

## Other Viewpoints

### Conservatives need caution this session

No area politician had a bigger 2012 than Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback. With a dose of persuasion and trickery, he convinced the Legislature to drastically reduce state income taxes. His administration shook off concerns of "too much, too fast" and forged ahead with a massive privatization of the state's Medicaid program. And a political apparatus closely tied to the governor purged the Kansas Senate of most moderate Republicans, who had united with the small contingent of Democrats to block some of Brownback's initiatives. Two years into his first term, Brownback has the uber-conservative Legislature he wanted and a path for more change. Lawmakers are almost certain to pass an ill-advised bill giving the governor the authority to select judges for the state appeals court, injecting politics into a merit-based system. School administrators and teachers are nervously awaiting a report from Brownback's "school efficiency task force," a committee top-heavy with accountants and light on educators. More restrictions on abortion clinics may be in the offing. But even as he breaks new ground in 2013, Brownback and all of Kansas will be dealing with the fallout from 2012.

The income tax cuts that the governor and his allies fought for so passionately will create a deep hole in the state's budget. The gap between revenues and expenses is projected to be \$295 million - assuming the state spends down a reserve fund of \$470 million, leaving no cushion for future years. The Medicaid overhaul took effect on New Year's Day, despite foreboding among medical and social service providers. Two weeks before the scheduled start of the initiative, KanCare, some hospitals and physician groups had not yet signed up with all or any of the three private insurance companies selected to coordinate the care of 380,000 Medicaid recipients. The insurance companies are ramping up, nevertheless, hiring dozens of employees from state-funded social service and medical support groups but at much higher salaries. Concerns are mounting about how the managed care companies - Amerigroup, United Healthcare and Sunflower State Health Plan, a subsidiary of Centene - will pay overhead and make a profit without reducing the amount of services Kansans rely on. The massive budget and health care challenges will fall to a remarkably inexperienced Legislature. Thanks to redistricting and the purge of veteran moderate Republicans, nearly one-third of the state's lawmakers will be serving their first terms. Many of them were elected not on the basis of experience serving their communities but rather on the strength of their conservative credentials, which garnered funding from Brownback's deep-pocketed benefactors. They will quickly find themselves in public service boot camp. That age-old adage "do no harm" would be a good guide for the 2013 Kansas legislative session. Brownback and lawmakers would do well to keep a close eye on the KanCare program and to shy away from measures that will erode quality schools and gut what is left of the safety net.

The advice comes a year too late, however. The hasty passage of the income tax cuts and the hurried start of KanCare are likely to haunt the state for a long time to come.

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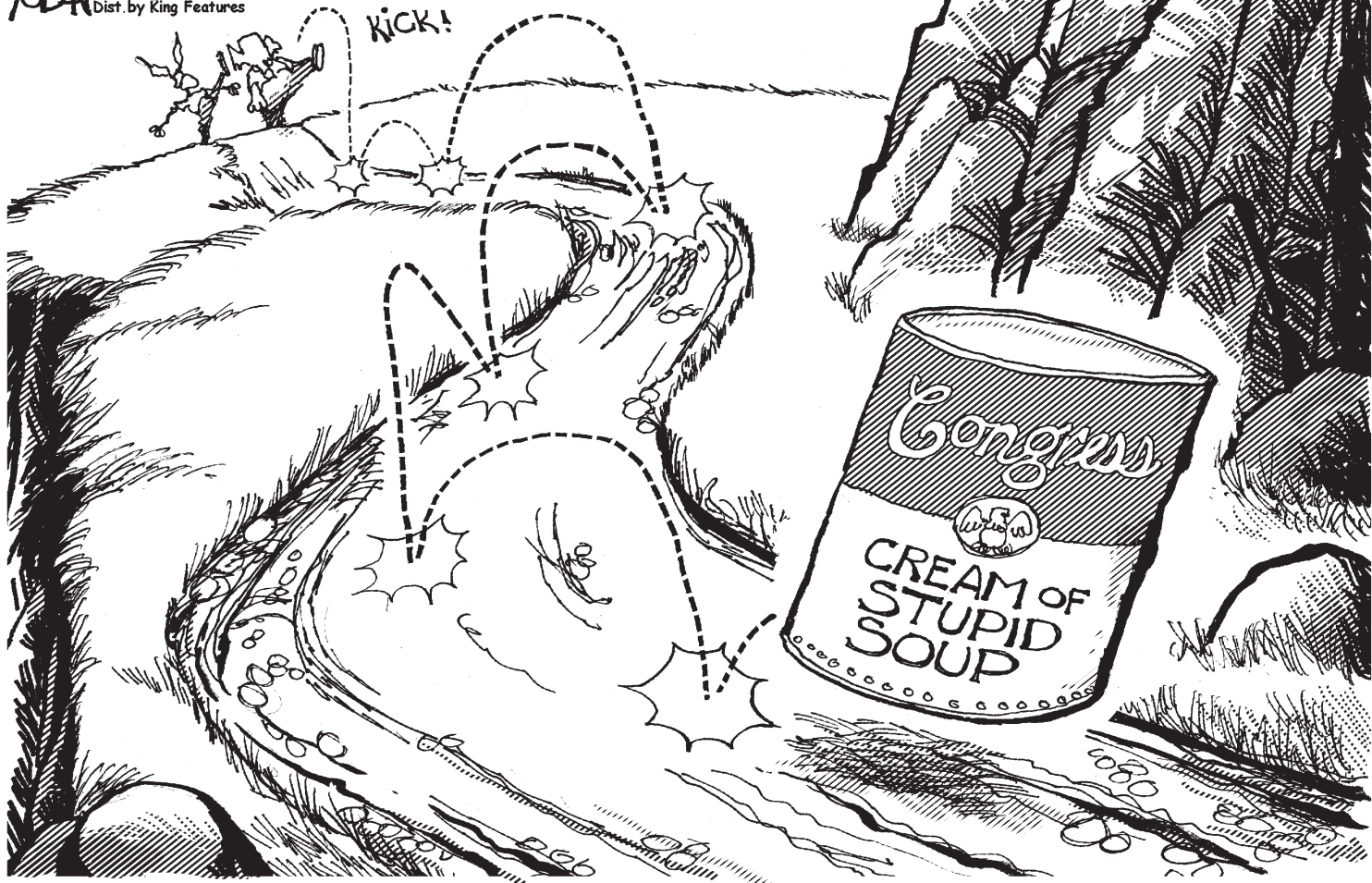
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### Apartment neighbors need lessons

What ever happened to common courtesy for your neighbors?

It doesn't seem like a terribly hard concept to grasp, yet every person who has lived above me in the past three years doesn't seem to get it.

The first apartment I moved into was before my senior year of college. I chose a garden-level apartment mainly because it was cheaper, but I figured the noise really wouldn't be that bad from my second-level neighbors.

Most of the time, I didn't notice what my neighbors were up to. (Then again, I was at school and work for most of the day.) But soon I realized that every time I was home, somebody upstairs was stomping or running around above me. The noise was constant.

Running around? Oh right, I forgot to mention that it turned out a whole family was living above me. Five people in a two-bedroom apartment. I was not thrilled.

Still, I put up with it because my lease was just for one year and it was a big, nice, cheap place to live in Boulder, Colo. That kind of place doesn't come around very often.

Then after I graduated, I moved here to Colby after accepting my job at the Free Press. It was really hard to find somewhere to live and within a week, I was down to just one option.

Once again, I moved into the bottom-level apartment, hoping I would get lucky when it came to my upstairs neighbors.

I soon found out that two girls around my age were living above me. We were pleasant and said hello when we'd see each other, but



Kayla Cornett

#### • The Eternal Pessimist

didn't have a relationship past that.

One weekend I was relaxing at home, probably watching some TV, when I heard very loud piano music, drowning out the show I was watching. I figured it was just the radio or a CD or something, because who could get a piano up a flight of stairs and fit it into a rather small living room? I was wrong. One of the girls above me would play it on the weekends, and it was always the same song. Always.

Don't get me wrong. I love hearing orchestral music live, but I want to be in an auditorium or concert hall when I'm hearing it. And I want it to be good.

Anyway, I actually talked one-on-one with Piano Girl, who happened to be a nurse for the doctor I was going to. She apologized about her piano-playing and after that I didn't mind it so much.

A couple of months ago, Piano Girl and her roommate moved out, and I was really nervous about getting a new neighbor. Would he or she be worse than my previous neighbors?

I got my answer this past week when my ceiling started vibrating with the bass of hip-hop music. I was watching the Fiesta Bowl

and folding laundry when I heard it. I thought it was coming from a car in the parking lot because the bass was just as loud as it would be when someone has subwoofers in their trunk.

It was only about 8 p.m. so it wasn't keeping me from sleeping or anything, but it went on for almost two hours. I got so fed up that the old lady in me came out: I grabbed a broom-like contraption and banged on the ceiling with the handle a few times, hard.

The music was turned down - for about 20 minutes. Finally, Bass Guy turned the music off right before I was about to go to bed. (Yes!)

The next morning, I had to go take pictures at the high school at 7:30 a.m., but I was done pretty quickly and decided to sleep a little more before heading to the office.

I climbed in bed and just as I'm drifting off, guess who's blaring his music at 8 in the morning? Yep, Bass Guy. I silently cursed him, dragging as I got ready for work.

I'm not sure what else my neighbors have in store for me, but using my previous experiences, I'm sure you'll be reading another column from me pretty soon.

At least I have learned something from these experiences: Next time I move, I'm only looking at houses for rent.

Kayla Cornett is the sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. An aspiring novelist in her youth, she has been writing sports, features and news since high school. She is a native Coloradan.

### Fiscal solution still imperfect

Kansans gathered together over the holidays with hopes of spending time with family and friends and reflecting on the many blessings we enjoy as Americans.

Instead, they were forced to spend Christmas and New Year's Eve enduring the ups and downs of the "fiscal cliff" debate, as the president continued his campaign for higher taxes as the solution to our economic crisis.

Tax increases hurt the economy and make it more difficult to make ends meet. With the expiration of the Bush tax cuts, Americans were facing more than \$4 trillion in tax increases on Jan. 1. In fact, a Kansan earning just \$43,000 would have seen a \$3,000 increase in taxes - \$250 every month.

My goal has been to make certain tax increases affect the fewest number of Americans as possible. And while imperfect, I am glad that we were able to pass a deal - the Tax Relief Extension Act - that protects 99 percent of Americans. It also limits tax increases on dividends and capital gains. Most important to Kansas farmers, ranchers and business owners, it permanently reduces the estate tax rates and locks in a \$10 million per couple exemption. Gone are the short term fixes, allowing people to more confidently plan for the future.

It is important to note this deal only addressed one aspect of the "fiscal cliff." What is missing is action on the larger problem of government spending. This year's deficit reached \$1.1 trillion, the fourth straight year of trillion-dollar deficit spending. This out-of-control spending has increased our national debt to a record \$16 trillion and counting.

President Obama has spent this political season trying to make the case for tax increases on higher-income Americans as the solution to



U.S. Senator Jerry Moran

#### • Moran's Memo

deficits. But the reality is the tax rates raised will bring in enough revenue to cover our government spending for just 16 days. As Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner announced that we reached our \$16.4 trillion borrowing limit on Dec. 31, President Obama's tax increases bought us until Jan. 16, when the federal government will be broke once again.

In February, the Treasury Department will ask Congress to raise the debt ceiling for the fifth time since President Obama assumed the presidency. A debt ceiling is meaningless if Congress simply extends the Treasury's borrowing capacity each time the limit is reached. I voted against an increase to the debt ceiling two years ago and want Kansans to know that I will not vote to allow the Obama administration to borrow any more money unless we substantially change the way the government does business and significantly reduce spending.

While some may say it is irresponsible to not raise the limit, our nation finds itself at a point of such indebtedness that it is more irresponsible to extend the debt ceiling without significant reductions in spending. There is no flexibility here - our country's future is at stake.

One thing we learned from the New Year's Eve "fiscal cliff" negotiations is that our work to tackle the spending crisis prior to the debt

ceiling vote must begin today. It cannot wait. Americans are demanding that Washington get serious about spending; the President must come to the table with Congress now and put courage and common sense before politics.

This means taking action on our nation's real "fiscal cliff" - the \$48 trillion in unfunded obligations found in Social Security and Medicare. These so-called entitlement programs represent promises the federal government has made to Americans, and these promises must be kept. We must work together now to preserve Medicare for America's seniors while sustaining the program for future generations. And, we must adopt a realistic plan to close Social Security's budget shortfall and return the program on a sustainable path to ensure future generations have retirement security.

We have yet to see willingness by the President to reduce spending, but with the revenue debate settled, spending is now front and center. Americans are ready for tough decisions, and they are looking for leadership from Washington.

The spending crisis we face will not be easy to resolve, but we were not elected to ignore these problems; we were elected to confront them. The president and Congress must do what Kansans do: Make decisions based on solid values and be held accountable for those decisions. I stand ready to work toward a solution, and I hope the president will join the effort to achieve meaningful spending reform.

Jerry Moran of Hays is the junior U.S. senator from Kansas. His committee appointments include Appropriations; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; Veterans' Affairs; Small Business and Entrepreneurship; and the Special Committee on Aging.

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

