

Deficit 'compromise' just a drop in the bucket

So, at nearly the final hour, Congress and the president reach agreement on a budget compromise that will save the economy.

We are not yet out of the woods. The agreement calls for cuts of \$2.5 trillion, which sounds like a lot of money, but that's not nearly enough to balance the budget. It will take real structural change to do that. The deal is only a start. The first billion or so is low-hanging fruit. It comes from capping all spending except the so-called entitlements — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, government pensions — at 2012 levels.

That part is not a spending cut, in other words; it's just limiting the formerly unchecked growth in the budget.

In fact, \$2.5 trillion in cuts over 10 years averages out to just \$250 billion per year, while the country faces a projected deficit just this year of \$1.645 trillion. The government now borrows 40 percent of what it spends.

Congress and the White House will have to find some way to cut another \$1.4 trillion a year.

Part of that is projected to come from growth in the economy, but that's not happening. The government projects the deficit to drop by more than half, to \$650 billion a year, by 2016. That's only a guess, however; spending has been well above growth for years.

A bipartisan committee is to be appointed to craft another \$1.2 trillion in cuts over the next 10 years, to be voted on by fall. But that's just another drop in the bucket, maybe \$120 billion a year.

Still, it's a start. We owe the "Tea Party" people a favor: they went to the brink to show the country how important solving this problem is. Until they did — and it's not been a pleasant experience — neither party paid more than lip service to reducing the deficit.

Republicans stand against any tax increase, while Democrats say, simplistically, "tax the rich." Yet one estimate is that the assets of all American billionaires amount to a little more than \$1.3 trillion. We could take it all and still have a \$350 billion deficit this year.

Relying on growth might work for a while — until the next recession — but eventually, that approach will fail. Cuts will have to be deeper, much deeper. What has to happen?

• Most of the budget is tied up in "entitlement" social programs that are popular with voters and dear to Democrats. We will have to let go, not of the programs, but of the way they are planned to grow and grow. That means caps on spending and cuts in the formulas for automatic increases.

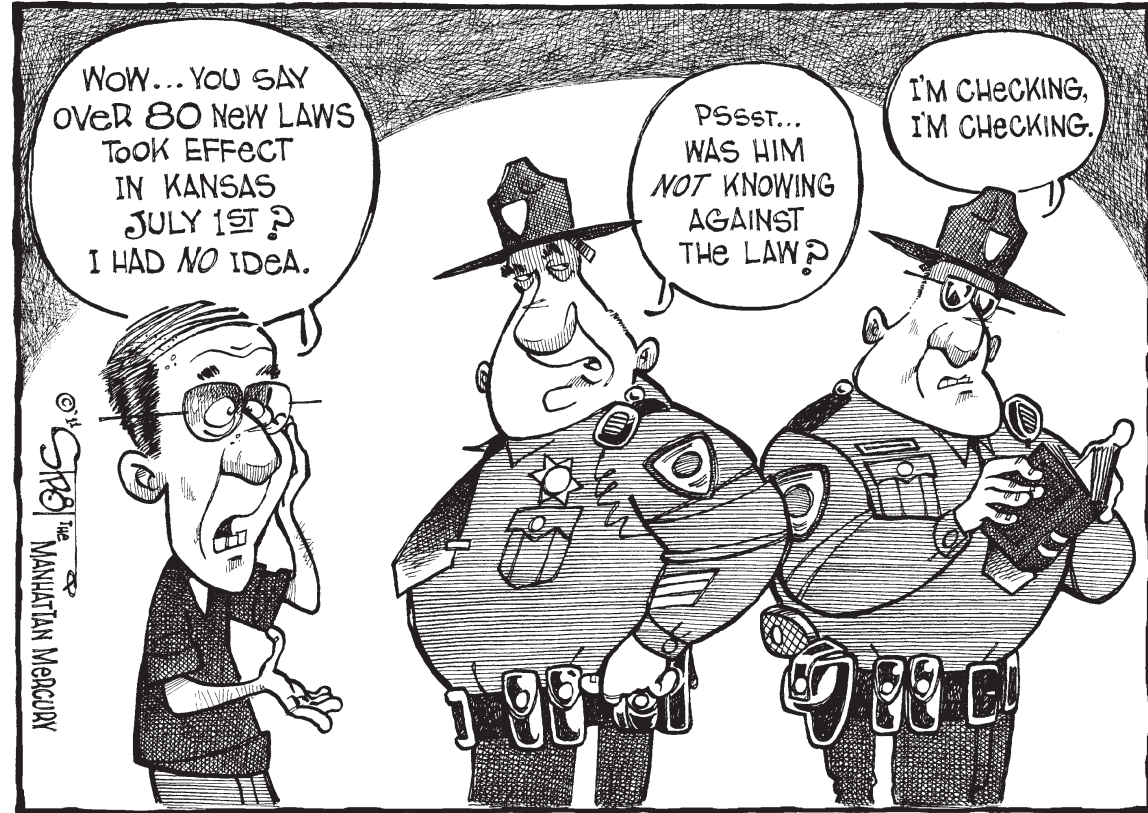
But as we've seen the last couple of years, increases in Social Security have become an "entitlement" in themselves. Still, to cap borrowing, we'll have to face reality.

• Tax reform. Sometimes a euphemism for a tax increase, this means rewriting the tax code to make it less complex. But will people let go of favorite deductions, such as the home-mortgage write-off?

• Real cuts, across the board, in programs from defense to farm subsidies. Those who depend on federal spending — and today, who doesn't — will have to suffer. We'll all get a piece of this pain.

None of this is going to be easy. We may have to go to the brink again. But the compromise shows the system, slow and cranky as it is, still works. All sides will have to keep the pressure on to make it work, but we know it can be done.

The country will have to take it one step at a time, but this is a — very small — first step. A great deal more effort — and a lot more pain — will be required. — *Steve Haynes*



Summer hops at her garage

As July turns into August, summer just seems to be hopping along out back.

I mean really hopping. Two of the toads I've found this spring have taken up posts on each side of our big double garage door.

Each night, we leave the yard lights on until 11 or so, and the toads have found great pickings under the big lights.

The biggest one — I call him Toadaly — has staked out the south end near a patch of grassy irises.

When we first saw him, Hoppy, the smaller toad, was also on the south end of the garage. He soon moved to the north end, where he has refuge in the onion patch that grows next to the spirea bushes along the alley.

At nightfall, the lights come on and almost on cue the toads come out to feast on the myriad of insects they draw in.

The other night, Steve came in laughing. He had been watching Toadaly chase a cricket. The cricket would hop. Toadaly would hop after him. The cricket would hop. Toadaly would hop. Steve finally had to give up watching this odd ballet because he had other things to do, so we never found out if the cricket outhopped the toad or if someone doesn't have a conscience anymore.

There was more hopping going on out at the park as we took the dog for



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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a walk on Saturday.

The warm, wet weather seems to be perfect for grasshoppers, and all the tall grass out at Sappa Park, a prairie area with walking trails.

The grasshoppers drive both me and the dog nuts.

I hate the feel of them. You don't feel most insects that land on you. They come. They go. And, unless the bite, you don't notice them.

Grasshoppers, however, have claws. They cling, and it feels like a burr has jumped on you.

I don't dislike grasshoppers — not like ticks, yuck — but, I jump every time one lands on me. When I walk in an area with hundreds of them, I'm as jumpy as a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs.

The dog, on the other hand, loves grasshoppers. She thinks them a tasty, fun snack. For her, catching grasshoppers is sort of like eating popping popcorn.

She jumps. She hops. She whirrs. She bites the air. She snaps. She turns her head so fast she should have whiplash.

Walking here in the park now is sort of like taking a small tornado out for stroll, and jumping every time you get hit by the debris, which is all the time.

In short, it's more exercise than your usual "walk in the park."

For anyone who's interested, our cat Molly is doing well on her insulin injections. The once-a-day-feedings haven't been as popular or successful, but we're still working on that.

I put out three small yellow bowls. Each morning, I put about half a cup of food in each and stand back as three cats attack the food. When they are done, I put them outside and go get Jezabel. She's so skittish, she would starve rather than try to eat with the others. After she's eaten, I let everyone back in for another round of scarfing.

I'm still working on how to test Molly's blood sugar. The vet says I can use a regular glucometer, but I still have to figure out how to prick her ear and get a drop of blood.

Where did 'presidents' go?

Language changes, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse, but always, it changes.

Time was when the head of a company was called president. He might be outranked — and perhaps reported to and could be fired by, the chairman of the board — but day to day, the president was the boss.

This applied not just to corporations and big institutions, but many little firms as well. To be sure, some small business people were satisfied enough to be called "owner," while other groups had their own unique titles. Cooperatives were headed by general managers, hospitals by administrators, trade associations and charities by executive directors and so on.

But your bank had a president and so did General Motors.

Then, sometime around the 1980s, mushy language began to invade the field. Someone decided that it wasn't enough to be president and declared he was chief executive officer, and the term caught on, and pretty soon, every firm had one.

To make matters worse, at some, the chairman was the chief executive, and at others the president. Pretty soon the vice president of finance was the chief financial officer, and from there, things took off.

Good or bad? It's hard to say.



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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The terms are descriptive enough, if perhaps a little stuffy. But it wasn't enough to just change the terms. Someone noted how long a title "chief executive officer" was and began using the initials. Now the president was known by an acronym, and the terms CEO or CFO were bantered about with abandon.

Then people began just using the initials when they talked about executives. The president wasn't the president of the company, not even the chief executive; he was the CEO. Columnists started referring to the evils of "corporate CEOs." In effect, the initials lost track of the words. They became the word.

Even the leaders of smaller outfits started referring to themselves as CEOs. It became a status thing; if you didn't have initials, you adopted some. And no one wanted to be just a president, an executive director, a general manager or a comptroller.

Some CEOs had only a few minions. Like a banana-republic dictator awash in gold braid or a small-town sheriff weighed down with the four stars of a full general, they affected the fancy title with glee.

Apologies to my CEO friends, but I'm not sure this has added to the clarity of the language. Of course a CEO with four followers is no more overblown than a president with three. The initials just seem more of an artifice.

It'd be interesting to stop a dozen people on the street and see how many of them could say what the acronym means. Not a majority, I'd guess.

I've been happy to not be a chief anything. I could be chief news officer, I suppose. But I'm editor and publisher, and if I need a corporate title, it's president. Someone has to take that job; it's the law.

I'll leave the initials to others.

Birthday online for first time

The only thing that has made celebrating another birthday tolerable is the fact that this is my first year with a "Facebook" birthday.

I didn't know I had that many friends. As far as I'm concerned, an e-card is just as good as a Hallmark. I can read and re-read my birthday wishes as many times as I want. Plus, I get to see my friend's faces at the same time.

Jim apologized for not getting me a card. I told him he could pull one out of the many cards he's given me over the years (yes, I've saved them) and recycle it.

"I'll never know the difference," I said.

As I age (gracefully, I hope), I realize there are many things I have not yet experienced. I don't have a formal "bucket list," just a few mental notes. I always wanted to be blonde but was too chicken to bleach my almost-black hair. Now, it's silver, and blonde doesn't sound so appealing anymore.

Forget about riding in a hot air balloon; that never did make my list. There's no way to control it. But ever since I saw the movie about the girl who trains a flock of wild geese she raised to fly beside her in a parasail, I've wanted to fly one of those contraptions.

A farmer friend has one, and I see him flying. That looks like fun.

I have gone whitewater rafting and don't need to do that again. But I would love a lazy, inertube float trip down a river. If you could promise there wouldn't be any snakes, turtles or fish in the water with me. I could halfway check that off, because I did do a water park with my granddaughter Taylor, and we floated on the Lazy River ride.

China, India and Africa are fascinating places I would love to see:



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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China because I've read all of Pearl Buck's books and have a mental picture, India because I can't begin to imagine millions and millions of people and Africa because it still sounds so wild.

My nephew Kirk just returned from his umpteenth trip abroad. I would love to have him as a tour guide. His travelogs made it all sound so interesting, and he's never afraid to try something new. He speaks French and perhaps a little Spanish, but because English is fast becoming the universal language, that barrier might not be so great.

Driving fast used to be one of my many faults. Age, however, has brought a certain perspective and caution to my driving. I drive the limit but not over. Still, I always wanted to drive a really souped-up hot rod on a track. You know, that whole power thing and to see just how fast you could go.

Some of my "bucket list" dreams are possible; some are best left as dreams, like the race-car thing. I think it's good to have dreams and aspirations. Nothing would ever happen if we didn't look forward to new experiences, new people, new places.

No matter your age, I hope life still holds excitement, purpose, pleasure, and most all, fun.

Taylor's stay ended way too soon. We were busy. Perhaps too busy. I'm

not sure how many really fun things we did with her. The fair, of course; swimming with friends; watching a friend's baby; making her cake for the fair (blue ribbon, I might add); and lots of reading.

Taylor is the kind of kid who blooms wherever she's planted. Maybe we didn't "peg-out" the excitement meter, but I think she had a good time.

Over the weekend, we met her mom at the halfway point and had a good visit during the swap. My other daughter, Halley, came along, and they celebrated my birthday a day early.

I can add a new rooster to my collection of lead chickens, a cross magnet for the fridge and a beautiful pashmina (a shawl or stole) to my wardrobe. They took me to my favorite seafood restaurant, and we gorged ourselves on shrimp, lobster, scallops and crab legs.

From the Bible

For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. — *Isaiah 44: 3-4*

Sometimes, the car's still there

Letter to the Editor

To the Editor:

Another "keys-in-the-car" story....

Years ago, my husband, Ron, was on the city commission and we went to a National League of Cities convention, probably four or five nights. Another member and his wife were along with us, and several city employees. We met at the Wichita airport and flew

to Minneapolis.

We had a great time, but when getting ready to fly home, the other guy could not find his car keys. Boy, did his wife let him have it! (She was that kind of wife!)

When he got to his car — in the

parking lot at ICT after four or five days — he found his keys sticking out of the outside door lock.

Oh, yes, his car was a Mercedes.

Joleen (Miller) Leslie
Hutchinson

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