



Free Press
Viewpoint

Flawed budget bill
disappointing to all

There is much wailing and gnashing of teeth over the state budget, centered on a flawed tax-cut plan that no one expected to actually pass.

The result could be a \$2 billion hole in state revenues down the line if something isn't done.

This is not Gov. Sam Brownback's tax-cut plan, though the basic idea came from the governor and he did sign the bill. The governor presented a carefully crafted package of tax cuts and changes that would not have created such a big hole in the budget.

The governor's plan itself was pure in theory and practice. He proposed ending several popular tax breaks, starting with the one for home mortgages, that could have caused a rebellion among voters.

This plan stayed true to the theory of a low, flat, fair income tax that many conservative economists have touted for decades, but it wasn't about to fly that way.

The Legislature stripped most of the income-raising ideas out, leaving mostly the cuts. The House and Senate passed different versions, the House bill having the most drastic cuts.

Late in the session, the Senate passed the House bill with changes senators thought would send it to a conference committee, where the issues could be worked out in a compromise between houses. Instead, the House passed the Senate-amended version as is.

Ideas differ on whether that was a double cross of the Senate or just good parliamentary maneuvering. Whatever you call it, though, the House slam-dunk left the state with budget issues. The carefully preserved 6.5 percent ending balance this year could disappear as quickly as it was created, leaving the state facing drastic cuts.

That's not likely to happen, though, since neither the Senate nor many House members, nor even the governor, wanted such big cuts without matching changes to stabilize revenue.

Hard-core conservatives may want to force more cuts in state programs and agencies, and there probably is room in some areas. For all the cutting of recent years, few agencies actually have disappeared. Programs seem to have a life of their own; witness the resurrection of state money for an arts program.

But the truth is, there's already been a lot of cutting. This governor and this Legislature have taken control of the budget and actually turned it around. State spending will go down this year for the first time in decades; most "cuts" in previous years were from proposed budgets, not from actual spending.

And that is at the root of much of the wailing. The spenders, the big-government forces, are no longer in control in Topeka. Government is shrinking, and they don't like it.

The tax law will have to be changed, yes, but it's unlikely the direction of state government will turn around any time soon. The die has been cast for a smaller budget, and most Kansans probably approve.

The forces behind higher spending – mostly those who benefit state and school employees, patrons of state programs and "entitlements," people who believe that government can and should solve every problem – don't like that, but it's a done deal now.

The next Legislature has time to avert a budget disaster. And perhaps, though many don't believe, some of the economic growth the governor promises will come along in time to save the day.

He just might be right, you know. – *Steve Haynes*

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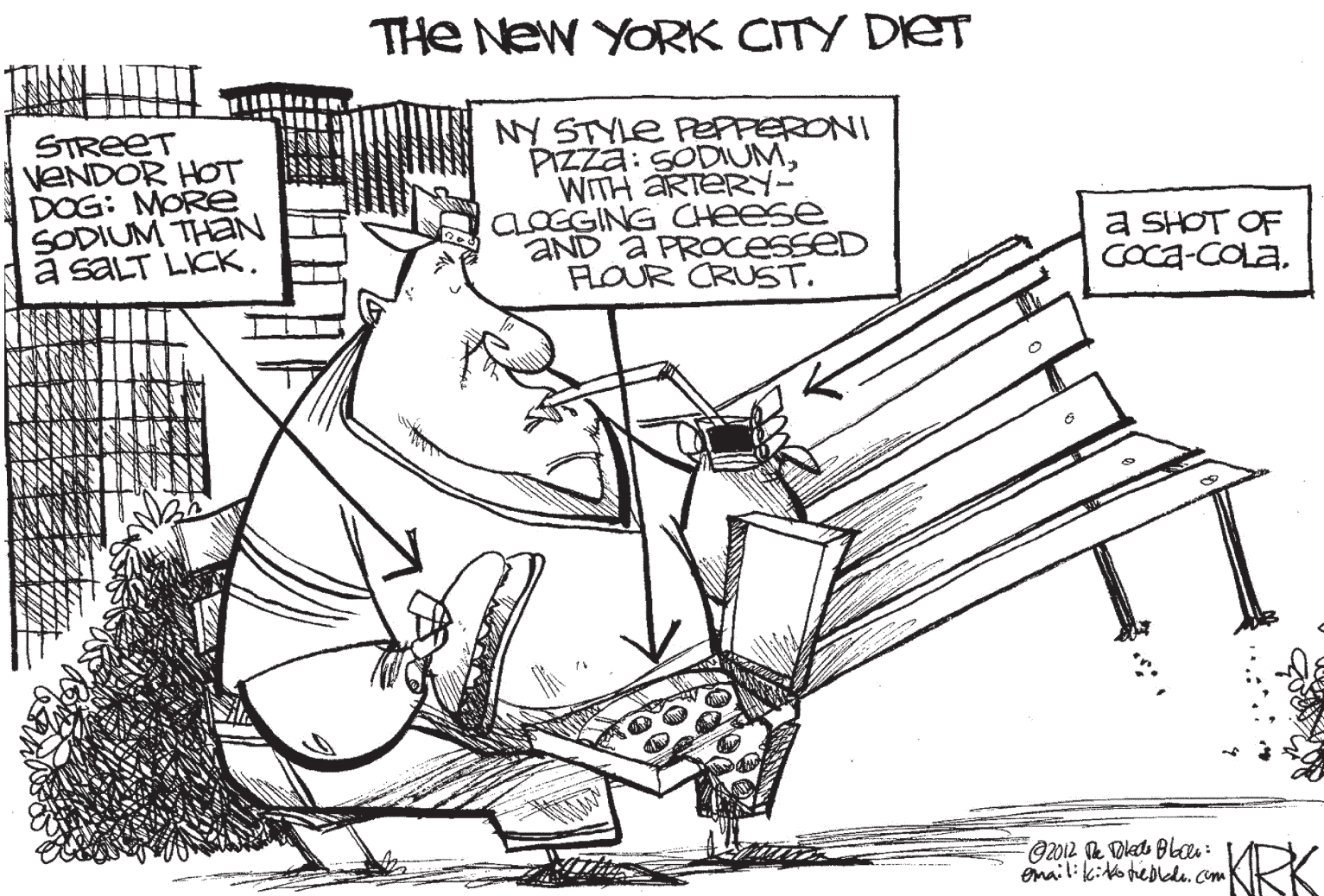
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Spring's in bloom in the mountains

The trip out of the mountains and through southern Colorado to home last week was fun and blessedly uneventful.

We had been to Creede, a little mountain town we lived in for several years back in the 1980s, for a few days to visit friends and attend the opening of the repertory theater.

The visit had been great and the opening play, a comedy with lots of singing and dancing, maybe not the best show of the season, but energetic and fun.

In the mountains, we enjoyed a second taste of spring. The lilacs in front of the courthouse were in full, gloriously scented bloom. Here and there, in people's yards, irises in a rainbow of colors made bright splashes of color. The temperatures tumbled to freezing at night and got up in the 70s during the day.

Too soon, it was time to head home as storm clouds gathered and raindrops started to fall.

It didn't rain much, but there were clouds with lightning and thunder on the horizon as we set out from Creede into the San Luis Valley, the largest mountain park in the state.

We grabbed lunch at one of our favorite



Cynthia Haynes

- Open Season

Mexican restaurants and a big bag of popcorn, and we were ready to leave the Valley, go over La Veta Pass and onto the plains of southern Colorado.

Anyone who thinks Kansas is wide open and treeless should visit the area down between Walsenburg and La Junta, Colo. You can see 50 to 60 miles, and there is nothing to block your view but sagebrush, cactus and yucca plants. You can get lost just looking out over the landscape, and I would hate to try to cover it in a horse-drawn wagon. The land seems to stretch on forever.

But we like that sort of country. We love seeing the yucca and cactus in bloom and watching for antelope. We saw several of the

speedy pronghorns. Mostly, they were standing by themselves, but in one case, we saw four together.

I called it a herd. Steve said that was a group; a herd had to have more animals.

(Well, that's the silliest thing I ever herd, ever heard.)

We continued to chase the rain across the plains and we could see where it had been. It doesn't take much water to turn that desert area green and blooming. But where it hadn't come down, the grass was yellow and the ground dusty.

We never really caught up with the storms. I thought we had at one time when we were almost to Oakley and it was dark. It turned out to be a few drops of rain mixed with lots of bugs.

Welcome home to summer in Kansas.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Health care facts are stubborn things

A Salina man recently submitted a column to several Kansas newspapers criticizing a recent health care update that I mailed to my constituents (Alan Jilka, *Colby Free Press*, May 7). As John Adams once said, "Facts are stubborn things," so let me respond to the many inaccurate claims in the column.

First, President Obama does raid \$500 billion from Medicare to fund his new health care plan. My critic suggests that since \$136 billion is taken from Medicare Advantage – and \$364 billion from other Medicare programs – somehow Obama doesn't raid Medicare. The fact is our seniors are being asked to shoulder the costs of ObamaCare.

Second, as it relates to budget deficits, my critic conveniently ignores the obvious reality that the federal government has to spend more money to provide ObamaCare and relies on new revenue to do this. According to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office, ObamaCare is still expected to have gross costs of \$1.496 trillion over the next decade.

Third, and most important, my critic implied that the mailer cost six figures at taxpayer expense. It did not. I invite him to look up the expenses in the official disclosure reports, which



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

- Capitol Notes

show that the total cost of production, printing and mailing was roughly 50 cents per household – and not every household received it. Our office has been frugal. In fact, we recently returned a \$143,000 check to the U.S. Treasury for unused office funds; that is about 10 percent of our budget on top of the 6.5 percent cut Republicans made to all office budgets last year.

Fourth, it is patently false that replying to the mailer will be returned with a campaign solicitation. It is against federal law to mix official and campaign contact information, and my office is 100 percent in compliance.

Lastly, my critic said he is vice president of a business. I would be curious to know if and how his business is affected by ObamaCare. In response to the mailer, a business owner in Yo-

der – Michael Miller – offered the following insight into the impact upon his restaurant. In order to meet the burdensome requirements of ObamaCare, he will see his expenses increase and subsequently have to increase his sales by six times that amount. Miller said:

"I simply can't pass this expense on to my menu prices because I'm not sure Kansans are ready to pay \$12 for a plate of fried chicken at their local restaurant.... I used to worry about ... competitors or my food costs or where I will be able to find good employees. Those worries all pale in comparison to the fears I have about what my government is going to mandate on me...."

A story like Mr. Miller's shows why ObamaCare must be undone. Words from a critic in a newspaper are but mere words on a page; Miller's story is the real life example of the American Dream being derailed. For that we must fight.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents the First District of Kansas. He serves on the Veterans' Affairs, Budget, and Agriculture Committees.

Walking trail still needs support

To the Editor:

A couple of months ago, I was asked to assist Colby's Active Community Design Committee in creating signs and materials for the new Colby walking trails. This initiative is a not-for-profit endeavor to make Colby the most walkable community in Kansas.

In these past weeks of working with the team, I have found kind people that are passionate about making their community a better place. They are mostly volunteers that have already spent countless hours putting their vision into motion. Cement is being poured and trees have been planted, with the trail starting right near the new Aquatic Center.

The group, however, is still in need of money. Once they get over two miles of cement



Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

in place, they can tap into a \$35,000 grant to add benches, lighting, additional signs, etc. I implore the community to give to make it happen. Donor recognition is available, like naming bridges and buying bricks for a future amphitheater along the trail – an opportunity for individuals, organizations and businesses.

While I am obviously tied to the project and biased in the matter, I feel like this project is a fantastic thing for the community. I am originally from Norton and now live in Denver – the city is great, but there is something special about people making things happen in Kansas towns. It makes a huge impact on the community. And, this walking trail can make a huge impact on the health, activity level, enjoyment and betterment of Colby as a whole.

So, take a look at the groups you are in, or the businesses you own, or the savings you have, and put it towards making your community better. Contact the Thomas County Community Foundation at (785) 460-9152 or tcfc@st-tel.net to donate or for information.

Jessica Seybold, Lakewood, Colo.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

