

from our viewpoint...

Kansas actually has a lot of income now

State Rep. Ward Cassidy struck a cord Saturday when he told a "town-hall" meeting crowd that the big issue at the Legislature this session may well be defending the state's growing income stream and preserving the 7.5 percent ending balance required by law.

While the state's revenue is recovering after more than three years of recession, he said, and cash is coming in ahead of official projections, nearly every state program and agency has been cut in the last few years.

That means that nearly every program and agency wants more money. Some, like schools and support for the disabled, have huge blocks of backers who depend on them. These groups won't just ask for money; they'll demand it.

Most agencies, Mr. Cassidy said, probably need and deserve more, but even with its newfound income stream, the state won't have enough to satisfy every need. Far from it.

Rep. Cassidy said the ending balance is important, not just because the law requires a cushion against tough times or unexpected need, but because it should help prevent a repeat of the deep cuts the state had to make during the late recession.

If the state had had that kind of reserve, he said, it might not have had to cut so deeply or so broadly as it did. Cuts hit nearly every agency, from education to transportation, and most in between. When big, well-liked programs like roads and school take cuts, you know things are tough.

But in the years leading up to the recession, Kansas had been spending nearly every penny it brought in. One reason for that was the fact that the Legislature caved in to the state Supreme Court and threw money at education after losing a court case on school finance.

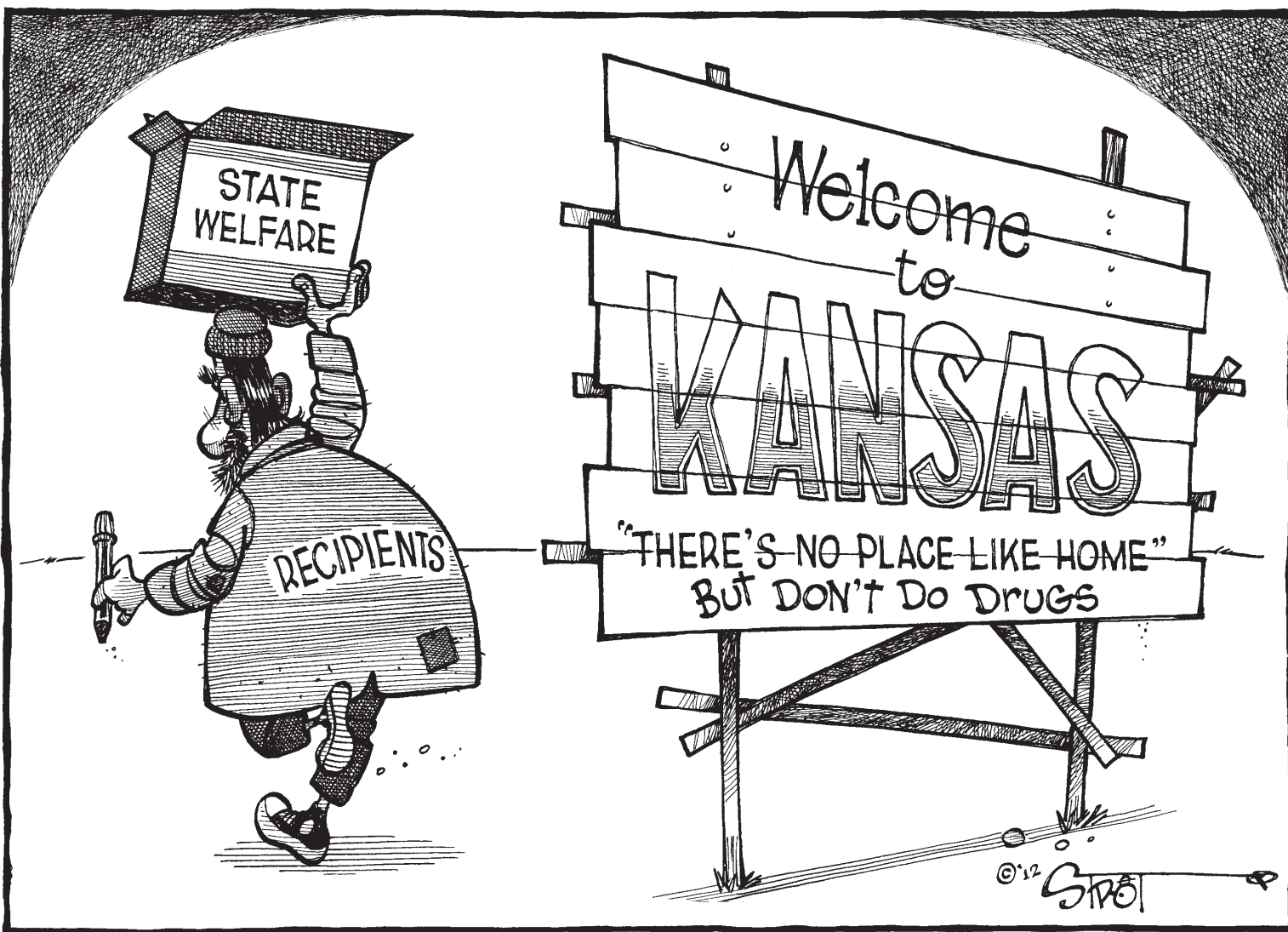
When the recession came along, the state had spent most of the "ending balance," its reserve or "rainy day fund." It had no cushion to fall back on.

Deep cuts needed to balance the budget affected everyone, but were especially tough on schools. Now the group Schools for Fair Funding, an alliance of districts formed to sue the state and lobby for more school spending, is in court once again. It claims the cuts violated the terms of the previous decision and the agreement worked out to satisfy the suit.

Never mind that the courts should never have ordered the Legislature to spend more than the state could afford, or that most of us thought spending decisions ought to be left to our elected representatives.

Never mind that the school districts involved were spending state money to sue the state, something most Kansans probably think is wrong. At heart, the issue is a power grab by the courts which the Legislature chose to cave in to rather than to fight.

That battle will have to be waged some day, and the time may come sooner rather than later. Defending that ending balance will be tough indeed. Mr. Cassidy has called this one right. — Steve Haynes



First, do no harm



guest columnist

• ken klemm

During medical school doctors are taught the principle precept of medicine - Primum non nocere - "First, do no harm." If only we could get politicians' to follow the same principle!

As our Nations jobless numbers appear to be shrinking and a few other glimmers of hope shimmer on the horizon, those wishing for reelection and their cheerleaders beat their drums about all the good the current administration has done. I don't buy it.

Modern economists have discovered a most surprising phenomenon. It has been noticed when an economy suffers a recession (AKA a panic) the natural resiliency of free-market capitalism, coupled with an industrious and free people, will provide a bounce back in about 18 to 24 months provided the government doesn't misstep and extend or worsen the recession. Economic history shows that it is better for government to do nothing than to do wrong.

Recessions are a necessary part of keeping an economy strong and healthy. A recession is like the Olympic trials of business. To have a top-notch Olympic competition all the athletes must be thoroughly tested. Those that don't make the grade discover that they need to double-down and get better or perhaps it would be best for them to find another way to succeed. Recessions, and the specter of one coming, are what make our complex economy strong, diverse and resilient. Government's futile attempts to protect us from these trials ultimately weaken the whole economy and make it weak, less diverse and fragile.

The decade plus of the Great Depression is now clearly understood as a classic recession worsened by government policies. It was kicked off by the stock market crash of 1929 (which itself was fueled and amplified by loose government monetary policy) and extended and worsened by wrong-headed government interventions. Each time the economy attempted to heal itself it was once again beat back by bad policies. What started only as a recession was transformed into the Great Depression by poor government policies.

Right now we are in a similar situation. This recession was kicked off with loose monetary policy and the government's meddling in the housing market. Similarly, our government has decided it's best to pour trillions of dollars into programs of zero or questionable value while trashing the very fabric of our free-market economy.

Conventional wisdom is only WW II brought us out of the Great Depression but this is a fallacy. What brought us out of the Great Depression was when our government started to get it right and let capitalism heal and grow our way out of the darkness.

The glimmers of hope we see now on the horizon are the amazing resiliency of our largely free-market economy and millions of hard-working American's slowly building back from the wreckage of government's missteps. Sadly, we as a Nation have added over

\$5 trillion in debt during the last three years to purportedly "fix" the recession. We've witnessed the trashing of the rule of law with the illegal bailout of GM and the capricious nature of many of the other bailouts. These actions may well turn those glimmers of hope into mirages.

A central feature of a strong, resilient free-market economy is the rule of law. Government's highest and greatest work is to provide clearly written and easily understood laws designed to keep the playing field level and to apply these laws to all members of society. This is critical to economic success. Today we have an administration that feels it is better to make the rules up as they go and then only apply them to those who are well-connected or otherwise deemed politically beneficial. The 1,200 plus Obamacare waivers are a prime example of this. Why would a law supposed to apply to all citizens (except Congress, sadly) have need of waivers? Even the standards to qualify for these waivers are unknown. It seems the most common qualifier for a waiver is to be a "Friend of the Administration".

As we struggle to rebuild our economy we should demand government cease wasting our future on trillions of wasteful spending that merely distorts markets and increases the debt hang-over we'll surely have to deal with one day soon. Let's demand government get out of the way and do only what it was meant to do. Primum non nocere should be part of the oath of office!

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Religious liberty essential to our nation

Our nation has a long legacy of defending an individual's religious freedoms. James Madison, the father of our nation's constitution and the author of the Bill of Rights, once wrote that "conscience is the most sacred of all property." Since our nation's earliest days, the U.S. Supreme Court has consistently affirmed our First Amendment right to exercise our religious beliefs freely. But today, recent decisions by the Obama administration are threatening Americans' religious liberty.

This past summer, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services exercised its authority under the new health care reform law to require that most employee-provided health insurance plans cover contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs. This new mandate contains a "religious employer" exemption, but the exemption is so narrow that many religiously-affiliated hospitals, educational institutions and charities do not meet the requirements. After releasing this rule, the department heard from hundreds of thousands of Americans who were opposed to the regulation and the narrow scope of its exemption. However, despite the concerns of so many, Health and Human Services announced last month that it would not change the mandate for nonprofit religious employers, but only extend to next year the deadline for compliance.

Extending the deadline does not change what is at stake. Faith-based groups who object to this requirement on moral grounds are being forced to choose between offering services that violate their religious beliefs or eliminating their employees' health coverage. If faith-based groups stop offering their employees health coverage to avoid violating their faith, many Americans will lose their current health care simply because that coverage does not fall within the administration's preferred policy parameters. Targeting religious beliefs in this manner erodes the principle of religious liberty upon which our country was founded.

Last October, I joined Senate colleagues in



jerry moran

• in Congress

requesting that Health and Human Services Secretary Sebelius reconsider this regulation and instead follow our nation's tradition of respecting religious liberty. Additionally, in September I sponsored S. 1467, the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, legislation that would protect health care providers and employers from being forced to pay for products and services under the new health care law that violate their ethical values.

Our federal government should not force religious groups to betray their fundamental beliefs. Current conscience protections permit some religious groups to abstain from participating in war or working on religious holy days, and others to be exempt from the health care law's individual mandate to purchase a certain level of health insurance as defined by the federal government. In the recently decided case Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church v. EEOC, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled that the government cannot interfere with "the internal governance of the church" in ministerial hiring decisions. Similarly, religious groups should not be forced to offer insurance plans to their employees that

violate their fundamental beliefs.

The threat to religious liberty caused by this unprecedented overreach by the federal government should be of concern for all Americans - whether or not they ascribe to a particular faith. The new mandate could force religiously-affiliated organizations to close or drastically curtail services to those in need.

These organizations play a vital role in serving communities in Kansas and across our country. If this mandate stands, many nonprofit hospitals, soup kitchens, family shelters and schools in Kansas will be forced to choose between violating the law or going against their religious beliefs. These organizations will have to either pay for services they consider immoral, face an ongoing series of fines for not complying, or limit the services they provide in their communities. Individuals of all ages, beliefs and backgrounds who depend on these institutions will have to seek care elsewhere.

What is most concerning is this: if the government can compel an individual or group to violate one's "sacred" conscience, then there is no limit to government power. All of our cherished constitutional rights would be subject to the whims of the federal government and those in power. One group's beliefs are being trampled today; another's might be tomorrow. Our nation's constitutional rights and freedoms are essential to who we are as Americans, and our commitment to these precious rights must be protected at every turn.

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