

## Free Press Viewpoint

# Payroll tax takes Congress to edge

Everyone in Washington said they wanted to extend the payroll tax cut, but again it took an 11th hour agreement to extend the tax cut for two months.

Both political parties pushed until they had cornered themselves and made it next to impossible to reach a compromise.

The situation about the payroll tax cut was another round in the ongoing battle between the Republican led House and the Democratic led Senate. This time the House Republicans found themselves sitting on the hot seat when they appeared to be unwilling to agree to the Senate compromise worked out by Sen. Harry Reid and Sen. Mitch McConnell to extend the payroll tax cut for two months.

Another piece of the Senate agreement was requiring President Barack Obama to make a decision on the TransCanada Keystone pipeline project in 60 days. The project is slated to go through the middle of the country to carry oil sand from Canada to Texas to be refined.

Earlier Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recommended the project be delayed for more environmental investigation of the route because of sensitive areas the pipeline was to be buried across including the Ogallala aquifer regions of Nebraska and Kansas.

The Senate Democrats agreed to include this item in the package with the payroll tax cut extension, and it was this provision the Senate Republicans agreed to as a compromise to extend the tax cut for two months.

House Speaker John Boehner found himself arguing the House would only agree to an extension for one year rather than the two months the Senate had agreed on. He tried to sell the House Republicans on the Senate deal, but he was not able to get the majority to go along.

His problem was even worse because if the Senate compromise was brought up on the House floor there was every indication enough Republicans would join the Democrats and vote it through. To prevent such a vote, Boehner made it clear the House would not be voting on the Senate compromise.

When attempts were made to bring the compromise to the House floor for a vote the acting House Speaker of the day refused to recognize the Democratic representative and walked off the podium recessing the House.

The House Republicans pushed as far as they could until Republicans in the Senate and other Republican leaders began pushing back forcing Boehner to retreat and accept the Senate compromise.

Again this payroll tax cut was something both sides said they wanted to see extended. Republicans kept adding things not actually related to the tax cut or the extension of unemployment benefits. Some of those additions were accepted by the Senate Democrats until they felt they could not go any further when the TransCanada Keystone pipeline decision was added.

American workers will not see a tax increase in January because Congress was pushed to the edge again to get something passed. The fight will start when Congress reconvenes in January with both sides saying they want this tax cut to be extended for one year.

We agree with Boehner on one point. It is time to stop kicking the can down the road. The art of compromise is basically missing in the rhetoric from both sides, and people can expect more brinkmanship as the election season heats up.

— Tom Betz



# So long, and thanks for all the fish

Although the news has been spread around town, I'm sure many of you might be surprised to hear that I am leaving the *Colby Free Press*.

This January I'll be taking my love of science fiction, computer games and Viking metal and moving to Goodland to take over the *Goodland Star-News*. Tom Betz, the editor there, is retiring, and I will be moving into his position.

I've been constantly amazed these past few months at how many "well wishes" and "we'll miss you" I get, from the fire chief, the chamber of commerce, the school board and many more. It seems I really did make an impression here.

It's been a short two years and nine months since I arrived in Colby. I remember my first impression was that it was quite similar to my previous home in Wyoming. Every town has its quirks though.

I've often said I try to make a home for myself wherever I go, and though you might think that it would be tough for a kid from a city of 60,000 to move to towns of less than 6,000, I've found that the adjustment was easy for me. I won't wax poetic about a more simple way of life, our lives here are just as complicated as they would be in the big city, but there are important differences.

Things move slower in small towns. There's less traffic and less hustle and bustle on the sidewalks. People are just plain friendlier too. People wave at complete strangers as they drive by. I've even had people I've never met say hello to me by name as they are walking past. People don't act that way on the Front Range of Colorado. Maybe they do when you get to the smaller towns like Wellington or



**Kevin Bottrell**

• Simple tricks and nonsense

Berthoud, or if you go out into the plains towns like Eaton or Windsor, but not in Loveland.

The difference is never more pronounced than around the holidays. I went to visit family in Colorado the weekend before Christmas. The stores were all packed and the roads were jammed with traffic. There were pretty people everywhere.

In small towns like Colby and Goodland, even when there's a full parking lot the store still doesn't feel crowded. I went to the grocery store on Christmas Eve and barely had to wait in line. I went to Walmart the day after Christmas and had no trouble whatsoever. There wasn't even a line at the returns counter. I'm sure there were probably busier times of day, but I've heard from friends how packed the Colorado stores were and we just don't compare.

Colby has been a great place to work as well. In my time here I've covered a lot of stories, from a hunt for a missing man that ended tragically to a dead ostrich at Oasis to Postal Service shenanigans. Nobody from the outside realizes how much goes on every day in towns like Colby, but it is usually more than enough to keep journalists busy.

Colby is also a great place to work if you have an interest in politics, because we seem to be a favorite stopping point for candidates,

officials and activists. In 2010 we had every candidate for the 1st District of Congress come through, and I got to sit down with each of them. I also got to have a one-on-one with future Gov. Sam Brownback one day during the campaign and I've gotten to talk with him briefly a number of times since the election. That's a big deal for a young journalist in a small town.

The job keeps me pretty busy, but I'm also glad to say I helped out at least a little around town. I was on the 125th Anniversary Committee and the Take Charge Challenge Committee, and although I didn't have much time to devote to them, I'd like to think I helped at least get the word out. I also judged some parades, a brand new experience for me. I judged the Christmas Light Parade three years in a row, and this year's was by far the best since there was no snow falling and no wind!

Colby has been a great experience for me, and as I move on with my career I will always look back fondly on my time here. All that's really left to say is goodbye to Santa City, the red roofs you can see for miles, the elusive flock of turkeys on Eighth Street, the fake palm trees, the grain silo welcome center, the Buffalo Park snow pile and the ugly old hospital. I'll miss you.

But hey, I'm only 35 miles away, so I'll likely be visiting, if only so I don't have to say goodbye to Starbucks.

*Kevin Bottrell, news editor of the Colby Free Press, is a Colorado State University graduate who believes that the middle road is often the high one. Contact him at kbottrell@nwksas.com*

# Modern China stepping forward

First impressions are lasting. And mine was very positive. In November I had the good fortune to be part of a group from Salina that traveled to China for ten days. After a 14-hour flight from Los Angeles we arrived at the Beijing International Airport and stepped into another world. Inside the spacious terminal everything was sparkling. The pristine scene contributed to our sense of excitement as we contemplated the adventure that lay ahead of us.

By now I've had time to reflect on the many experiences of our trip. And as I try to sum up my sense of this rising power I keep coming back to the feeling I had when I first arrived. The Beijing airport was rebuilt for the 2008 Olympics. The Chinese wanted to impress the people from all over the world who traveled to their country for the Games. They wanted to show everyone that the 21st-century China is not your father's, or even your older brother or sister's China. The airport makes a bold statement. They're a proud country with five thousand years of history that is stepping confidently into the future.

And they've thrown open the doors to the outside world.

Therein was the main lesson I took away from my initial visit to the previously forbidden kingdom. The Chinese leadership decided somewhere along the line that a hermetically sealed China, a la their North Korean neighbors, would not produce the economic growth necessary to feed their large population, let alone take their place as a leader on the world



**Alan Jilka**

• A Voice of Reason

stage. Trade with the outside world was needed to accelerate their trajectory.

Some on our trip compared the Beijing airport to its counterpart in Moscow. I haven't had the opportunity to visit Russia to date, but according to others the airport in that nation's capital is a cold, gloomy and forbidding place, as unwelcoming as one could imagine. If one can judge a country somewhat by the airport in their capital city, Russia is still deeply suspicious of the outside world, caught up in a stagnant economy with backwards-looking leadership. China, on the other hand, has opened up to the outside world, while knowing that such an opening will bring inevitable changes.

Yes, our tour was fairly tightly scripted, but the organizers did pack a lot into eight days. We visited the capital and four other large cities in the area of China's eastern coast. We saw enough of the country to palpably feel the economic boom that is transforming modern China, a country quickly embracing capitalism. And there still is lots of room to grow. Although the Chinese economy is now the world's second largest, according to our guide the country ranks only 106th in terms of per

capita income.

Trade fuels a lot of this growth. And the Chinese desire for foreign goods and know-how leads me to conclude that an eventual opening of their political system is inevitable. Along with products and technology come ideas. People travel back and forth and learn each other's language and customs. Students go abroad to study. The daughter of China's vice-president, for example, studies at Harvard. More and more Americans are studying in China. Mutual understanding develops, which is the major building block for a peaceful world.

When one of our guides said his goodbyes he stressed the optimism that average Chinese feel towards their future. And as we passed through the same airport on the return home I could understand his and their feelings.

I also returned recognizing that this attitude of openness towards other cultures has been a large part of America's success. And we need to maintain that outlook. America can learn some things from China. And we can bring back their best ideas and reinvigorate the native optimism that has always been an integral part of our national psyche.

*Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.*

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

**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@nwksas.com

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**Sharon Friedlander - Publisher**  
 sfriedlander@nwksas.com

**NEWS**

**Kevin Bottrell - News Editor**  
 kbottrell@nwksas.com

**Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter**  
 colby.sports@nwksas.com

**Marian Ballard - Copy Editor**  
 mballard@nwksas.com

**Tomi Miller, Christina Beringer - Society Reporters**  
 colby.society@nwksas.com

**ADVERTISING**  
 colby.ads@nwksas.com

**Kathryn Ballard**  
 Advertising Representative  
 kballard@nwksas.com

**Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design**  
 khunter@nwksas.com

**BUSINESS OFFICE**

**Kylie Freeman - Office Manager**  
 kfreeman@nwksas.com

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**  
 support@nwksas.com

**NOR'WEST PRESS**

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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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• Bruce Tinsley

