

Budget cuts must apply to every state program

Kansas faces continuing budget cuts. That's reality for the next couple of years.

A wail and cry can be heard across the state as people realize that "their" state programs face the ax.

And every program benefits someone or some group.

Yet the fact is, the state is broke, and has been for at least three years. In good times, the Legislature and governor spent everything that came in. When the crunch came, the state had no reserves, no "savings account" or rainy-day fund to fall back on.

And so the last governor, though he liked to spend, started cutting. That continues today with Gov. Sam Brownback, and it remains a painful process. No one thinks it's much fun. It's just that the state isn't collecting even the reduced income it planned for this year.

And when the state is out of money, unlike the federal government, it has to stop spending.

Schools may be cut the most this year and next, because for most of the recession, schools were held above the fray. That lasted until the federal stimulus money being used to prop the state budget up went away. Now, the schools must face reality.

Some schools already support another lawsuit to force the state to spend more. The only way that can happen this year is with a tax increase, and we'd guess not even our liberal Supreme Court will want to bite off that much, ordering the Legislature to hike taxes.

Schools are the biggest target, but cuts to any program raise a howl. The governor tried to cut all money for the Kansas Arts Commission. Supporters raised a ruckus, and the state Senate voted to block the governor's

reorganization order.

The arts situation is a good illustration of what happens. Its state budget is only about \$813,000 per year, just a drop in the bucket. The governor proposed that the agency continue as a private foundation under the state Historical Society, capable of raising money and taking federal grants, then sending the money out to communities. Rather than get behind that effort, however, supporters hope to preserve the agency as it is, protecting thousands in grants to local arts commissions.

Arts grants go to support programs that generally lack broad public support, or someone would be doing them. Backers usually come from the educated elite, people who could afford to support these events. Yet they insist the only way Kansas can have arts is to tax those who don't care — or may not be able to afford it.

And that's not right.

Every program, from senior-citizen lunches to truck inspection, has its backers. The more employees a program has, of course, the more backers.

It's not that any of them is without value. Schools certainly are important. So are roads, colleges, technical schools, restaurant inspections, you name it.

But the state is still broke. It has less money than people want it to spend, far less. The Legislature and governor will have to make hard choices.

It's OK for everyone to advocate for "their" programs. But when the decisions are made, everyone should get behind them and remember that the state cannot, should not and must not spend money it doesn't have.

— Steve Haynes

Snake could solve problem

OK, so it's a little irreverent, but I see a chance for the city to take care of the alleged problem with feral cats living in the storm sewers downtown.

Short of a three-inch rain, nothing seems to put much of a dent in the cat population.

Now the city has a request from a woman to allow her to keep her seven-foot boa constrictor in town. I say the council should say yes, as long as she agrees to have it patrol the sewers whenever it gets hungry.

Some of those wild cats are pretty mean, but they'd be no match for a seven-foot snake.

The city would have to find some way to absolve itself of liability for people who might be startled when the snake pops up through a manhole, of course. Or snatches their poodle.

Seriously, the snake is an issue the council will have to decide. I don't envy them some of the things they have to get into. Every time the city deals with animals, the council gets beat up. It's hardly fair even though they did volunteer for the job.

This would be a good time to thank all the present members, and Mayor Joe Stanley, who put in countless hours to do the city's business, struggle to do the right thing, and get paid mostly in late-night phone calls and complaints.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

So thanks, council people, for doing a thankless, but important, job.

☆☆☆☆
A couple of interesting typos that turned up this week:

"A tough roe to hoe...."

Shad, salmon or sturgeon?

The expression, of course, should be "a tough row to hoe." Like in gardening, back in the days when hard labor was the only way to kill weeds. You also see "road to hoe," but that's not right, either.

Ever try to hoe a road?
"Hopefully, that can be kept to a bear minimum."

Because the bears are real grouchy in the spring? A bare minimum, maybe?

Those two got caught. That's what editors do. The ones that get through.... I knew an editor once who told his readers those were a free benefit of taking the paper.

And that's the way we look at it here, unless we can find some way to charge extra for the funny ones.

☆☆☆☆

Two thumbs up for:

• Raye's Grocery, which is remodeling and putting down new carpet. It's good to see one of our bigger businesses investing in the future.

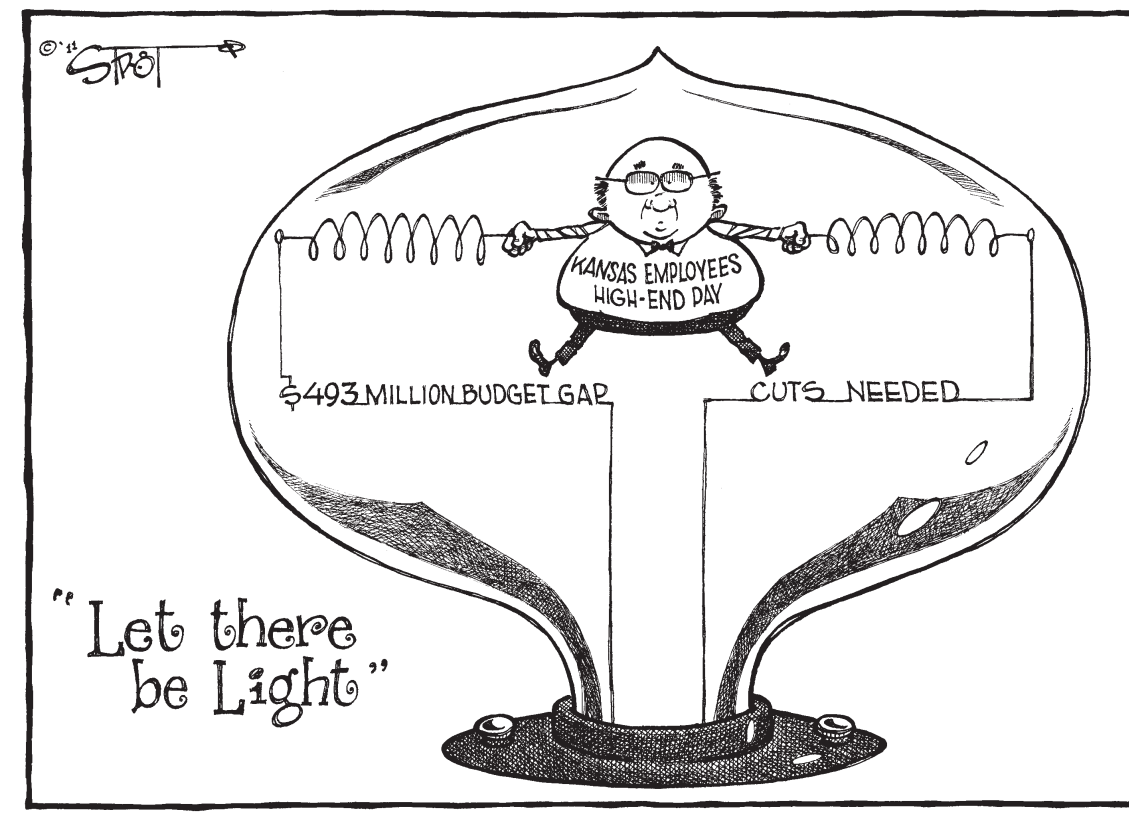
• The city crew, for fixing the bump in Cass Avenue in front of Dollar General. The asphalt "shoe" that lifts traffic up from the brick to the (much higher) concrete intersection had disappeared with the freezing and thawing of winter. The crew put it back, and now you can drive 10-15 mph on Cass again.

• Greg and Mary Jo Lohofener and Connie Grafel, who put in a whole lot of time on the new senior/civic center, theater and bowling alley. And all the volunteers who worked with them.

Things get done when people make a commitment. Good job.

☆☆☆☆

We could do this every month or so, if people would send in suggestions. E-mail them to s.haynes@nwkansan.com.



Hints help harried housewife



Out Back
By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
quality-pro@webtv.net

Remember "Hints from Heloise"? I used to love reading her helpful home-care hints.

Unfortunately, none of the newspapers or magazines I subscribe to carries the column, now written by her daughter. Who, I might add, has a big, full, head of silver hair. That has nothing to do with anything except to point out that I, Heloise, Emmylou Harris and Paula Dean have something in common.

When the girls were small, I used ice cubes to freeze gum in their hair, peanut butter had a myriad of uses, and vinegar was good for a health tonic or rinsing clothes.

My mother was a great believer in placing layers of newspapers on the countertop to work on. When a job was done, just fold up the top layer and toss your mess in the trash. And, presto, a clean layer was ready for the next project.

She also had newspaper or magazine liners, cut to fit, in the bottom of all her waste baskets. In fact, that was my job. I'd place the container on several layers of newspapers, trace around the bottom, cut just inside the line (so it would fit) and lay inside. Then, when you emptied the trash, throw out the top layer and a clean liner was ready.

My mom was a recycler before the word was even invented.

All this is to say I appreciate anything that will save time and money. That's why I was pleased to find an e-mail message extolling the virtues of coffee filters. I already knew to use coffee filters when filtering oil from the deep-fat fryer, but the

message listed 24 additional uses: wrapping Christmas ornaments for storage, cleaning windows, protecting a cast-iron skillet, holding tacos (or other messy food), straining soup stock, tying fresh herbs in to put in soup, for pressing flowers and as a disposable "snack bowl" for popcorn or chips.

The icing on the cake is you can buy a package of 1,000 for \$1.

-ob-

By the time Jim and I get back home on a Sunday, he will have preached twice and we will have attended one additional church service. We'll be exhausted and probably take the phone off the hook before taking a nice nap.

This is a little personal, but I usually remove my partial plates before settling in. Sunday, I took a nice long nap and woke up to fix us a light meal. It was only when we were ready to eat that I realized my bottom partial was missing.

I was so tired I hadn't removed the upper but, in my stupor, I must have removed the lower. Then, I couldn't find it. It wasn't on the table beside my chair and it wasn't folded up in my blanket. I turned my recliner upside down and felt down

the sides — nothing. Now I was getting worried.

Finally, Jim stepped in to save the day. Somehow, the partial had found its way to behind his recliner, but he found it. I'm blaming the cats.

-ob-

Office update: It's totally rewired, even for Internet, insulated and mostly sheetrocked. It would have been totally done except we ran out of sheetrock. Anyway, I am so excited about this room I can hardly stand it. I'm counting on this room being the secret to us getting organized. You know, a place for everything and everything in its place.

For me, though, it will probably be a place where I can stuff all the papers and close the door.

From the Bible

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ. Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.
1 Thessalonians 5: 9 - 10

State dealing with benefits



Letter from Topeka
By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer
ralph.ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov

The Senate approved 35 to 4 on March 23, Senate Substitute for HB 2194, a first step in addressing the nearly \$8 billion unfunded liability to our Kansas Public Employees Retirement System.

None of the increased contributions by either the employee or employer will take effect until July 1, 2013. On that day, the statutory cap on the state contribution will increase from 1.1 percent, up from 0.6 of 1 percent. The state's increase totals about \$23 million a year. The cap for local units of government doesn't increase until Jan. 1, 2014.

The employee contributions are increased starting Jan. 1, 2014, by 1 percent with an additional 1 percent increase on Jan. 1, 2015. For Tier 1 employees, this will increase their contribution from 4 percent to 6 percent over a two-year period. For this increase in employee contribution, these employees will receive a benefit formula multiplier increase from 1.75 percent to 1.85 percent for all future years of service.

Tier 2 employees today are contributing 6 percent of their salary. Because they are currently contributing 6 percent, they are being given a one-time irrevocable option to increase their contribution rate. If Tier

2 employees choose to stay at their current 6 percent rate, they lose their cost of living adjustment when they retire and their multiplier will stay at the current 1.75 percent. If they elect to increase their contribution to 8 percent over two years, they will retain the cost of living adjustment and receive the increased multiplier to 1.85 percent.

The Senate bill also creates a study commission of 11 members who will analyze the current system and develop a viable plan to ensure long-term sustainability. They will be asked to consider all possibilities, including a defined-contribution plan, a hybrid of some sort or a modified defined-benefit plan.

The commission must have a report for the Legislature to consider by Dec. 15. The Legislature must act on the recommendations within 180

days. The provisions of this bill do not take effect until the Legislature acts on the study commission's recommendations.

With these proposed changes, the system would reach actuarial equilibrium for the local government employees in 2015, state employees in 2016 and school district employees in 2021.

I'm not sure how the House of Representatives will handle this. They have a different plan.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 128-S, Topeka, Kan. 66612, or calling (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us. Let me know if you would like to be on my mailing list.

Photo Policy

The Oberlin Herald wants to emphasize photos of people doing things in the community. If you know of an event or news happening that we should attend, please call 475-2206.

Please be sure to allow a couple of days' notice so we can arrange to be there.

Space in the paper is limited and so is the time of our staff, so we may not be able to get to every event, but we will try.

Because space is so limited, we cannot run team or group photos, any pictures of people lined up or of people passing checks, certificates and the like. (We will always try to make room for a story about any of these events, however.)

We do run wedding and engagement pictures and "mug" shots with stories and obituaries, when they are provided to us. Please remember that we need a clear, sharp picture. Dark or fuzzy prints will not work.

We cannot return photos unless you submit a self-addressed, stamped envelope with clear instructions for return. Other photos submitted may be picked up at our office within two weeks. After that, they will be disposed of.

Laser proofs of photos which have run in The Herald are available, first come, first served.

Write

The Oberlin Herald encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

Mail letters to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan., 67749, or by e-mail to oberlinherald@nwkansan.com.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

THE OBERLIN HERALD

Serving Oberlin and Decatur County since 1879

USPS 401-600

Office hours: 8:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Fri.

170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243

Phone: (785) 475-2206 Fax (785) 475-2800
E-mail: oberlin.herald@nwkansan.com

Published each Wednesday by Haynes Publishing Co., 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749. Periodicals postage paid at Oberlin, Kan. 67749.

Nor'West Newspapers

STAFF

Steve Haynes editor
Kimberly Davis managing editor
Mary Lou Olson society editor
Nancy Robinson proofreader
Carolyn Kelley-Plotts columnist
Joan Betts historian
Cynthia Haynes business manager
Pat Cozad want ads/circulation
Tim Davis advertising representative

Steve and Cynthia Haynes, publishers
Kimberly Davis, assistant publisher

Official newspaper of Oberlin, Jennings, Norcat, Dresden and Decatur County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, Colorado Press Association, Nebraska Press Association and Inland Press Association.

Subscriptions: One year, \$38 (tax included) in Decatur, Norton, Rawlins, Sheridan, Thomas and Red Willow counties; \$42 (tax included) elsewhere in Kansas; \$48 elsewhere in the U.S. Foreign subscriptions, \$50-\$250 (in U.S. dollars only) extra per year (except APO/FPO). POSTMASTER: Send change of address to 170 S. Penn Ave., Oberlin, Kan. 67749-2243.

