

Living within our means

Call it sustainable government. That's what this country, heck, what all the "developed" nations, including most of Europe and certainly the U.S., need to learn. Just as we need to learn to live within our energy means, the world needs to learn to live within its income, trimming government spending and "entitlement" programs to fit revenue and sustainable growth.

Most U.S. states could be added to the list, Kansas among them, though Kansas certainly is no California in terms of debt or spending or excess growth.

Still, our state has seen its budget grow far faster than the economy in recent years, driven by those federal "entitlements" that everyone likes to blame things on.

After coming into office with the state treasury literally empty after years of budget cuts and revenue shortages, Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback claims to have turned things around. Under his leadership, the Legislature produced a balanced budget with a \$700 million ending balance, or surplus, giving the state a cushion to fall back on.

That in itself was an accomplishment.

However, the governor has more far-reaching ambitions. He wants to make the state more friendly to businesses that could bring in new jobs. A big part of his plan was to lower taxes and eventually, to eliminate the state income tax.

He and the legislature made a big start on that plan this year, eliminating state taxes on most small-business income and slashing tax rates for most Kansans. The Legislature, without a doubt, botched up this plan when it got to the Senate. Senators agreed to pass a version that included all the cuts the governor proposed, but none of the revenue-producing changes he wanted.

The result could be a budget gap of up to \$700 million a year over the next few years, state experts predicted, though that gap keeps shrinking as the state's economy improves.

The governor's enemies were quick to claim the tax cuts would lead to massive cuts in schools and other state programs, and big hikes in local property taxes. That hasn't happened yet, of course, and it might not, but everyone agrees the tax bill passed last year is badly flawed.

The governor launched a campaign this week to re-establish some balance in the revenue picture, where he had proposed ending some popular deductions, including the one on home mortgage interest, to offset his tax cuts.

Another alternative is to keep a "temporary" sales-tax increase passed a few years ago in place of the higher income tax. Many argue that this would hurt low-income Kansans, but another argument is that a sales tax actually hits the wealthy hardest because they buy a lot more than the rest of us. There are ways to get out of the income tax if you're rich, but the sales tax applies to everyone.

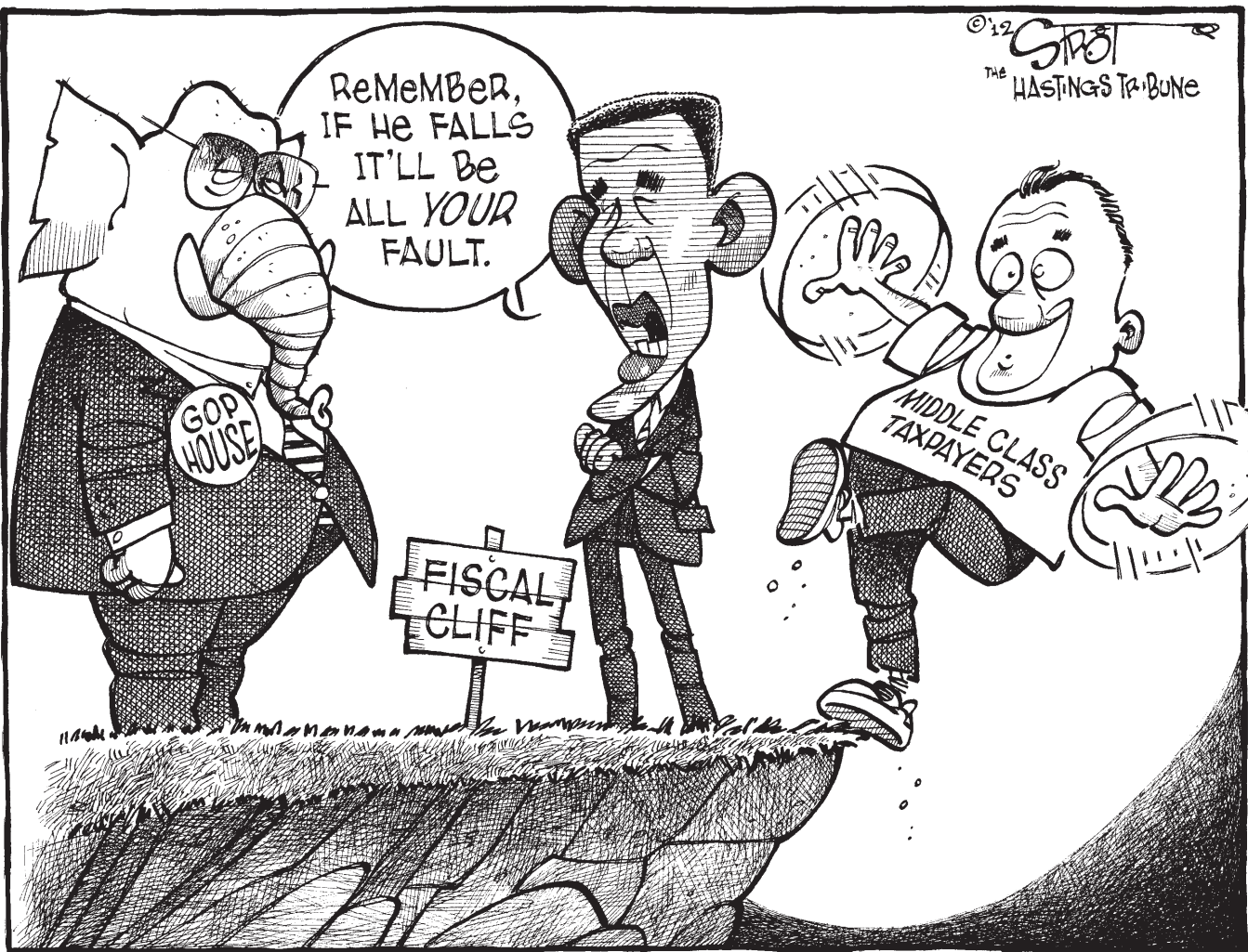
There'll be opposition to any solution. The very conservative will oppose any tax or revenue increase, hoping to slash government even more. But the state does need good schools, colleges, roads and and services, and it must have prisons, regulations and the like. While the administration promises to root out excess spending, there's only so much you can cut or save.

In the end, we need a solid compromise that makes the state run the way people want it to. That's critical to the governor if he wants to run for higher office again – and many believe he still wants to be president. To do that, he needs to make a success of his fiscal program. Budget Director Steve Anderson says he believes it could be a model for other states, and it might, but only if it works.

A solution is important to the rest of us, too. And as in Washington, a reasonable approach that will work is what we need in Topeka.

– Steve Haynes

On the Prairie Dog Steve Haynes



How the time seems to fly by

It's true. The older you get, the faster time flies.

Here's another truth: newspaper work puts time on steroids.

Working only one day a week doesn't sound like much, but it seems to roll around faster and faster. In the newspaper biz you're always working on the future. You know coming events, celebrations, the community calendar. Then – boom- that issue is here and immediately you're on to the next week's paper.

I swear, it seems like just a couple of weeks ago we were working on Christmas 2011. Now, it's almost 2013 and I'll be saying the same thing next December.

-ob-

Since I'm on the subject of newspapers, I think it's OK to poke a little fun at ourselves. I don't like

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



writing headlines, probably because I'm not very good at it. But when a friend sent me their collection of really dumb headlines I don't feel so bad.

This one could have been written here: Hospitals resort to hiring doctors or Physician shortage prompting move, administrators say.

Here's one that would set our editor off: Meeting on open meetings is closed

Love this one: Parents keep kids home to protest school closure.

OK, just one more: Rally against apathy draws small crowd.

-ob-

I'm torn. Everyone and I mean everyone in my family is on a diet of one kind or another. My heart wants to make candy like I do every year, but my mind says I'm not doing them any favors. I know that all that sugar, fat and chocolate is not good for any of us, so why do I do it.

I tell myself it's because I love them. Well, duh, if I love them, I should do what's best for them. Shouldn't I?

I could use artificial sweeteners, but we all know what that stuff tastes like.

My compromise is going to be sending small amounts to each family instead of an entire box load to each kid.

They might not like it, but they'll thank me later. Won't they?

Tell your story and find common ground

Helping consumers and our customers understand agriculture is vital to the future of the industry and the high-quality, affordable food Americans enjoy.

How do farmers help their customers understand their profession?

It begins with the commitment to tell your side of the story whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Whether farmers talk to grade-schoolers, members of service clubs, fellow church members or state legislators – practice the art of relationship building between rural and urban, between farmer/stockmen and consumers of agricultural products.

The holiday season is also a perfect time to tell others about the farm and ranch story. Whether we know it or not, today, many consumers are one, two or three generations removed from the farm. But just about everyone has a lawn, garden, flowers, plants or shrubbery. These same consumers enjoy, and some cherish, their ties to a father, grandfather or great-grandfather who tilled the soil.

Today's foodies have a strong desire to know about how their food is grown.

Insight John Schlageck



Many of them want to meet and know the people who are furnishing their families with the food they eat.

How do you initiate a conversation about farming?

It's easy to find common ground with urban cousins. Begin by noting that the fertilizer they buy for their garden or lawn is no different from what you, as a farmer, put on your crops. The rose dust, herbicide or insecticide used to control scab, dandelions or mosquitoes is similar to the plant protection you use.

Sometimes the common denominator revolves around nutrition. A good analogy could be the parallel between a person's need for healthy food and a plant's need for a well-balanced diet.

It's easy to move from nutrition to some of the more difficult challenges facing agriculture.

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To the Editor,
Would the person or persons who stole my American Flag and poles on October 3, at 208 E. Warsaw, please return it to the bracket you took it from?
Betty Wiltfong
Norton

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