

from our viewpoint...

# First round over for budget battle

The government did not shut down, and the country has a budget for about five and one-half months. This was the opening round in the on going budget and deficit battle.

The next round began last week with the passage on Friday in the House of a proposed budget for next year Rep. Paul Ryan says will put the country on the road back to financial stability and cuts \$6 trillion over the next 10 years.

The bill passed the House on a vote of 235 to 193 mostly along party lines. House members voted down other proposed budgets by the Democrats, the Conservative Republican Study Committee, the Congressional Black Caucus and moderate Democrat Jim Cooper of Tennessee.

The House budget is not expected to make much headway in the Senate where the Democrats have a different view of how to balance the country's financial budget.

For those who are 55 or younger Rep. Ryan's budget has a plan to end Medicare. When the youngsters reach retirement age—expected to rise to 70—they would receive a voucher to buy private insurance. Estimates are the private insurance will cost about \$6,000 more than the existing Medicare program.

The Republican budget takes a big bite out of infrastructure with \$633 billions out of transportation. The Republican budget cuts taxes for corporations and the wealthiest top one percent in the name of creating jobs.

Most economists report small businesses—being those with 500 or fewer employees and making \$50 million or less—produce more than half the new jobs in the country and are not part of the Fortune 500 list of largest businesses. That would argue against the Republican theory it is the rich who create jobs and who would help balance the federal budget.

President Barack Obama's budget speech on Tuesday said the Republican budget was going the wrong way. Obama agreed the country needs to address the deficit, and proposed large cuts. He said he would not agree to more tax cuts for the top two percent like were approved in December.

The two sides have set the stage for the next looming battle over the debt ceiling. The country is expected to reach the present debt ceiling of \$14.3 trillion before the middle of May, but the deadline could be extended to July 8 said Treasury Secretary Timothy Geittner, to buy some time. After that the country would fall into default.

The TEA Party folks are telling House Speaker John Boehner they will refuse to raise the debt ceiling.

The debt ceiling is a limit set by congressional authority. Raising the debt limit has been a sore point for many years, but traditionally Congress has reluctantly voted to raise the ceiling when it has come up before.

Not raising the debt limit could bring on another recession just as the economy is showing more signs of recovery, and could mean the government would not be able to pay for its commitments such as Medicare and Social Security.

Republicans in the House—other than the TEA Party—are saying they could approve an increase in the debt ceiling if the measure includes more spending cuts beyond what have been approved for this year and more for the next several years.

The battle has been joined and both sides will be trying to put their best arguments forward with an eye toward the 2012 election. The campaigns have already begun. —Tom Betz



# Kansas has some good news for drivers

Well, here's some good news for Colorado... thanks to Kansas!

And that good news will probably generate a chant from the Colorado folks, something to the effect, "About time!"

It all has to do with Kansas on the verge of raising its speed limits on Interstate and state super highways from 70 miles per hour to 75. Those heavy-footed Rocky Mountain folks will soon be able to venture into Kansas on I-70 without having to toss an anchor out the window to slow 'em down!

Well, that's an exaggeration, for sure, because few drop their 75 mph speed to Kansas' 70 anyway. Blame those strong Kansas tailwinds.

I can remember when the speed limit on the nation's highways was cut some years ago to 55 miles per hour to help with a gas shortage, and other concerns that escape memory. That was booed loudly, but it did decrease the number of fatalities on the nation's roadways.

Reports are beginning to surface the Memorial holiday weekend will usher in that much talked-about "magic number"—\$5 gas in this region! Maybe Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback can sign the new law in advance of Memorial Day so motorists can drive even faster to the gas pumps to take advantage of the "lower" priced fuel.

Seventy-five is a bit too fast for this Man of the Plains. When I was still driving, I would keep my speed at 68-70 in Kansas and when I entered another state with a speed limit in excess of 70 (like Colorado's 75), I would be content to let my machine roll along at, you guessed it, 68-70. I found no need to stretch my neck in the likeness of a pretzel to see if there were any highway patrolmen around.

I watched a television reporter talking with a Texas congressman the other evening who



**tom dreiling**

• time out with td

was in full support of that state likely hiking its speed limit to 80. He pointed out his congressional district covers 500 miles from one end to the other and with little or no air service, he must travel the highways to meet with his constituents. As if he didn't know that before he ran for congress! Poor excuse to up the speed.

Speed limits really have little influence on the way people operate their cars and pickups and trucks. I recall a few years ago when I was publishing the newspaper in Norton, I was going to Denver over a weekend to see my kids and grandkids and drove a couple of secondary roadways to connect with Interstate-70 at Colby. I wasn't on the interstate no more than 10 minutes before one of those big Ford extended cab pickups, silver in color and bearing an SG license tag (Sedgwick County/Wichita), moved over to the left lane to pass me. It was being driven by a young man probably in his 20s. He was doing breakfast! A large cup of coffee in one hand and a sandwich in the other. As he moved up even with my driver's side window, he looked over at me and raised both the coffee and sandwich in my direction as if to say, "Hey, wanna taste?" I could only surmise that his knees were controlling the steering wheel. That was a recipe for disaster. But you know the old saying, "That'll never happen to me."

No, I am not an advocate of increasing highway speed limits. Experts will tell you at 70 miles per hour, no driver has control of his or her vehicle. In fact, the 55 speed limit mentioned above was thought to be right on the line

of being able to control a vehicle. Yes, recent reports show highway fatalities are down, but this is due to more and more people using seat belts. But will raising the speed limit be pushing things a bit too far?

"What can a fool without money be parted from?" That was the question I asked in my last column. The best of the lot came from a Kansas City reader, who wrote: "Friends! Who in their right mind would hang around with a fool without money anyway?"

Several readers weighed in on the possibility of Donald Trump getting into the presidential race with these Snippets:

"He'd have no problem putting together a Cabinet. His two sons and daughter who appear on 'The Apprentice' reality show, would fit the bill perfectly. Dad's always right!"

"President Donald Trump? Afraid I'd have to vote Obama, whom I can't stand. But President Donald Trump? That's got to be a joke."

"Donald Trump just might fit the bill. He definitely can make decisions without any problem. That would be different."

Again, Snippets are not letters to the editor, they are simply two or three sentences summing up a thought on a timely topic.

Just because most of us will die of natural causes, doesn't mean we have to stop eating natural foods. That tip came my way from a nephew "deep in the heart of Texas."

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# Time to examine how our money is spent

As Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Taxes are the price we pay for a civilized society." It costs money to make this country hum. Anyone can see it would be impossible to have roads crisscrossing the country, federal jails and courts, national parks and monuments, environmental protection that has no boundaries, and a whole raft of other essential services without a nationwide system in which we all have a stake.

Right now, our debt, the deficit and the spectacle of a narrowly averted government shutdown have focused attention on federal spending of tax dollars. To that, I say hooray. I hate looking at my own spending budget, but I know what my priorities are, and what money I have to use, save or borrow against. When we examine our personal finances, we recognize our personal values. Such a magnifying glass aimed at the federal budget will expose priorities of our "civilized" society.

## where to write

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**from other pens**

• commentary

So what are our federal values? We have two sides to the spending budget; one non-discretionary (required spending by law or interest on the debt), and the other discretionary. The discretionary side is where our priorities are displayed full frontal. The current budget allows for 56 percent on the Pentagon, wars and nuclear weapons.

Yes, that's right. Not to confuse the issue, but that 56 percent does not include veterans' benefits, or the interest we pay on the debt of past wars, or homeland security. We spend a lot on war, war planning, defense, offense, outdated weapons, overspending on weapons

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systems cost overruns and more.

It brings to mind the old adage: If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. If we have the "stuff" to make war, we use it. If we shifted priorities, we could spend more on international development to help countries survive and thrive so they might not be ripe for conflagration. If we had plentiful, well-trained and professional conflict resolution teams, we could rely on them more and boots on the ground less.

Our troops do a masterful job. The outpouring of support for what they have handled in Iraq and Afghanistan, and now in Libya, is appropriate. However, many in Congress are saying it's time to look at the military budget. The Pentagon does not pass audits. Weapons manufacturers routinely have cost overruns that would not be tolerated anywhere else in the budget. Weapons systems made in various congressional districts are reauthorized even if the Pentagon and the Joint Chiefs don't want them.

As you look at what you pay in federal income taxes, take a few minutes to think of our country's values in spending your hard-earned dollars. Last year, in a nonpartisan town meeting effort sponsored by America Speaks in 60 cities across the country, 85 percent of all participants wanted defense spending cut by at least 10 percent, with a majority of participants, 51 percent, supporting a 15 percent cut. We can have the defense we want and need, plus the security of jobs, health care, education and a clean environment by adjusting our spending priorities to meet our values. It's time.

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