



Free Press Viewpoint

Low interest rates only hurt economy

To keep the economy afloat, the Federal Reserve Board has cut interest rates to historic lows, down, in fact, to nothing on some short-term loans to banks.

And while this is keeping rates low for those who want to buy a house, few are buying. Few can afford to buy. A lot of people are out of work. Sure, plenty of people are refinancing old loans, and reap great rewards, but that doesn't get the economy going.

Meanwhile, the government has made it so difficult to make home loans that banks just aren't making many. Some banks have gotten out of the business. Others are super cautious.

So despite attractive, even historic, low rates, the housing machine has not cranked up.

Same could be said for the rest of the economy. It's recovering, but not nearly fast enough, and what recovery it's seen is so fragile that the Fed is afraid to do much for fear of sending us into another tailspin.

So these low rates, while they look good, have not done much for the country.

They have done a lot of damage, however, in places most of us don't see. They've ruined interest on most bank accounts. Savings accounts now pay only half of 1 percent to 1 percent interest. At that kind of rate, no one is saving.

Worse yet, senior citizens and others living on a "fixed" income have seen that income plunge right along with their rates. Already hit by the volatile stock market and the economy in general, these people often just can't afford to see their income shrink any further.

While interest rates are low, rates for consumers, such as on credit cards, are not. Why?

New federal laws and regulations have made it much less attractive for banks to loan money on credit cards. Rates that used to hover below 10 percent shot up a couple of years ago to 11, 12 and 13 percent. Poor risks used to pay 18 percent, and some of those rates are beyond 20 percent.

Thanks for the protection, government.

Businesses still have a hard time getting credit, partly because of new regulations from Congress and the federal bureaucracy which banks must comply with. Rules designed to forbid fraud and shaky loans abound, but we suspect when the sharks get to swimming again – as they always do – the rules won't keep them from cheating the customers or putting a few big banks in peril.

Because the sharp guys always figure an angle. Rules only cover the old holes, not the new ones.

So if you think we're saying that the Fed and Congress have made a mess of things, you're right. And we suspect a lot of people would agree.

This economy is not going to improve until the government figures out how it's messed things up and gets its hands out of the pie. It's not the Democrats or President Obama, or the Republicans in Congress.

It's just the heavy hand of government holding things down. Remove that, make things right, and the economy will be fine.

– Steve Haynes

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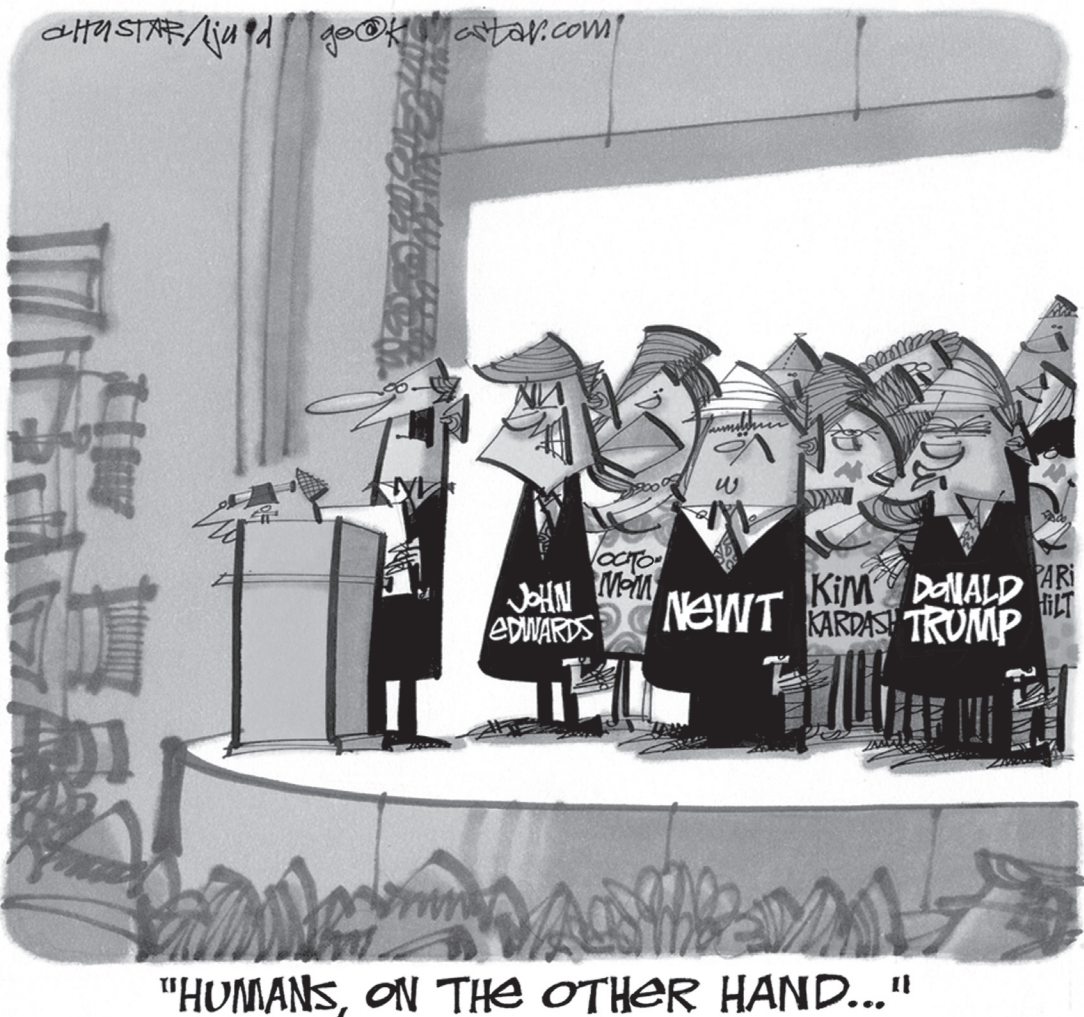
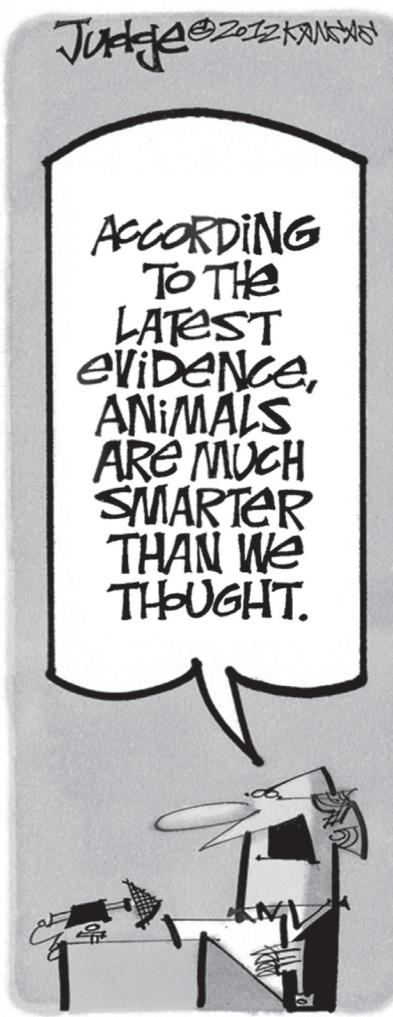
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"HUMANS, ON THE OTHER HAND..."

Car locks are soooo inconvenient

I have a small-town girl admission.

I don't usually lock my car. Of course, neither do I usually leave the keys or anything of value in my car.

I figure if someone wants to steal the beach towel on the back seat, the one I keep there so that, when I have to take the dog somewhere, her muddy feet don't get all over my upholstery, let 'em have it.

If someone is smart enough to hot wire my car and wants to do that in the middle of downtown Oberlin, they will probably just break a window to get in and not worry about much else. I might as well save the window.

So locking myself out of my car is not normally a problem for me. Besides, Steve has a spare key to my car. All I have to do, if I lock myself out, is wait for him.

So why is it that the only two times I've locked myself out, he wasn't around?

The first time was at the Albuquerque airport more than 20 years ago. I somehow dropped my keys onto the floor of the back seat while getting my luggage out of the car and didn't realize the problem until I'd shut the door.

Steve was back in Colorado, a good three or four hours away. Luckily, my brother-in-law lived in Albuquerque at the time, so as I flew off to see my parents in Texas, Steve mailed him the spare and he had it for me when I returned a week later.

Last Thursday, it happened again. This time,



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

after safely parking the car in my garage, I got out to open the passenger-side door to retrieve my computer and purse, which were on that side.

The side door had automatically locked itself. It has this annoying habit of doing that for apparently no reason and with no discernible regularity.

I had already put my keys away in my purse, so I went back around to the driver's side and hit what I thought was unlock. Then I shut the door.

When I tried the passenger-side door again, I realized that both doors were locked and the keys were in my purse – in the car.

Steve was in Marysville at a U.S. 36 Association meeting and was not expected home until the next day. I called him anyway.

It was 10:30 at night – a little late to call a locksmith – and I had to leave at 8 a.m. to get to my pharmacy job in Colby the next day.

He was having problems of his own and didn't seem very excited about my dilemma,

but suggested I call a friend.

His advice was good. The friend came out and with a little work – and the alarm going off only twice – we got the car open.

I called Steve back to tell him all was well.

He said that he was glad all was well with me, because all was not well in Marysville. He was several miles from his hotel with a flat tire in the rain – lots of rain, about three inches that night.

He also had 3,000 U.S. 36 travel editions which he was supposed to deliver to others at the meeting. These were all packed in the back of the truck on top of the jack and spare tire compartment.

No wonder he wasn't especially excited about my problem. He had plenty of his own.

He eventually got help from the police and a sheriff's deputy but not before moving a lot of heavy newspapers, bending his jack and getting wet as a drowned rat.

He's getting new tires soon, and I'm looking at getting a second spare key for the car.

This locking myself out every 20 years has just got to stop.

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@nwkansas.com

Executive session not for careless use

If it looks like a skunk and smells like a skunk, it's a skunk, and the stink is covering the City of Sharon Springs, thanks to the mayor.

The mayor was on the agenda of the regular monthly county commissioners meeting to talk about the Wallace County Recycling. Since both men operating the plant resigned effective Tuesday, the city was left scrambling to find someone to take their place. Not that they will ever be able to replace L.O. Samuelson. They have taken advantage of his passion for recycling for decades as he saved them money by paying expenses out of his own pocket.

That being said, Mayor Dennis Sharp and councilman Milton Tokoi entered the commissioners meeting at around 10 a.m. The agenda said that they wanted to talk about recycling. The first thing out of the mayor's mouth was to call for an executive session for personnel reasons. That was where it was left and both the county clerk and myself left the meeting, the door was closed and the shades were drawn. The session was called for 10 minutes.

Naturally, I was starting to smell a definite odor by this time. The fact is, neither L.O. Samuelson nor Everett Langdon were employees of the city or the county. Samuelson is an independent contractor and Langdon works for him and is paid from Samuelson's personal business account. As a matter of fact, Samuelson's contract states specifically that he is "an independent contractor for all purposes and shall not be deemed as an employee of the City for any purpose hereunder."

Both men had already resigned their positions, and that was made public in the *Western Times*, so the bird had already left the nest, the jig was up, everyone involved was already identified, there was nothing to hide. Or was there?

I voiced my complaint to the county com-

Other Opinions

• Julie Samuelson
Western Times

missioners after the executive session. Commissioners Cowles and Buck couldn't see anything wrong with it, but commission chair Adam Smith listened and said he would do some checking. And he has, to his credit.

The real truth of the matter is that the Open Meetings Act was not designed to keep people from being embarrassed. The rules are specifically spelled out and available to everyone. Every elected official should know them forwards and backwards. The longer you hold an office, the more you should know, which is scary in and of itself, since the mayor doesn't seem to know them at all. If he does know the rules, then he just willingly broke the law.

It is corrupt to go behind closed doors for no reason at all. The Open Meetings Act and its rules are often overused by people who are trying to cover up wrongdoing.

After doing some research, on his own, Commissioner Smith found a form that should have been filled out by the entity calling the executive session before the meeting. Smith also said he didn't understand why anything discussed had to be in executive session in the first place and that nothing discussed was what he considered to be confidential. "That was my mistake," said Smith. "I should have called them on it and asked for a better explanation. That's my fault too. I'll accept my responsibility." At least he accepts his responsibility.

The Open Meetings Act specifically states

that when going into executive session, justification for the session must be made, subject to be discussed must be given, and the time and the place for the body to reconvene must be given. In this case, there was no real justification, the subject was personnel, which was incorrect, and the duration of the session was 10 minutes. I guess one out of three isn't bad.

There are seven subjects that can be legally discussed in executive sessions: 1) Personnel matters of non-elected personnel; 2) Attorney-client privilege; 3) Employer/employee negotiations; 4) Confidential data pertaining to financial affairs or trade secrets; 5) Matters adversely relating to a person as a student, patient or resident of a public institution; 6) Preliminary discussions relating to the acquisition of real property; 7) Security matters relating to a public body or agency.

Why the mayor did this is anyone's guess. I'm sure he thinks he had his reasons. I believe he called the executive session simply because the newspaper was there and he didn't want what was said to be public knowledge. Did it save him or the council some embarrassment? Obviously not. It is action such as this that should remain on the minds of every voter come next city council election. We should not, ever, re-elect anyone with so little regard for the law. After all, how can anyone in good conscience pass laws governing the public, when they can't obey those that govern them? We should expect, and demand better behavior from our elected officials.

The city council and county commissioners were to meet in special session on June 19 at 10 a.m. at the courthouse to discuss the matter of recycling further. Maybe then, things were not such a secret.

Julie Samuelson is the editor and publisher of the Western Times newspaper in Sharon Springs.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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