

Federal highway aid needs rapid plugging

Congress needs to act, and soon, to plug a gigantic hole in the federal highway aid program.

Without a new law, Kansas alone stands to lose \$120 million in federal aid next year, with disastrous consequences to the state's road program. That's almost one-third of the state's federal money, says Transportation Secretary Deb Miller.

Congress killed an amendment last month that would have plugged the gap with \$8 billion as a rider to a bill allocating money for the Federal Aviation Administration. Few other bills offer a chance to address a transportation issue, and time is running out.

The Federal Highway Trust fund is in trouble for several reasons, not the least of which is the high price of gasoline and diesel fuel. As prices soar, people stop driving as much, and the road fund suffers.

At the same time, the government has been pushing for more fuel efficiency, smaller vehicles and less driving. People are listening this time. The prices today really hurt.

And while the trust fund — like most state road funds — has many sources of income, all are hurting. Plus, the basis of all state and federal highway budgets is the fuel tax.

That's a problem, both because people are using less fuel, and because the tax is calculated by the gallon. If it was a percentage of the price of fuel, the fund might be full.

The problem will only get worse as smaller cars, higher fuel efficiency standards and the pressure to drive less further reduce the tax

take. Then there's the problem of "alternative fuel" vehicles.

People who use natural gas, propane or electricity to power their cars don't pay road taxes at all, unless you count the taxes on tires or new trucks. To keep on building highways, the country has to figure out how to tax these vehicles. There's no good solution.

State and federal officials have talked about a "miles driven" tax, which is technically possible. But paying your road tax in one or two yearly lumps would be painful as heck.

The current at-the-pump plan is relatively easy to take, at least compared to the cost of fuel.

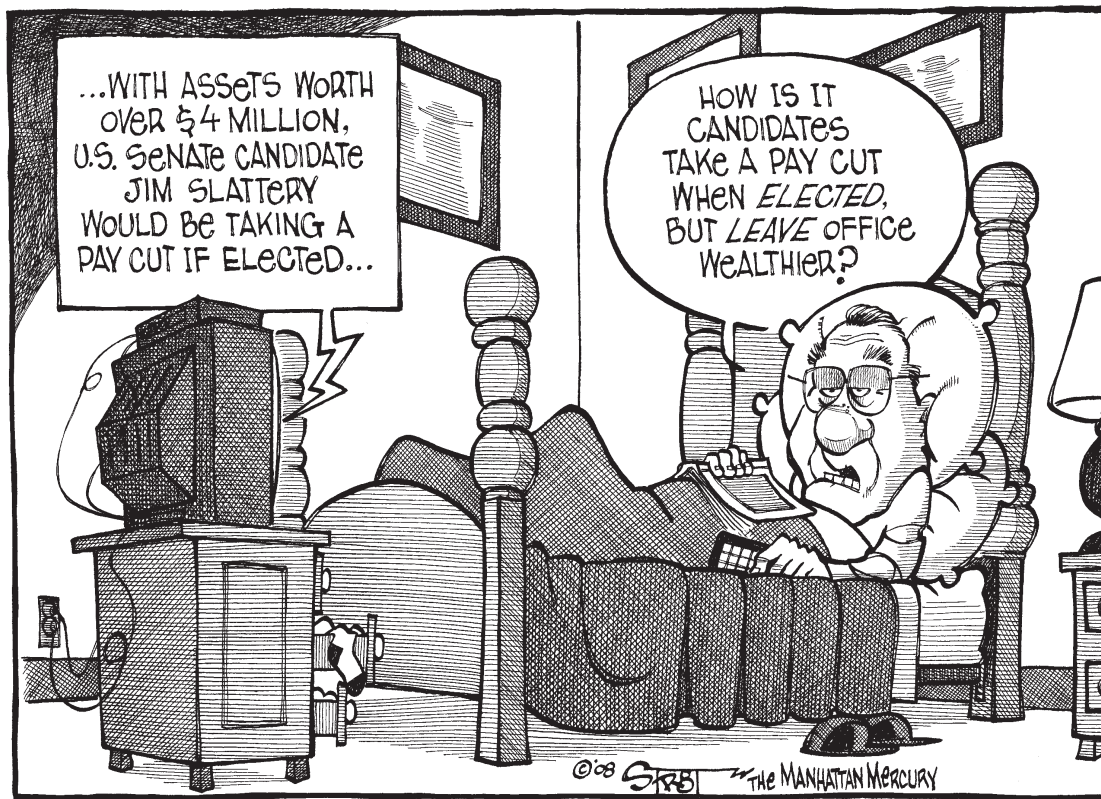
Congress needs to do something, and chances for a temporary fix are good, since every state would be affected by the shortfall expected next year. A permanent solution is more distant. History says in Washington, nothing will get done until *after* the deadline.

Meantime, though, action is needed on a patch job by October, and in Washington that's not a long time. Congress pretty much has to gear up for action right after the summer break.

Kansas officials haven't said yet which road projects might be affected by a shortage in the federal fund, and thankfully, most big jobs in this area are done, but the impact across the state could be huge — and long lasting.

The state already faces a crisis finding money to fill its highway fund, and a breakdown in Washington can only make matters worse.

— Steve Haynes



Garden is thriving like crazy

It's summer — glorious, hot, wonderful summer — and the garden is growing like crazy.

My corn really is high as an elephant's eye, and we've already picked several tomatoes.

Out on the fence the snow peas are all gone, but over by the house, the green beans are beaming as fast as their little vines can go.

Every morning I go out to pick beans. It's kind of a hard job, but luckily we only have a small patch.

I start by taking off my shoes. Then I step bare-footed over the two-foot fence that surrounds the patch. I'm not very tall and I have to be careful when I go over the fence. Usually, I lean forward and catch myself on the house.

The bean patch is only about four feet wide and eight feet long, so it doesn't take long to go through it, but it's stoop labor. You find a spot to put your feet among the close-planted beans and lean over to carefully lift each plant and check it for vegetables.

If you find beans, you have to decide if they're ready to pick. If they're too small, you have to hope you'll remember that tomorrow, because if you pass over them one day



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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and miss them on the second day, by the third day they've turned into tough three-foot string beans.

Sharing the auxiliary garden with the beans are the zucchini and broccoli.

My zucchini seeds didn't do well; I only had two plants come up. So I bought some plants and planted more seeds. Did you know that you can support almost a dozen zucchini plants in a four-foot-by-eight-foot area? Well, so far, anyway.

The broccoli is a test. I used to grow broccoli back in Colorado when the children were young. I loved picking my own broccoli and cooking it fresh. However, the broccoli worms, which die and drop off when it's cooked, kept my children from eating the stuff, so I stopped growing it.

Well, the kids are gone and I've learned that you need to soak the

heads in salt water. I'm ready for that fresh broccoli, which I'm going to have to pick real soon. The zucchini plants are moving in on them.

I've tried to be real careful about zucchini. You know how it is. Ignore a little one, and two days later you don't have vegetables, you have baseball bats. I found and gave away the first two perfect-sized squash. Then I checked the plants again. I found four pick-em-tomorrows and an oversized dark-green zuch hiding under the leaves. It's not a baseball bat — too short — but it's certainly over the hill.

And I thought I was being sooooo careful.

Other than that, I should have a green pepper soon and Steve is pulling some lovely garlic. It's summertime, and the livin' ain't easy.

But it's fun.

Teachers taking all the blame

By JOHN R. SCHROCK

If you want to kill a profession, blame them for all cases of failure. Someone dies at the hospital — blame the doctors. Someone dies at the nursing home — blame the nurses. A case goes unsolved — blame the policemen. Obviously, in spite of the best of doctors, nurses and police, some patients will die and some crimes will not be solved. Continue this blame game, and soon no one will want to be a doctor, nurse or law officer.

That is the biggest problem (among many) with No Child Left Behind. It has a bad attitude toward teachers. All blame is placed on the teacher anytime a student fails. And by the year 2014, all students must succeed — or teachers and their schools will be punished.

There are plenty of reasons a student may fail the narrow assessment tests of reading and math, and most of the reasons are not under a teacher's control.

A growing number of students do not speak English. They begin their academic race way behind the starting line, yet must reach the finish line alongside those that are native speakers. Some children are born with very limited academic ability. Sadly, some teenagers have fried their brains on drugs. Or a student may be unable to focus if the parents are in the midst of a divorce. And some are handicapped by lacking books in the home, and live in a culture that neither values nor supports academics.

Just as the best of doctors lose patients, the best of teachers lose

students.

When I lecture in China to Chinese students preparing to be teachers, their jaws drop when I explain that all blame for a student's failure is placed on the teacher. I ask "Who's fault is it when you fail to pass the college entrance exams?" In unison, Chinese students reply: "Our fault."

What is most disturbing when you listen to Board of Education discussions in America is that you never hear of the responsibilities of students and parents. Students are responsible for studying, completing assignments and homework, being honest and doing their own work, working with the class learning activities rather than against the teacher, and placing other non-academic activities including video games and work and sports second. Parents are responsible for providing an atmosphere that supports and values academics, coaching their child to work hard, keeping their children healthy and able to hear and see well, and supporting the teacher and school.

Just as a doctor is not responsible when a patient does not take their prescription, a teacher is not to

blame for the consequences when a student fails to complete their homework.

Sadly, neither presidential candidate recognizes this deprofessionalization of teaching. Both will continue some form of No Child Left Behind and the culture of "blaming the teacher."

However, Americans with children know No Child Left Behind is a disaster. According to an AP-Yahoo.com poll conducted Dec. 14-20, 2007 with 1821 adults, 46 percent responded that we should get out of No Child Left Behind, 27 percent defended No Child Left Behind and 30 percent were neutral. Polls by some Kansas regional papers show even higher rates of disapproval.

The problem with No Child Left Behind is not "more local control" or "fund the unfunded mandate." The problem is that it blames teachers for problems they do not control. And many of our best veteran teachers and rookies are leaving the profession. If we want them back, we must stop the blame and kill No Child Left Behind.

Mr. Schrock trains biology teachers and lives in Emporia.

Write

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and phone number of the author. Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansas.com.

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Frog to get special tombstone

After a week of parties to celebrate my retirement, I'm beginning to think they're glad to see me go.

However, my old office-mates aren't through with me yet. I have to come back to clean out my desk and pick up some of my plants.

When I consider that for the last six years I spent almost as much time at the office as I did at home, it's easy to understand how I accumulated so much.

The last week at the office was spiked with the anticipation of my granddaughter, Taylor's annual visit. Her mother, Kara, called me Wednesday evening.

"Taylor has something she needs to ask you," Kara said, handing off the phone.

"G'ma, it's kinda like this," she began. "I have a special friend I want to bring along."

"Well, who is it?" I asked.

"It's my pet frog," she said.

I could almost hear my daughter say, "I am NOT going to take care of a frog while you're gone. If G'ma won't let you bring him, you'll have to let him go."



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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Couldn't have that on my conscience.

"Sure, you can bring him," I heard myself say. Next day the phone rang and a tearful Taylor was on the line.

"G'ma, I won't be bringing my frog," she choked out.

"Why not?" I asked, not really wanting to know.

"He died," was all she could say. We discussed funeral plans and I assured her that PaPa would make a tombstone for her frog.

"What was his name?" I asked her.

"His name was Jumpie," she said.

"Jumpie with i.e." So, it looks like we're going to be carving a tombstone ... with

an i.e.

And so, my retirement begins. As "they" say, "This is the first day of the rest of my life."

Who knew that on the first day I would need to clean out the refrigerator?

From the Bible

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.
Galatians 5:1

Couple supports golf course

To the Editor:

I am disappointed in the opinionated nature of several of our City Council members shown at the budget meeting July 7, where the Oberlin Country Club's request for financial aid was brought up.

A dozen or so representatives and friends of the country club were at the June 26 council meeting, where a detailed statement of the club's financial health was presented. They answered questions from the council members, but apparently (the answers) were not heard, as several of these questions came up again during the budget meeting.

As some council members apparently thought of the club as a place where old men go to enjoy their hobby, I would like to bring to light what this facility brings to our community.

The club:
• Supports the Junior Golf League, which gives kids age 7 to 16 a chance to learn the game. The league meets every Wednesday through the summer. We just had a tournament with over 50 kids on July 7. Sounds like a great way for children to develop skills, learn sportsmanship, and build relationships.
• Hosts the high school golf team

during the school year every day after school and hosts two tournaments. They consider golf a sport, not a hobby.

• Hosts the high school cross country team and provides facilities for a multi-school race.

• Hosts the Decatur County Hospital benefit golf tournament, which is one of the bigger fund raisers for the hospital each year.

• Over the course of the year, hosts between 50 and 100 out-of-state guests and many more out-of-county guests. Don't you think these people buy gas and visit our downtown?

• Has a men's night Tuesdays; ladies night Wednesdays; and a couples night Fridays, that are for anyone, not just members.

• Holds five to six tournaments which brings in yet more people from out of town and keep our folks here.

• It is an important part of Oberlin's economic development effort. Ask the real estate agents in town if they show the golf course to prospective buyers. Ask the folks

who walk the paths for exercise or the bird watchers or the high school kids who play golf and represent our town. Volunteers do much of the maintenance and operation. Many members stood up this year with contributions. Membership has fallen from 137 in 2005 to 70 this year, with many of our older members no longer with us, unable to play or moving away.

Encourage everyone to contact a member or just stop by to see what a beautiful place the club is. Make up your own mind on what it brings to our town.

I am not an avid golfer. I play once in a while, and yes, I do pay my own way. I know that the golf course was an important part of us moving here and is something that everyone in Oberlin should be proud of, whether you golf or not. It has been here since 1927. I, for one, would sure hate to see it go.

Thanks to the council members (and the mayor) who have the insight to realize what we have.

Bill and Connie Riedel
Oberlin