."

I still remember writing my letters to Santa and mailing them so he would know what I wanted. I even remember getting a letter back from Santa telling me that something I wanted was basically out of stock and that he was sorry that I would not be getting that.

I would always try to stay awake so I could catch him drinking the milk and eating the cookies I left out, but somehow I never made it. I would wake up my parents very early to come and see all that Santa had left me. The years my dad was home from the Navy were the best – well almost the best.

My dad could be just a little bit ornery. One year I guess he was tired of my endless chatter about Christmas almost being there and when I thought I heard the sleigh bells he decided to act.

My dad took his pistol outside and fired it and came back in to calmly announce that he had wounded Santa. I became totally hysterical and nothing could make me stop crying. My mom finally went and gathered up band-aids, iodine and tape and made my dad go fix Santa up. This did the trick, but I never really forgave my dad for that one.

When I was five, Santa left a note pinned



Sharon Friedlander

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to the tree for me. My mom read the note to me after the other presents were opened. Santa wanted me to go down to the corral to find my one last present.

My mom and dad and our friend Albert all gathered up their coats and we set out to the corral. As we rounded the corner of the barn I saw my saddle on a small horse. I asked my mom why my saddle was on that horse and she said, "lets go see."

As we got closer I could see another note hooked to the saddle horn. My mom read the note and it said, "Sharon, this is Beans and he is your very own horse." I nearly spooked the poor horse jumping up and down because I knew now that my saddle was on my horse!

Beans proved to be quite a challenge in the coming months. He was a mustang that had been broken by the Indians and loved to throw his rider off. I got really good at flying that year.

I had a great childhood being on the ranch and getting lots of toys to use to keep me amused. Ranches were pretty far apart in Ne-

vada so I spent a lot of time amusing myself. I still have a picture of my "loot" from one year and it had everything from a football, microscope and chemistry set to the inevitable dreaded dress.

Yep, my aunt was determined to make me into a girl at least twice a year – Christmas and Easter. The dresses were always accompanied with socks, gloves and patent leather shoes and sometimes even a hat.

I always wore them at least once and mom always took a picture to send my aunt so she would know I did get them. I did send her thank you notes for them, too. My aunt and mom finally gave up giving me dolls since I would only take them apart and then leave them in a pile.

I just figured if it didn't go in my saddle bags it just didn't count. Give me a pocket knife and I was thrilled. When we moved back to Florida, my carefree days of hopping on my horse and chasing bad guys were over. Now my aunt could see the dress on Sunday and take her own pictures.

I will always have great memories of those Christmases and even the dresses. As I said, I was one lucky little girl!

Sharon Friedlander, publisher of the Colby Free Press, enjoys reading, hot rods and critters. Contact her at sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com.

Give and read books for new memories

If I could request but one gift during the holiday season, I'd ask for a book. Books abound with a wealth of knowledge and wisdom. They provide hours of adventure and entertainment rarely found anywhere else in today's culture.

A couple of books I would include on any wish list would include "Cutting for Stone," by Abraham Verghese and "Pillars of the Earth," by Ken Follett.

"Cutting for Stone" is about Marion and Shiva Stone, twin brothers born of a secret union between a beautiful Indian nun and a brash British surgeon at a mission hospital in Addis Ababa.

Orphaned by their mother's death in childbirth and their father's disappearance, bound together by a preternatural connection and a shared fascination with medicine, the twins come of age as Ethiopia hovers on the brink of revolution.

This novel is an unforgettable journey into one man's remarkable life and an epic story about the power, intimacy, and curious beauty of the work of healing others.

"Pillars of the Earth" is set in 12th-century England and the story line revolves around the building of a cathedral in the fictional town of Kingsbridge.

The ambitions of three men merge, conflict and collide throughout 40 years of social and political upheaval as internal church politics affect the progress of the cathedral and the fortunes of the protagonists.

Another book I once read, and pick up to review from time to time, is Howard Thurman's "The Mood of Christmas." The message in Thurman's book revolves around a gift he says everyone should enjoy and use in the best way. This gift is memory.

Thurman defines memory as, "one of God's great gifts to the human spirit without which



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neither life nor experience could have any meaning."

What Thurman urges in his book is to use your memory now, today and often. Think what a priceless gift it is.

What if you had no memory?

Every second, minute and hour of every day would have to begin for the first time. Learning would be impossible and education would be meaningless.

Instead, humans have the power to store vast amounts of information and experiences throughout their lives. All we have to do is think about it and we can recall these thoughts and experiences on demand with the use of our memory.

Some people store only unpleasant memories. Every slight is filed away. When a later encounter is made with the person responsible for the offense, the individual is chastised again, either mentally or verbally.

After a period, the memory storehouse is full of unpleasant thoughts. The mind is filled with suspicion, resentment and hate.

For others, only pleasant thoughts are stored for safekeeping. Such thoughts can be summoned at a moment's notice. They restore faith and re-establish confidence in life at difficult and trying times.

Remember with the coming of the New Year, look to the future with hope – the confident expectation of good. Use the gift of memory

to your benefit. Enjoy past experiences and remember life is what you make of it. Make it good.

And as for reading or giving a book this holiday season, there are plenty of other wonderful books waiting to be read. So go online, visit your favorite book store or swap books with a fellow reader. Just remember, this is the perfect time of year to read a book.

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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