

commentary

from other pens...

In dealing with budget, Graves haunted by past

By John Hanna

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. — Sen. Tim Huelskamp opposes tax increases, even though Gov. Bill Graves insists they're the right way to solve the state's budget problems.

"Tax increases are not acceptable substitutes for fiscal management," Huelskamp says.

He's not the first person to say it. Graves was — in his State of the State address of January 2000.

"I agreed with him back then," Huelskamp, R-Fowler, said dryly. When legislators reconvene Wednesday, their biggest job — the only one they absolutely must finish — will be to eliminate a \$206 million gap between appropriations they have already approved and the revenues the state expects to collect in fiscal 2002, which begins July 1.

Republicans in the Senate have expressed doubts a tax increase would clear their chamber. In the House, GOP leaders have flatly ruled it out. In his push for a tax increase, Graves is haunted by his own past statements and actions.

The champion tax cutter who was re-elected in 1998 has morphed into a defender of government programs. He criticized House and Senate budget proposals last week for relying too much on money that wouldn't be collected again in future years.

"I don't think there's any question it's really easy in this place to get caught in your inconsistencies," said Rep. Melvin Neufeld, R-Ingalls, vice chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

The hole in the budget has sent legislators scrambling for solutions. They can trim approved spending or find new sources of money.

They also can resort to some gimmicks.

One House proposal is to delay payments for a week to doctors, clinics and hospitals that provide medical services to the poor. It pushes \$10 million worth of payments out of fiscal 2002 and into fiscal 2003.

Both chambers call for tapping extra nursing home fund payments from the federal government. Last year, legislators put the money into a fund to start a program in July 1 to help seniors facing high drug costs.

Graves says both budget plans would create disaster in fiscal 2003. Graves doesn't oppose the manner in which legislators want to use the extra nursing home money, only how quickly they would spend it.

The budget Graves proposed in January would have kept state commitments to higher education and transportation. Even before he delivered his State of the State address, revenues were falling short of the estimates upon which he based his recommendations.

"His own budget numbers tanked," said Rep. Rocky Nichols of Topeka, the ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

Graves took office in January 1995 promising to commit himself to good fiscal management. In his first State of the State, he declared, "An essential element is a government willing to do more with less."

With the economy vibrant and revenue collections booming, taxes were cut in 1996, 1997 and 1998.

He vowed, in his 1999 State of the State, to stay true to that record. "Many have speculated, with election to my final term as governor, my commitment to the people of this state to reduce their tax burden will wane," he said. "It will not; it cannot; it must not. Taxes are too high, and they must be reduced."

Last year's he cautioned against "the easy way out," or reversing the progress made during his administration.

This year, with the hole in the budget, the economy softer, the push for extra spending on public schools greater and the decisions more difficult, Graves argues a tax increase is required.

Graves said if legislators were determined to approve proposals he considers foolish, "There will be a point in time where I'll probably give them enough rope to hang themselves."

Graves may have already done that very thing — to himself.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Correspondent John Hanna has covered Kansas politics and government since 1986.

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Flyboys freed! 1.2 billion Chinese to go

Was the Taiwan Straits incident the ugly American meddling in Asia? It all depends on the word meddling, and is there a word between very sorry and an apology?

This big Chief in the White Teepee sure did the right thing. He got the people home.

He was not dealing with some little ole lady in tennis shoes you know! While this new and more powerful China may not be the old Stalinist communists they must think they are in the middle ages.

It must be understood we are dealing with a nation that aspires to be an Asian superpower, but it is one thing to save face among weaker Asian nations and another to be a world power.

It would be a huge mistake to let China close the Taiwan Straits to world commerce. If that happened what would come next, the Gulf of Mexico—the Panama Canal?

Even while the People's Liberation Army of China interrogated American airmen, Jiang Zemin was in Cuba talking to his pal Fidel. Now does that sound like the all American Roy Rogers?

Would the great commissar, of China win the freedom award you say? Don't think so! They engage in bellicose rhetoric and call the United States a paper tiger, but they would do anything to get U.S. satellite systems.

Even more alarming, the People's Liberation Army of China is not the only bear in the woods. The nuclear corporations of Westinghouse Electric—Loral and Hughes foam at the mouth over the export of the very technology that U.S. taxpayer money helped develop.

The truth is they both hold the same indifference to a free society, that an inter-city politician has for a balanced budget. Today there seems to be an arrogance of big government and bigger corporations who have no national flags. It's all we want



wayne gattshall

• wayne's world

is your money. Wonder who they would side with if there was a war? That's easy, just follow the money, trade Old Glory for \$1 coffee mugs!

Well the United States is not the organ grinder's monkey. Maybe since these great all American paradigms of capitalism are nervous as a cat on a tin roof over the downing of an American surveillance plane they should go talk to their comrade Jiang Zemin. Oh well, since it's all about FREE TRADE, so let's sell new generation destroyers to Taiwan. Do you suppose the People's Republic of China would quit exporting 85 percent of their Donald Duck surpluses to the good ole U.S.A. if we did? Don't think so! Then there is the little matter of 15,000 Chinese students in our universities.

This most paramount leader from China, has another problem, he has nearly one billion (900,000,000) people who live in fear of famine more than a knock on the door. China will never be able to feed their own people without imports. It has 25 percent of the people but 7 percent of the arable land.

In fact if they produced missiles like they do food Jiang couldn't invade Cuba. China, the very origin of soybeans, right now needs all the soybeans the great American farm belt can produce but show us the exports. They buy them from the other guy.

There is not a nation in Asia that doesn't have a powerful ethnic Chinese population. They may

have fled China because they are often Christians. Most of these refugee from mainline China, hold important positions in these Asian autocracies, too. It is "give us security we will give you money." In fact if mainland China had all the money of ethnic Chinese back...they would not need our \$100,000,-000,000 (\$100 trillion) in capital flows (hedge fund money from U.S. banks). They could build their factories with their own money.

It's time to wake up and smell the roses.

Things are really a mess. The old economy is back manufacturing and agriculture is what makes a great nation. The stock market is in the tank, foot and mouth is everywhere. Gas may be \$2 a gallon this summer. So let's plant more corn for global warming, (corn soaks up tons of carbon dioxide). Drill for oil and gas in Kansas, Texas and Alaska. Drill, drill, soon and often. Deploy the missile shield. It may not work but we better try. We can't put the generation ex-ers on the ground with someone that has nothing to lose.

It might even be a workable farm-food policy too. Higher commodity (farm) prices would not be the end of civilization as we know it. Hook up the baloney meter, these fancy guys from the Department of Agriculture want to peg farmers income to the five-year-old 1996 income. They call it income averaging, but we already have income averaging. It's a subsidy to the Federal All Risk crop insurance agents.

Use the Department of Agriculture money to subsidize them some more. Let's subsidize the free food pentagon (five biggest food processors), too. Some call them farm subsidies, but the free-food-complex would tear Capital Hill down brick by brick if Congress ever took away the money.

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Presidential appointment needs a fix

You can blame it on Linda Chavez, the Florida recount or the FBI, but the fact is, nearly three months after President Bush's inauguration, hardly anyone is at work in his sub-Cabinet.

At the Pentagon, for instance, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld is in place along with his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz. Eight other top officials have been named, but none has been confirmed by the Senate, so they can't really function. And 37 other posts remain unfilled.

Rumsfeld, aides say, is frustrated. The same can be said of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson, who is home alone at the top of his department. Six of his top aides have been selected, but only three have been officially nominated, and none has been confirmed.

In fact, at nine out of 14 Cabinet departments, only the secretary is in place. The exceptions, besides Defense, are the departments of State, Labor, Treasury and Veterans' Affairs.

As of last Friday, according to the Brookings Institution's Presidential Appointee Initiative, of the 487 Senate-confirmable posts Bush has to fill, only 29 have been filled by confirmation, 31 more have had people nominated and 94 have had people named but not officially nominated.

Actually, according to Brookings scholar Paul Light, director of PAI, Bush personnel chief Clay Johnson claims that 300 of the 487 have been selected by the President but haven't been announced yet.

If that's true, Light said, this would be "a modern record for presidential signoff." Still, it seems to take forever for a new president to fill his government (nine months on average), and the time is getting longer.

After 84 days in office, which Bush reached last Friday, President Ronald Reagan had nominated 112 officials and 72 had been confirmed in 1981. By that same period in 1993, President Bill Clinton had nominated 70 officials and 42 had been confirmed. Light doesn't have figures for Bush's father.

However, the 37-day Florida recount slowed down George W. Bush's transition process. Comparing his record 124 days after becoming president-elect, Bush's 60 nominations and 29 confirmations nearly tie Reagan's 58 nominations and 38 confirmations, and outstrips Clinton's 35 nominations and 26 confirmations.



morton kondracke

• commentary

Clinton was notorious for his inability to make decisions and for the inefficiency of his first-term White House. Most scholars rate Reagan's as the best recent transition. So Bush is not doing badly by comparison.

What's more, Light noted, he's been handicapped by the FBI's "tightening up" after being "embarrassed" by the media's (not its) discovery that Bush's original choice for Labor secretary, Linda Chavez, had employed an illegal immigrant.

The fundamental fact is that the entire presidential appointment and nomination system is clogged by bureaucratic bottlenecks, duplicative and intrusive forms and, ultimately, Senate delays in processing nominations.

Nominees are required to fill out four sets of forms — a White House personal data questionnaire, the excruciating standard form 86 used for FBI security clearances, the Office of Government Ethics financial disclosure report, and a separate form required by Senate committees.

Regardless of whether appointees will have access to national security information, form 86 requires them to list all the jobs they've held and places they've lived over the past 15 years, provide the name, address and phone number of an acquaintance from every educational institution they've attended since high school, and even the whereabouts of ex-spouses.

In the computer age, form 86 must be filled out by hand or typewriter. Then it takes the FBI an average of 40 days to complete full field investigations on nominees, Light said. Senate committees receive raw reports from the FBI, but then demand their own forms, whose questions vary only slightly from the FBI's.

According to Light, having been cleared for government service in the past actually lengthens the delay because the FBI and Senate staffers spend hours comparing forms in search of discrepancies.

"The perfect nominee is someone with no life, no interests, no history," Light explained, "maybe

an orphan who never married and never worked — an assetless cipher."

This tedious system has been the subject of at least nine major reform studies since 1985. Yet, the length of time required to process nominees has grown with each new administration.

Brookings' latest study, headed by former Sen. Nancy Kassebaum Baker, R-Kan., and former White House budget director Franklin Raines, recommends simplifying forms, limiting FBI investigations to security needs, reducing the number of appointments a president makes, reviewing the multiple sets of ethics rules governing appointees and shortening the Senate confirmation process.

At a hearing earlier this month, Senate Governmental Affairs Chairman Fred Thompson, R-Tenn., promised that, this time, the system will be reformed. We'll see.

Morton Kondracke is executive editor of Roll Call, the newspaper of Capitol Hill.

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"BARTENDER, I'LL HAVE ANOTHER GLASS OF ICE WATER WITH A DASH OF ARSENIC."

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