

## We need to change way government spends cash

With this year's federal deficit expected to hit a record \$1.7 trillion, attention has been focused on the national debt and deficit spending as never before, from Congress to the "tea party" and with both major political parties.

The national debt is now \$14.35 trillion and climbing. States have \$1.18 trillion in debt and local government \$1.73 trillion.

Plus, the unfunded liability for Social Security is estimated at \$131.7 trillion. Everyone recognizes that the huge and growing debt threatens our economy and our way of life. No one seems to know what to do.

People made it clear last fall, however, that they want things to change.

And the truth is, any solution will be painful, as European nations have discovered. Spending is addictive. Every state or federal program, every grant and "entitlement," goes to someone. Government spending provides jobs, helps people live, feels good to those who get the money.

So how do we break the cycle and bring some sense back into state and national capitals?

Dr. Ed Flentje, a Washburn University political science professor in Topeka, made some suggestions in an "Insight Kansas" column last month.

Dr. Flentje recalls, as an advisor to former Gov. Robert Bennett in the 1970s, hearing the governor say again and again, "Spending is more responsible when the government that spends is the government that must finance that spending."

In other words, it's a lot easier for government officials at any level to spend money someone else has taken from the taxpayers. Yet that's exactly how the system works. Billions raised by the federal government are passed through to states for highways, schools, "homeland security," you name it. And much of that money trickles on down to the local level.

Have you ever heard a local official say, "We

can get federal money for that," or "Well, it's federal money. Not our money?"

Of course, the city or county officials didn't have to raise taxes to get the money. The federal government just "gave" it to them. Never mind that the federal government is broke, deeply in debt and has no money to give. It can always borrow more.

Except it can't. The government has borrowed so much now, it's credit rating is threatened. Dr. Flentje says people have trouble understanding this system:

"This behemoth has become incomprehensible to the public, breeding cynicism, distrust and outright anger at government — national, state, and local government," he writes.

He says Alice Rivlin, the founding director of the Congressional Budget Office and former vice-chair of the Federal Reserve Board, has a handle on the problem. Though she held posts in the Clinton administration, most recently, she helped Rep. Paul Ryan shape the House Republicans' budget plan.

Nearly 20 years ago, he said, Ms. Rivlin proposed two steps to settle this hash:

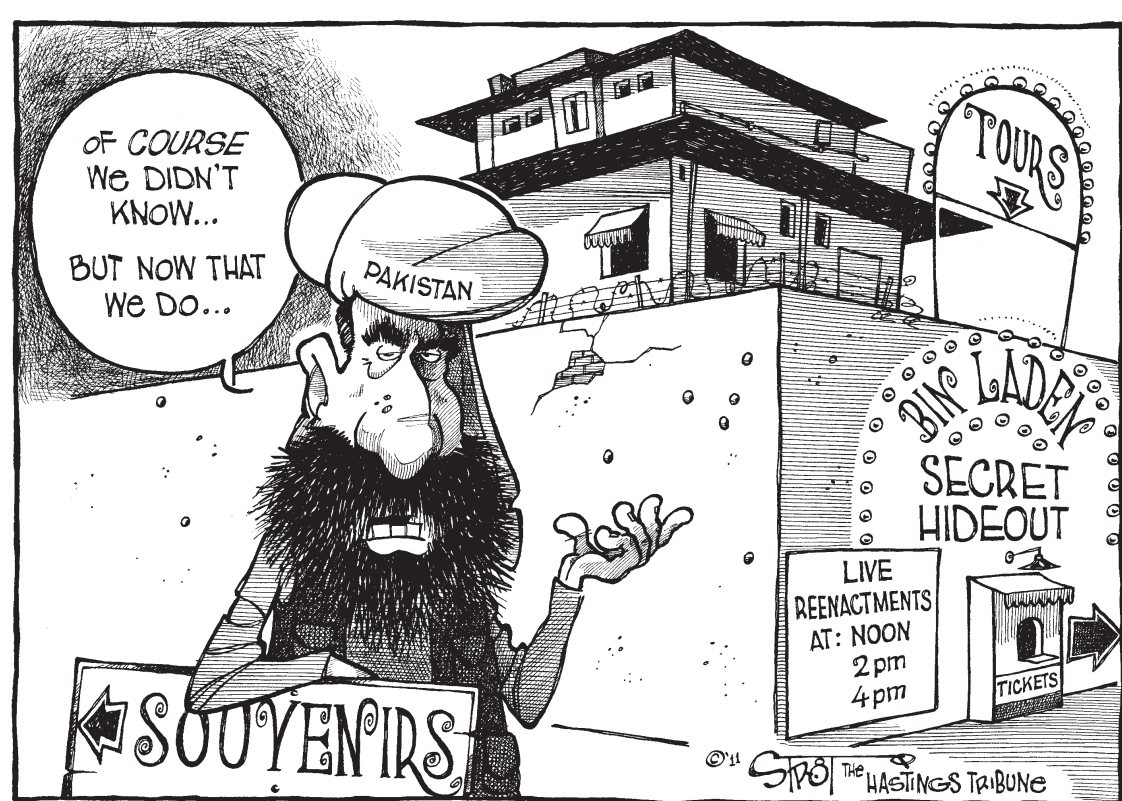
- "Devolution. The federal government should eliminate most of its programs in education, housing, highways, social services, economic development and job training."

- "The productivity agenda. The states should take charge of the primary public investment needed to increase productivity and raise incomes, especially to improve education and skill training and modernize infrastructure."

Wow. Put the responsibility for raising taxes with the people who actually spend the money. It may be an idea whose time has come. It's certainly as good a suggestion as we've heard.

And we can't wait to hear the wailing from all those who feed at the public trough.

Until we can face reality, though, our debt issues aren't going to vanish. It's simply time to get real. — *Steve Haynes*



## Medical emergency stressful

Excuse me for a moment. Thanks. I needed to re-read last week's column to remind myself of what I had written. This past week has been a blur.

Medical emergencies and the care and feeding of an injured person can almost be overwhelming. Between administering medications, driving to doctor's appointments, picking up prescriptions, preparing meals and tiptoeing around while the patient sleeps, a person can lose track of time.

Jim had surgery on his hand last Tuesday and will see the specialist again this week. The good news is he has feeling in his thumb and index finger and we expect him to regain full use of both. The surgeon showed me the x-ray of Jim's thumb. "See how this bone is rounded on the end?" he said, pointing to the unaffected joint. Moving to the other joint, he added, "Now, see how this one isn't"

It was obvious, even to my untrained eye, there was a noticeable "notch" taken out of the joint. Again, we marvel at how fortunate Jim is not to have lost his thumb. We keep telling ourselves, "It could have been so much worse."

More good news came out of the surgery. It was thought the doctor would do skin grafts on Jim's index finger. On close examination, under anesthesia, the surgeon decided the hand was healing well enough on its own and chose not to bother it.

I'm not sure if I'll go in to see the doctor when Jim has his follow-up visit. His last words to us as we left



### Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts  
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the surgical suite were, "Take it easy and keep this (the wrapping) clean."

I don't know how Jim will explain the grass stains, grease and grime embedded in the bandaging. Maybe he can convince the doctor how he just HAD to run the weed-eater, why a friend needed a car battery charged and how, with all this time on his hand(s), he decided it was a good time to clean out a storage shed (or two). Short of overdosing him, I don't know how to "hold him down."

-ob-

Sunday was Mother's Day, and I heard from all my kids. James and Charlotte gave me a card, plus hugs and kisses, at church; Jennifer and Becky called; Kara called and said a card was in the mail; and Halley called late in the evening after we returned from dinner at a friend's home.

"Sorry about not sending a card," she said, "but I want it noted that I did call. I will get credit for this, won't I?"

Yes, Honey. You'll get credit. Matters not what time they call (or text), I love to hear from my kids.

-ob-

Speaking of texting. Three days after Jim hurt his hand, we ended up back in the local emergency room because his hand was swelling and felt warm to the touch. The doctor unwrapped his hand to check things out. Taking advantage of the moment, I snapped a picture of his thumb with the camera in my phone to send our son-in-law. Adam is a paramedic, and I knew he would appreciate a photo.

As I was adding a message to the picture, one of the nurses said, "Wow, that's pretty cool. I don't see many people your age that know how to text."

Forget Jim's hand. THAT hurt.

### From the Bible

Yea, I will make many people amazed at thee, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for thee, when I shall brandish my sword before them; and they shall tremble at every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of thy fall.

Ezekiel 32: 10

## Writer sees many lost chances

To the Editor:

Our community has survived much, from dust storms to depressions. After many "lost chances," we may have reached our "last chance":

Through railroad, a "lost chance."

Sappa Lake water rights, "lost chance."

Junior college, "lost chance."

State prison, "lost chance."

Wheelchair factory, "lost chance."

Bus factory, "lost chance."

Boat factory, "lost chance."

Trailer factory, "lost chance."

Van renovation factory, "lost chance."

Dairy, "lost chance."

Airport, "to be determined."

With the Rural Opportunity Zone Act, Gov. Sam Brownback and the State of Kansas have given the 50 counties in Kansas with steady declining population another chance.

To reverse our slow drift toward community death, it will take the entire community working together, or this could be our "last chance."

Dr. Jay Anderson,

Oberlin

### Letters to the Editor

#### Reader likes 'hero' section

To the Editor:

Thanks so much for the write-up about the "Hometown Heroes" (in the April 20 *Oberlin Herald*). It is good to hear what people are doing and have done in our community.

I would just like to thank everyone for making Oberlin such a nice place to live. When we each one seek to do our part, great things can happen. Thanks, everyone.

Gladys Geis, Oberlin

#### Help child-care providers

To the Editor:

The first Sunday in May honors mothers and their commitment to children. The Friday before Mother's Day, May 6 this year, was Provider Appreciation Day, a day to recognize all those who work with children and help with their education and care.

By applauding the dedication of child-care providers on Friday, we remind our communities of the importance of quality child care, and let providers everywhere know that we recognize and value their work. It is important that the care a child

receives during the first five years of life be of quality because 90 percent of brain development occurs during those years.

We urge everyone to show their child-care providers how much we appreciate them. Come in and read a book to the children, donate a toy or book for the day care or treat the provider to dinner.

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## Session now winding down

We are supposed to be finished with the Legislature for the year today. The House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Ways and Means Committee continue to work on the omnibus budget bill, merging budget ideas from both houses. As more information becomes available to them from the fiscal notes of bills that were approved by the governor, the committees will take action incorporating necessary language into the budget measure.

So far, additions to the final bills have been small and noncontroversial. However, as House Appropriations discussed the omnibus bill, a Shawnee legislator proposed a very controversial bill. It would have essentially gutted three months of work by the committee, reducing the budget by another \$138 million. In committee, it received only four votes but it had the e-mail for all of the representatives buzzing. Education, which has already been hit hard, would have had lost another \$168 per pupil.

The goal of the House is to have the largest ending balance possible so it can have a strong negotiation for the Senate proposal. There is a lot of speculation as to what that final number will be, ranging from \$10 million to \$80 million. In a perfect world, the Legislature would like to have a larger ending balance, but not at the expense of cutting any more money from schools and the other necessary programs.

As things sit right now, the Senate made an offer that includes eight package deals and several individual items. The House now has to take the time to review that proposal and either agree or come up with a counterproposal. The conference committees will keep meeting until we have a final budget to vote on.

An example of policy discussions now going on between the House and the Senate is the Community Defense Act, which would have restricted sexually oriented businesses. It will be interesting to see what the final conference agreement becomes or if it ever comes back from the Senate. Just before finishing this article, I found out that the Senate rejected the bill and it is now



### Letter from Topeka

By State Rep. Ward Cassidy  
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essentially dead for this year. This is what makes the work so frustrating. We spent many hours on this and it ends up going nowhere.

The Kansas Employees Public Retirement System continues to be a major discussion topic, and it will be until this session is over. If I had to guess, I'd bet there will be a commission created to study it further. I had a friend ask the questions — was the system ever funded properly, and was there ever money borrowed that was not paid back? The answer I have received is that in the 1990s, there was a period of five years where it was not funded at the 4 percent that was required by law. In 1995, the system was overfunded when the multiplier was raised and the "85" window was created. All borrowed money was paid back.

The Senate approved a measure that requires state inspection and licensing of facilities where abortions are performed. The measure also

puts in place new requirements for physicians who perform abortions. The bill is on its way to the governor to be considered.

We had a lengthy debate on the casino being built in Sumner County. The casino is expected to generate 3,000 jobs. The question was whether our attorney general, Derek Schmidt, should bring legal action challenging the legality of a contract with Peninsula Gaming, which is building the casino. It was voted down 62-59. I did vote for the bill because I felt the rights of the individuals in the area were not being considered. It was a hard vote, as I know how badly we need new jobs.

The House this week sent a bill to the Senate that would allow schools to use specialized funds for general education purposes. They are hoping that it will help them get through next year with all the cuts made so far.

### 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.

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