



Free Press Viewpoint

School finance needs cooperation

The 2012 legislative season is fast upon us. School budgets will be one of the big issues, what with the state's finances perennially tight and the Legislature having messed up the income tax system something fierce last year.

But before joining the fight, we'd urge the state's teachers, educators and school boards to take a deep breath and offer to work with the governor and Legislature to make some sense out of the tax situation.

Unless their purpose is simply politics – to make the governor and his Republican allies look bad – they have nothing to gain from picking a fight.

The governor has already said he wants the tax situation fixed. He's promised not to cut schools. As long as the Legislature will do something about the income tax, there's no reason to believe he isn't telling the truth.

In effect, he's offered an olive branch to the school interests, which consume about half the state's budget.

The tax situation became a mess near the end of last year's session when the Senate, under pressure to get something done on the income tax, a key plank in the governor's platform, passed a bill that included nearly all his proposed cuts but none of the "flattening" changes he'd proposed to eliminate "loop-holes" such as the deductions for home mortgage interest and other popular tax breaks.

Everyone, especially the Senate, just assumed the two houses would negotiate differences on the tax bill and come up with something they could live with. That didn't happen, however. The House just slam-dunked the Senate bill and sent it on to the governor, who signed it.

That left the state with a projected shortfall in coming years, as much as \$700 million a year, assuming there is no fix for the income tax, although that figure keeps dropping as the economy improves.

This clearly was not what the governor wanted, but as one veteran statehouse reporter likes to say, "He signed it, so he's got to share the blame."

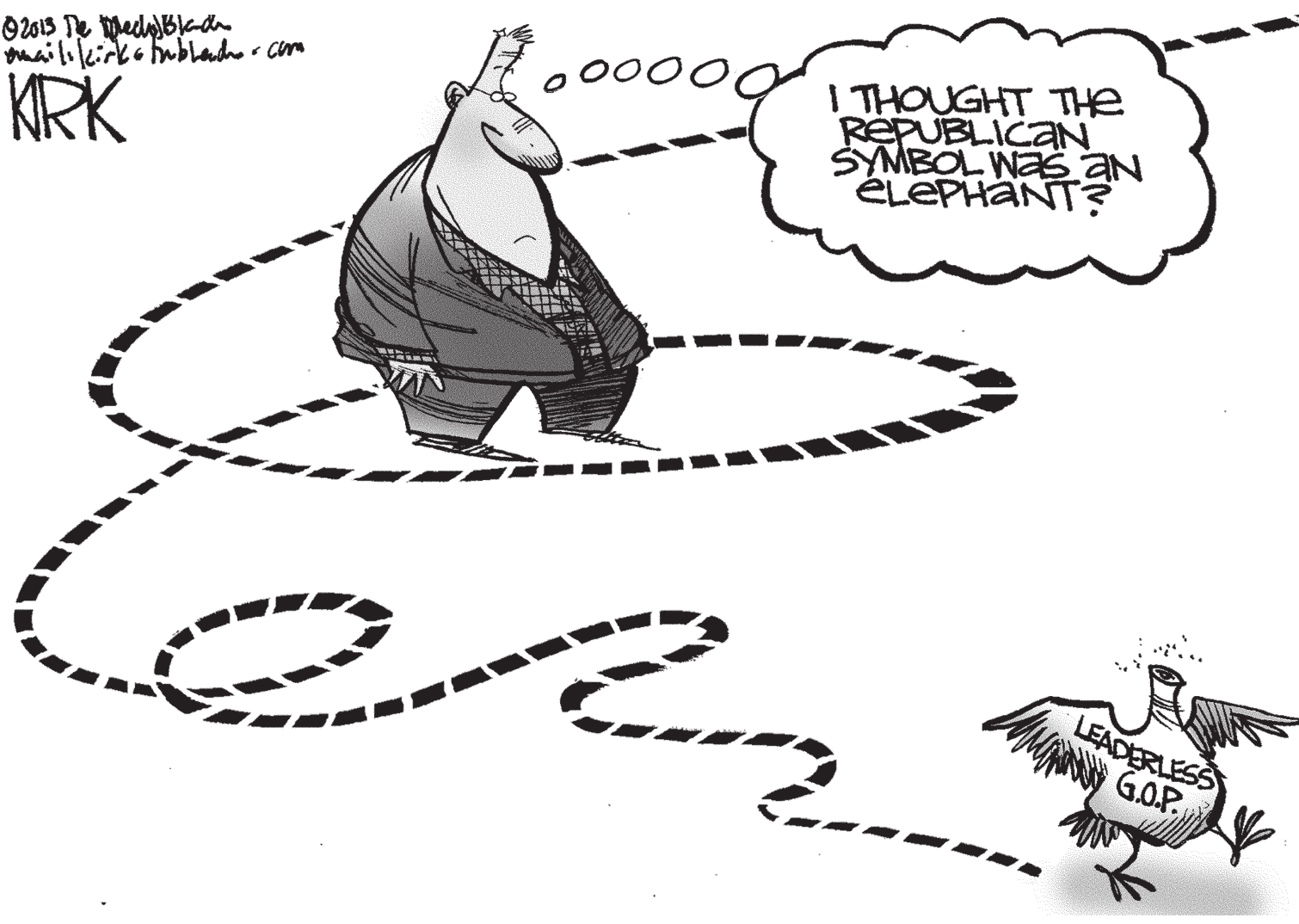
So true. And the governor has said the revenue system needs to be fixed. It'll be the big issue this year.

How well it's fixed and how education fares may depend on how well everyone who sees the need can work together. The governor has signaled his intent. The state's school boards appear to be ready to work with him. The teachers? So far, they've not come around, but they should.

This administration says it's a friend of education, and they might just get farther by joining in than by howling.

– Steve Haynes

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Granddaughter saves the day

Christmas is over without a trip to the emergency room.

This is always a good thing.

Now you would think that when the kids left home, we would be able to stop worrying about those trips to the ER. (Somehow, Steve always seemed to get the shift that ended up taking one or the other of the munchkins to see the doctor, and usually for stitches.)

This year, however, it was our granddaughter who probably saved both of us from getting some really nasty burns.

It all started out with our regular Christmas dinner. Even though there were just the two of us this year, we had steak, twice-baked potatoes and green beans, our traditional dinner.

Steve suggested that I put the potatoes on early so that they could be well baked and ready to be removed from their skins, mashed and returned to the shells in time to put them under the steak, which would be under the broiler. Normally, we like to cook steak outside on the grill. This year, however, the weather was not cooperating with our little charcoal grill, so it was inside for the steak and potatoes.

I picked a dozen nice Colorado bakers, pricked them all over with a knife and put



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

them in the oven at 350 degrees. In an hour to an hour and a half, I figured, I could pull them out and get them and finish preparing them for twice baking. I always fix 10 to 12 potatoes when I do twice bakes because: 1. They freeze well. 2. It's just as easy to bake 10 as two, and most importantly, 3. They're a pain in the tush to make but we love them, so making a dozen means I get to enjoy them six times and only have to make them once.

After about an hour, I checked the potatoes and one had exploded. Not just a little like they sometimes do. No, this potato exploded all over the back of the oven. It looked like someone had thrown a pot of rice in there. I was horrified, and called Steve to inspect the mess. There wasn't much we could do, so we checked a couple of the close ones. They need-

ed another half hour.

So, we got on the computer and called our granddaughter in Augusta, Ga., to see how her Christmas was going. She's almost 3 and she was on a present-and-sugar high, running around in circles. She only stopped long enough to say "Hi," and she was off again.

Her other grandparents were there. We were so jealous. But we enjoyed watching the chaos for that half of an hour, then went in to check the potatoes.

A second one had exploded! And this was one that we had just checked. We would have both been in a world of hurt if it had decided to go off in our faces.

Luckily, we had plenty of potatoes left for dinner and the freezer, and the oven needed cleaning anyway.

Boy, did it need cleaning.

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@nwks.com

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'Whack on the head' prompts new ideas

There's an old saying that sometimes you need a good whack on the side of the head. Nothing could be truer today in this speeding world of instantaneous communication.

While there are countless ways of doing so, many of us remain tied to the comfort of doing something in the same way. As a result, it becomes more difficult to think about doing it any other way.

It's time for all of us to break out of this rut of familiarity. Let's begin by looking somewhere else.

Finding new ideas or a new way of doing something is akin to prospecting for gold. If you look in the same old places, you'll find tapped-out veins. On the other hand, if you venture off the beaten path, you'll improve your chances of discovering new ideas.

Crawl out of your comfort zone. Every culture, industry, business or organization has its own way of looking at the world. Often the best ideas come from exploring the way others in different walks of life do things.

"Anyone can look for fashion in a boutique or history in a museum," journalist Robert Wieder said. "The creative explorer looks for history in a hardware store and fashion in an airport."

Where will you look?

Borrow ideas.

Throughout history people have used novel and interesting ideas that others have used successfully. Our ideas must be original only to their adaptation to the problem we're working on at the time.

Dig deeper.

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it's the only one we have. Never stop with the first right answer you find. Look for others.

How do you keep a fish from smelling?

Grill it as soon as you catch it. Keep a cat around. Burn incense. Cut its nose off.

Remember, the best way to find a solution to something is to come up with lots of them.

See the big picture.

In 1866 an Iowa farmer watched the con-



John Schlageck

• Insights
 Kansas Farm Bureau

struction of the transcontinental railroad near his fields. After seeing the track laid and a locomotive steam by he thought, "So that's what railroading is all about: tracks and trains."

What didn't he see? That he could transport his products to more markets more quickly, and that once there they would compete against products from many more places. That people could travel coast to coast in less than a week. That more ideas would be shared, and different people would meet and marry.

The Iowa farmer saw the steel and wheels, but he didn't see the consequences. Look for the larger implications of an idea. Look at the big picture.

Expect the unexpected.

Columbus was looking for India. Bell was trying to invent a hearing aid. Often what you're looking for leads to something entirely different.

Listen to that hunch.

Your subconscious mind continually records and stores unrelated data from the outside world. Later, it combines these data into good answers, or what might be considered hunches.

If you simply ask, trust and listen these hunches can sometimes lead to the right solutions.

Look for the obvious.

"Only the most foolish of mice would hide in a cat's ear," designer Scott Love said, "but only the wisest of cats would look there."

See what's in front of your face or ear. Think about what you may be overlooking. The resources or solutions might be right in front of you.

Ask a fool.

That's what the kings of old did to break out of the group-think environment their "yes-men" culture created. It was the fool's job to see any proposal or discussion underway in a fresh light.

Peter Sellers, the brilliant British actor, played this to perfection in his last movie, "Being There." He did so by extolling the trivial, trifling the exalted or reversing the common perception of a situation.

Here's an example. If a man is sitting on a horse backward, why do we assume that it's the man who is backward and not the horse?

Never assume things are a certain way. Shake up people's assumptions and this will allow them to see things differently, sometimes more clearly.

Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "To those who are awake, there is one ordered universe, whereas in sleep each man turns away from the world to one of his own."

Your dreams can help resolve conflicts, refresh thinking, inspire solutions and suggest different approaches.

Follow your dreams.

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