

from our viewpoint...

# Tight budget leaves health care unfunded

Those who wanted the state Legislature to approve meaningful health care reform were somewhat pleased with a compromise bill that passed on Wednesday, but at the same time the state budget squeezed out the money needed for most of the health programs.

Rep. Jim Morrison (R-Colby) said he did not feel the health reforms really met the needs of Kansans, and he was not surprised the money was left out.

Morrison said he was disappointed with the way the session had gone, adding that he felt it was a major loss for western Kansas not to get approval of the power plants proposed for Holcomb.

The representative said he found himself unable to support the budget, adding that it was the first time in his career he had voted against one.

Morrison had said he did not feel the state Health Policy Authority had presented a good plan to help cut the cost of health care for people who need it.

Authority Executive Director Dr. Marcia Nielsen said she was pleased with passage of the compromise bill, but that without money, not much has changed.

"So much time and so many resources were invested in the process of developing health reform, as instructed by the legislature last year," she said. "To have a compromise on health reform without adequate funding will be difficult to explain to Kansans who care deeply about these issues."

Morrison disagreed, saying he feels the authority was trying to expand a government insurance program. He said he feels the state should encourage more free market in the health insurance area and help people find ways to cut costs without expecting the government to pay for it all.

"Health reform is a major multi-year undertaking," Nielsen said, "and the Kansas Health Policy Authority is committed to pursuing the goal of a healthy Kansas for all Kansans."

"The problems in our inefficient and expensive health system get worse as the economy tightens. Kansans expect all of us to step up to the plate and work together on common-sense solutions."

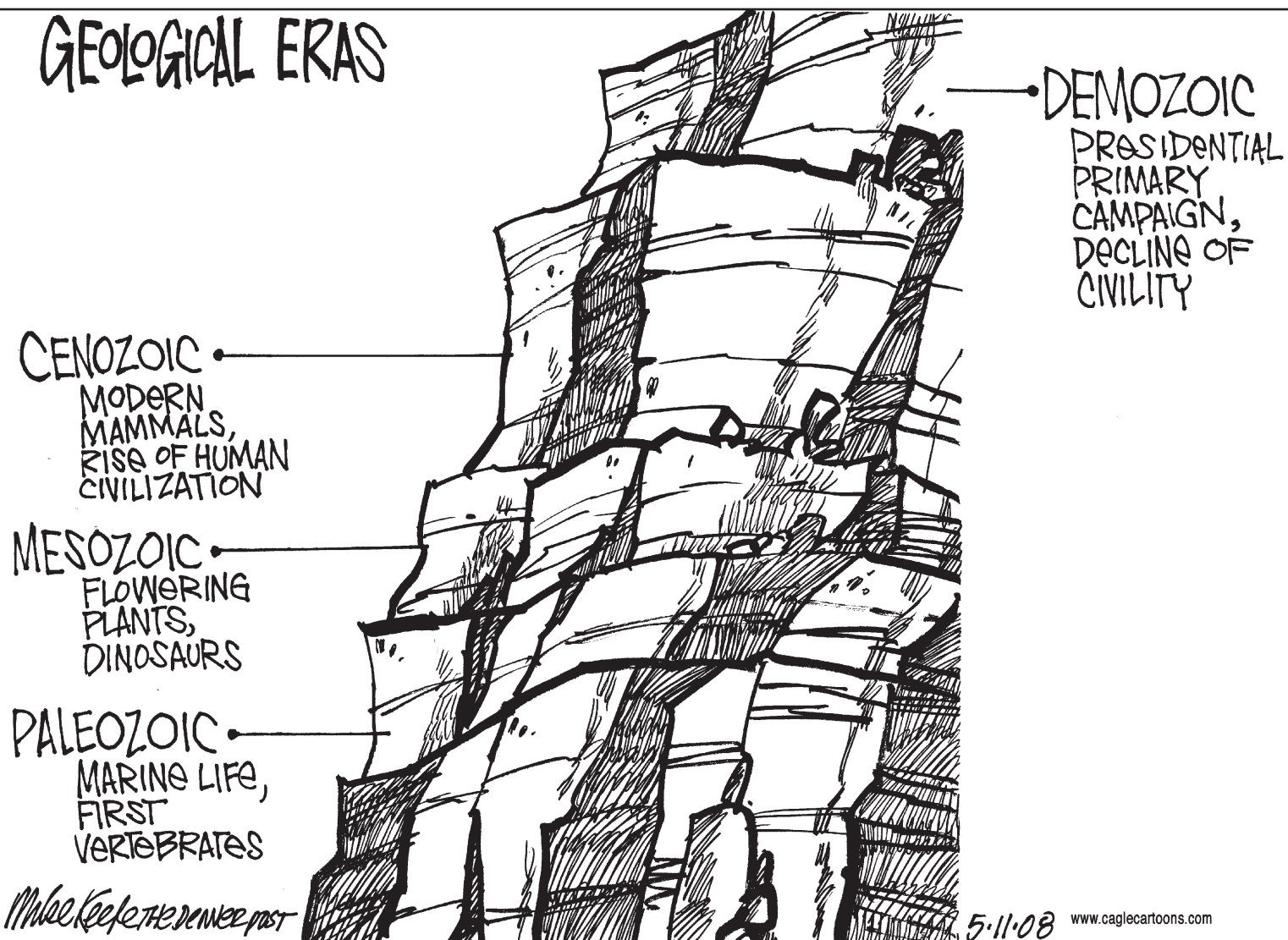
The authority presented a 21-point program after spending a year gathering information around the state, and the compromise bill included nine of the initiatives it identified. However, only one — a coordinated school health program — was actually in the state budget, for \$550,000.

The authority had proposed a 25-cents-per-pack increase in cigarette taxes to pay for its proposals, but the Legislature did not want to raise any taxes in an election year.

Health care reform continues to be a big-ticket item for employers and employees alike, and as the economy tightens more people may have to drop their insurance in order to feed their families.

Neither the state nor the federal government will be in a hurry to turn on a tap of money to pay for health care, and continued economic stress may make it tougher next year to get the state legislature to begin funding the health reforms passed this year.

Undoubtedly, health care reform and health insurance costs are a major issue in Kansas, but across the nation people are looking to the presidential candidates to see if there is a national solution. — *Tom Betz*



# Gross national happiness

Happiness is in the data. That doesn't bode well for folks on the political left.

As it goes, Arthur Brooks, a Syracuse University economics professor and author of the new book "Gross National Happiness," began mining happiness data back in his college days.

The prevailing wisdom then, Brooks told me, was that liberal folks were happier — that conservatives were close-minded, rigid and therefore less capable of happiness.

But as he dug through the data, he found the opposite to be true: Conservative Americans are nearly twice as likely to report being "very happy" as are liberals.

Why such a big happiness gap? Brooks said it has to do with worldview.

Conservatives hold more traditional values — faith, marriage, family, freedom, hard work. They believe in the individual and just want to be left alone. Like them or hate them, the traditional values they hold, the data show, are a source of happiness.

Liberals, on the other hand, are not as likely to marry, have children or go to church. They're far more likely to feel exploited by others. Lacking control over one's environment is a source of unhappiness.

Which ties into the presidential election.

Brooks said that both Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama have run campaigns based on grievance. Their appeal is to folks who feel victimized by social and economic forces — folks who want the government to impose more rules, regulations and mandates on the people who make them unhappy.

That's not to say Republicans haven't been



**tom purcell**

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guilty of a similar game. Brooks is quick to point out that they, too, used the largess of the federal trough to promise voters goodies in return for their votes.

That's the problem with elections.

"They're based on the assumption of unhappiness," he said. "Politicians focus on perceived wrongs rather than the things that are going well. Americans take for granted how well things really are going. Our economy may have slowed, but it is roaring compared to past economic downturns."

Nonetheless we focus on the negative and our politicians stoke our unhappiness all the more. They bribe us with our own money, promising to expand the government to address the grievances that they promote.

But we ought to be careful what we wish for.

As our government grows, you see, our freedom decreases, and one of the greatest sources of happiness is freedom — something else we take for granted in a country founded on the concept.

In any event, happiness is something to think about before you pull a lever in the voting booth. It's really this simple:

If you have a hopeful view of the future and wish to unleash the creativity and enthusiasm

of the American spirit — if you want the government to stop taking so much of your money and stop meddling so much in everybody's lives — well, you're out of luck.

Sure, libertarian Ron Paul is promising to clamp down on government, but he doesn't stand a chance this fall. The only option is McCain, who is promising not to raise taxes or meddle with things as much as the Democrats.

And if you are pessimistic and believe that a free society allows nasty capitalists to exploit you and make you miserable, vote for Obama or Hillary. They promise to expand the reach of the federal government into every corner — they promise to monitor, intervene and punish.

But as the data show, more government equals less freedom and in the end you'll be made even less happy.

Obama gave us a perfect example. He knows that every time the capital gains tax is lowered, the government ends up receiving more revenue — this is because the lower rate gives more folks the incentive to risk their dough. And when they profit, so does the government.

Obama promises to raise the capital gains tax anyhow — he promises to punish citizens and the government and ultimately slow down economic growth — because doing so would be "fair."

Yeah, that's what we need more of: politicians and the government, not individuals, deciding what is fair in America.

That ought to make you happy.

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# Texting taboos



**floyd, mary brown**

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Thomas Wise, but he notes texting can get out of control and interfere with occupational and personal settings.

Dropping grades are one of the consequences of excessive texting according to Dr. Tamyra Pierce, who has done research on the topic. "For years television has been the technology that preoccupied teens' time and distracted them from their homework. However, with the advancement in technology, teens now have many other gadgets that can keep them from their obligations," said Pierce. Dr. Block is particularly concerned about people texting while driving a car.

Young people aren't the only ones who have the problem. Some adults are compulsive "multi-taskers." These individuals not only are unable to sit through a meeting or attend a presentation, but can't play with their children without checking their email or text messages.

With nearly one billion text messages sent a day, rules of etiquette are starting to be addressed since texting is so prevalent in society.

"I don't think people should be texting in situations where people deserve to be listened to," said etiquette expert Caroline Tiger. "People shouldn't have to be in a conversation or looking out at a group and see people with their heads bowed clicking away on their cell phone or BlackBerry. A lot of people are annoyed by it. It's something that we're only just beginning to figure out, how to deal with it."

Reminders for those attending movie theaters, churches and other public events to turn off their cell phones so not to ruin the experience for others is widespread. However, lately this admonishment is now being extended.

With the help of a character from a soon to be released movie, AMC Lowes theaters use the voice of Kung Fu Panda to tell patrons: "No cell phone, no talking, no texting. You don't think it makes a sound? It does. I hear it-click, click, click, click, click."

Except it's not only noise that disturbs others. "It's bothersome because the screen is so bright, we ask people to take it outside," said Ben Schuler, manager of a smaller movie theater.

"People are under the illusion that other people don't notice," Tiger says. "They think they are wearing some sort of invisible cloak, but they're not."

What's paradoxical about this phenomenon is that instead of being conducive to relationships, it can act like a barrier, as it did for the uncle and the teenagers we mentioned.

In this world of technology and text messaging, the title of the 1970s song comes to mind with good advice, "Love the one you're with." Let's make sure with all the convenience and fun of these gadgets, our attention remains in the here and now focused on "the one you're with."

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