

Bigger budget cuts to come for Kansans

The gas prices and the overall nation's economy have affected Kansas to the point of a \$25 million shortfall this month. March is one of those months in which there are lots of individual tax refunds being paid, which are netted out of receipts. The drop in sales tax means less spending than projected and that is a negative sign for the months ahead. The drop this month is going to spur even bigger cuts, as we prepare the final budget for 2012.

An example of the problem of rising gas prices for our economy is that for every one penny of increase, consumer spending is reduced by \$6 million.

I have been asked to discuss the problems we incurred by accepting federal stimulus dollars. First of all, in 2009 with the economy down, state tax revenue dramatically dropped, leaving states with deficits of hundreds of millions. Acting under the theory that the recession was a slight pothole, the federal government passed the Economic Investment and Recovery Act trying a short-term fill for the pothole until the economy rebounded and state budgets increased.

The federal "stimulus" money was a one-time payment designed to taper off as the economy recovered. Because the economy did not recover as the federal government expected, the stimulus dollars allowed states to delay, but did not prevent, dramatic budget deficits.

The federal stimulus dollars were offered with numerous conditions that included claw-back provisions which would force states to payback the funds if violated.

The decision for each state in the union was made by the governors. Governor Sebelius was in office, accepted the funds, and Kansas never had the opportunity to reject the funding with its attached regulations.

The severe drop in federal funding, with its requirements that state funding for programs not decrease, is the main factor causing the State General Fund increase in Governor Brownback's budget.

This was an exceptionally busy and stressful week. We debated more than fifty pieces of legislation. This is our final week before returning to Topeka on April 27 for the "veto session." This break provides research and revenue staff time to review and assemble the necessary information, we will need, to make informed decisions on the budget when we return. Veto session is scheduled to go from April 27 to May 11, but the reality is, we will not leave Topeka until a compromise is reached with both chambers and the Governor. In veto session, the legislature deals with bills approved or vetoed by the Governor. The majority of the time we will be working on the 2012 budget.

Last Thursday night, after seven hours of debate, stretched over a fourteen hour day, the House approved its version of the rescission/Mega appropriations bill 69-52. I voted for the bill. There was a \$78 million FY 2012 ending balance. There were many more proposals but the work of the Appropriations committee was upheld.

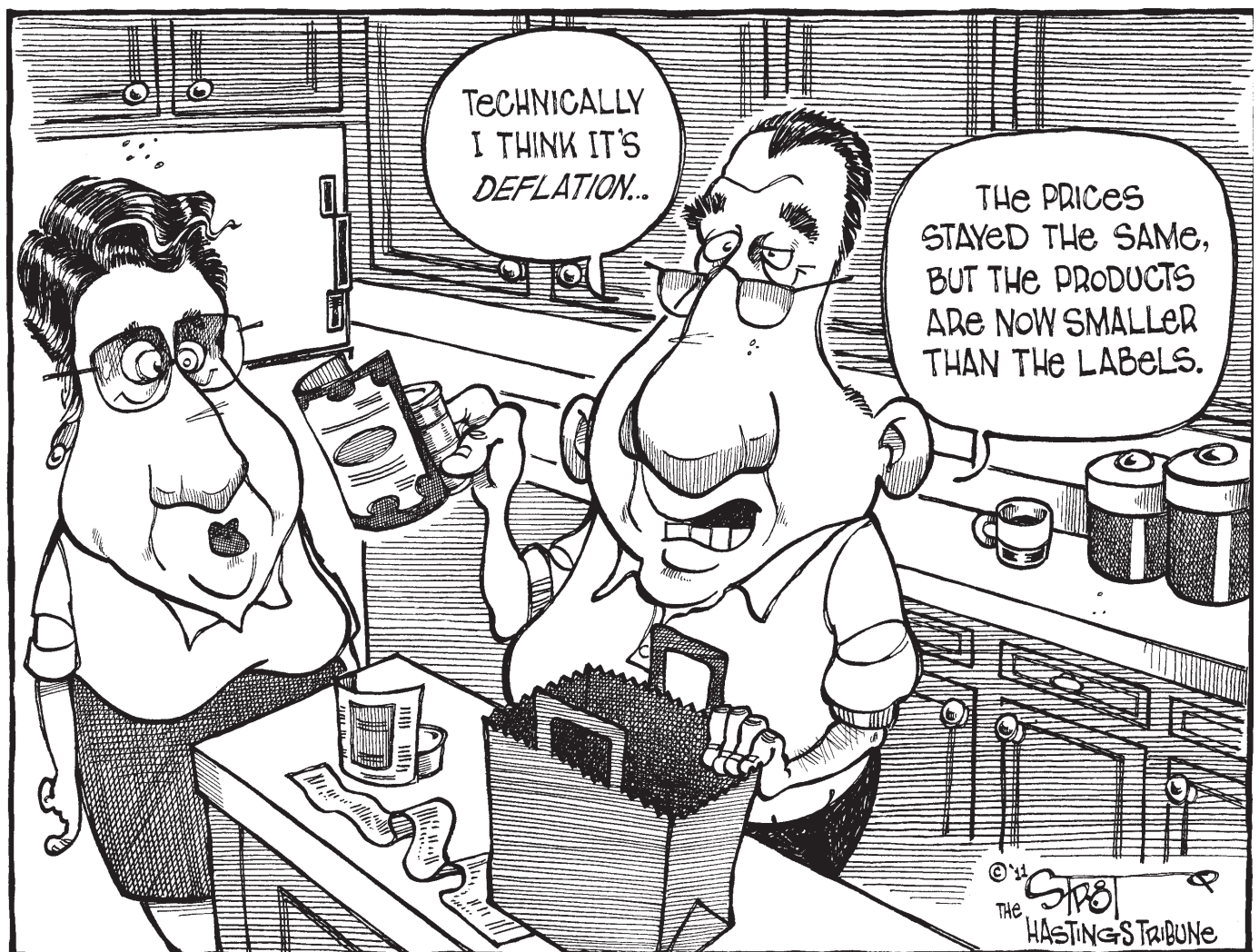
The House budget will be rather strong going into conference with the Senate due to failing revenues already putting the Senate budget in the hole. Governor Brownback now has budget cuts of \$775 million dollars in place. The House has reduced another \$78 million. This is the first time the All Funds budget has decreased since 1972.

Friday, April 1 I woke up to my wife's favorite holiday. I called her that morning and she informed me some mice had run into the house from the garage. After telling Gloria to get some mouse traps - she told me April Fools.

It was a warning for how my day was going to go. We had Chamber at 10:00 am and I was hoping it would get over by noon, allowing me to get an early start home. Instead, we heard conference committee reports until late in the afternoon.

I have worked hard and learned a lot these past few months. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to represent NW Kansas.

News from
your
legislator
Ward Cassidy



Spring and renewed love are in the air

Spring is in the air - if not in my step.

Everywhere you look, trees are budding; daffodils are blooming; and grass is greening. Spring is definitely here. And, as ready as I am to get out and dig in the dirt, I realize my moaning and groaning after yardwork has taken some of the pleasure out of it. Where did these aches and pains come from? I never used to hurt like this after an afternoon of gardening. Now, I need a "break" after an hour. Instead of tackling the entire yard in one day, I break it down into sections. And, small sections at that.

I refuse to make too many concessions to my advancing age - it's a privilege denied to many - however, I'm not going to push it farther than I can stand. Gardening may be considered "work" but, I still want to enjoy it.

-ob-

It's no secret that Jim and I have two anniversaries: one of the day we got married; and the other, the day of our

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



This time, I wasn't speechless as he produced an exceedingly large, genuine diamond simulated, engagement ring. This time I said, "I've changed my mind about this commitment thing. I think it's a pretty good deal. And, if it's all the same to you, I think I'd like to try for another 17 years."

We laughed. I put on that "hoky" ring and we had a lovely meal. I've continued to wear the silly thing - getting as much mileage out of it as I can.

-ob-

Did you hear about the old cowboy who gave some advice to his grandson? He told the boy that if he wanted to live a long life he should put a teaspoon of gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning.

The grandson did as his grandfather instructed and when he died at the age of 103 he left behind 14 children, 30 grandchildren, 63 great-grandchildren and a 15-foot hole where the crematorium used to be.

first date. Memorable, mostly because it was on April 1. Memorable, also because Jim sprang a phony engagement ring on me.

This year was no exception. He made reservations at the restaurant that was "the scene of the crime". When we pulled into the parking lot and stopped in the same space we had parked in 17 years ago, I even uttered the same word that I spoke back then. "What?"

Keeping the re-enactment true, Jim said, "I know how you feel about commitment...but, there is something I need to talk to you about," as he reached for a ring box.

A Dutch documentary on rural Kansas

Insight

John Schlageck

Only once in a blue moon do Kansas farm and ranch families have an opportunity to tell their story to people half way around the world. That was the case March 23-24 when a Dutch (public broadcasting company in the Netherlands) television crew traveled to Smith and Sheridan counties to portray life on the farm in rural Kansas.

Theron and Lori Haresnape and family, Smith County, Harold and Bridget Koster and grandchildren and Wilfred Reinert from Sheridan County provided an up-close and personal view of their farming operations, family, faith and how folks live in the Heartland.

So often visitors from other countries travel to the United States and they only travel to the East or West coasts, says Paul Rosenmoller. He interviewed the Kansas farmers and ranchers as part of the Dutch film crew.

People who live and work in the Midwest are often overlooked and seldom included in visits by travelers from abroad, he continues. The same holds true for television documentaries.

"Farms, ranches and small villages of 14 people like Seguin are an integral part of the United States of America," Rosenmoller says. "I believe these rural areas are underestimated. The people who live here have sentiments, opinions and views just like other parts of America. So what is happening in the countryside has a huge impact on what we know in Europe as the United States."

Rosenmoller and the other three members of the crew were fascinated by the big sky and wide-open spaces. All expressed the feeling of being at the edge of the world - albeit very, very beautiful with so many acres of land and so few farms and people.

his cow herd as the Dutch cameras rolled. When he finished, he told the film crew his cattle love him.

"I look after them every day," Reinert says. "I feed them, doctor them, fuss after them and care for them in return."

On the Haresnape farm, the central Kansas family expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to, "teach four people from another country about our industry and make friends in the process."

During their interview, the Kosters emphasized how important every person is in the community of Seguin.

"We may only have 14 people here, but they're 14 of the best people anywhere," Bridget says. "You can count on them. They look out for you and you reciprocate."

When the Dutch crew departed Kansas, they left knowing they had indeed spent time they would remember always with some unique, wonderful people.

As he departed, Rosenmoller asked the Kosters if there had ever been a film crew in Seguin.

They replied, not to their knowledge. "You did very, very well," Rosenmoller told them. "You can be proud of the way you conducted yourselves and proud of your story."

And while the Dutch camera crew had traveled half way 'round the world for this story - it was more than worth the effort.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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