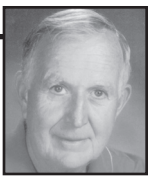


Legislative News

By
Ward
Cassidy



State Representative 120th District

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 50 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 14-hour day, the House approved its version of the recession/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 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 a.m. 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 Northwest Kansas.



TREES ALONG MAIN STREET are coming down. Eric Fiala, left, reported that the trees were either dead or dying. The trees won't be replaced for at least a year. Also pictured is Paul Larson. Herald staff photo by Karen Krien

BURN

Continued from Page 1

the Conservation Reserve Program land. However, it is also a time when commissioners and fire chiefs are concerned about these fires getting out of control.

While all the commissioners were not present, both Ernie Ketzner and Andy Beikman had voted by phone to pass the burn ban. Mr. Patton signed the resolution.

At the Cheyenne County Commissioner meeting on Thursday, they had talked about a burn ban but had decided to table the matter to see what the weather would bring.

Mr. Murray had also been at the meeting. He said he was not in favor of having the commissioners sign a resolution for a burn ban at that time because there was still a chance of rain and having a burn ban in place meant that no one could burn - not even a to light a barbecue grill.

They had discussed Conservation Reserve Program burning and noted that, if there no wind, it can generally be controlled. However, during the last fire, the National Weather Service issued a red flag warning that afternoon after the fire had been started. A

red flag warning is where the humidity drops and the conditions are not favorable for burning.

Mr. Murray thought that, if the county's policy were to read that if there is a red flag warning, burning will not be allowed. Dispatchers could then make the determination as to whether there could or could not be a controlled burn.

It was also suggested that, when a controlled burn is called in, the burn should be reported by radio to the firemen.

Kari Gilliland, county attorney, will revise the policy and present it at the next commissioners' meeting.

Burn ban restrictions

Bans on open burning include the banning of any outdoor fire including trash, fields, pasture, fence rows, grassland or ditches, campfires, warming fires and charcoal grill fires. The resolution does not apply to those living within the city limits.

Anyone found guilty of burning when the ban is in place can be fined up to \$500 and/or confined to the county jail for up to one month.



Destroy dead pine trees now

The only sure way to halt the spread of always-fatal pine wilt disease is to destroy dead pine trees by April - preferably by the first week.

That means removing the trees and immediately chipping or burning their wood. Firewood cut from a pine wilt victim can still serve as a reservoir for the disease's spread, said Megan Kennelly, plant pathologist with Kansas State University Research and Extension.

The central U.S. pines commonly infected are the Scots and Austrian, although mugo pines occasionally fall victim, she said. The disease has been in the eastern half of Kansas for decades. Last year, however, confirmed cases extended the state's "front line" communities to include Beloit, Great Bend, Hays, Medicine Lodge and Pratt.

"This winter, K-State's diagnostic lab detected cases from even further west," she added. "We're really hoping they're isolated - that appropriate sanitation will prevent further spread."

The disease travels by way of pine sawyers - a type of flying, longhorn beetle. The actual tree killers, however, are microscopic

worms known as pinewood nematodes. The beetles and nematodes both overwinter in dead pine wood. They get together when the new beetles emerge from their pupal case and pause to harden. That's when nematodes can enter the beetles' breathing chambers in great numbers.

The adult beetles leave their winter home (around May 1 in Kansas) to find a healthy pine host. There, they bore a feeding hole - which also serves as the entry for their wormy passengers. Once inside, pinewood nematodes are so prolific they often can clog a tree's water and nutrient flow in a matter of months.

"Usually, the first symptom is off-color, gray-green needles - wilt. Those needles then turn brown, but don't fall off. Typically, that happens in late summer or early fall, and the trees is dead within a few weeks or months," Ms. Kennelly said.

More information about pine wilt and about diseases that may be affecting pine trees that "look bad, but aren't dead," she said, is at www.plantpath.k-state.edu.

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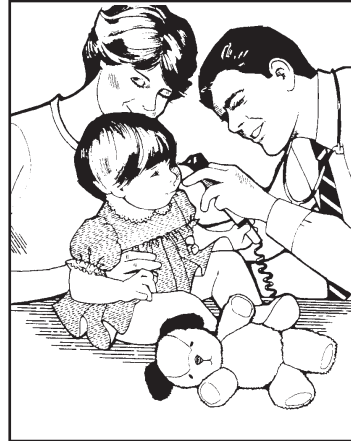
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