

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Most of us will see little change

By Steve Haynes

Theoretically, Americans are in for one of the biggest tax hikes on record two years after the next election.

That's 2010, when the Bush tax cuts are set to "sunset," or expire. Without action by Congress, rates will return to those in effect in 2002, when the new Bush administration and the Republican majority in Congress pushed through \$1.35 trillion in tax cuts over 10 years.

The nation had a budget surplus then, as figured by shaky government accounting. Today, after five years of tax cuts, a recession and unprecedented government spending, the deficit approaches \$800 billion a year.

Something hasn't worked out.

Democrats say it's simple: the country couldn't afford the tax cuts, and we need to go back to the old rates. They complain about the fiscal irresponsibility of the cuts, but big deficits seldom bothered the party when it was in power. Its priority has always been spending.

Why cut taxes, goes the argument, with so many things we need to spend the money on?

Republican conservatives, on the other hand, argued they could cut government spending by cutting taxes. This sort of starve-the-budget thinking is pretty common, but it seldom works.

Why?

Because few in Congress, or the state Legislature, for that matter, really believe in spending cuts. Cuts produce complaints from those who depend on government programs: program beneficiaries, employees, bureaucrats, everyone feeding at the public trough.

You can cut taxes, but the result seldom is lower spending. It hasn't worked in Washington, and it hasn't worked in Topeka.

This country badly needs fiscal restraint, though. The budget "rules" of the Gingrich era didn't bring it. The tough stance of today's Democrats isn't likely to do much better.

Pressure groups work for spending, not for taxpayers. They represent all the interests who want to get money, from social groups to unions to big corporations.

In Washington and in Topeka, darned few voices represent the taxpayer. Fewer still call out for fiscal sanity, lower spending, real tax cuts and less government.

Money talks, and those who make money from government have the biggest voice. It's not a matter of right or wrong, sound fiscal policy or unsound.

Just follow the money.

So, where do we go from here?

It's a good bet Congress will not let all the tax cuts fade away. The Democrats will vote to sock it to the rich. Republicans will try to defend the economic benefits of stimulating investment. Most of the cuts will remain.

And despite that, most of us will see little real difference in our taxes, which will be too high.

Maybe the economy will grow enough to shrink the deficit, maybe it won't.

And we'll still need to talk about less government, not more. — Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcx@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Kristi Powell - Advertising Sales
kpowell@nwkansas.com

Emily Wederski - Advertising Sales
ewederski@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Everett Robert - Circulation, Classifieds
erobert@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Jim Jackson, DeLisa Allen, David Erickson, Betty Morris, and Dana Huthansel

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.



May this be a good May

So much activity.

There seems to be so much activity with preparing for graduations and helping tornado victims it's about enough to make one's head spin.

I stopped by the Swap Shop in Hoxie Tuesday and a host of folks were scurrying around loading clothes and household items into boxes and then putting them in the trailer of a semi to take south.

I have an acquaintance from California who, on Monday, told me it seemed like most Kansans needed to stay yards from the nearest tornado shelter, to which I answered, 'no way.' I grew up with words of an uncle ringing in my ears — "Don't go into a basement during a tornado because you might end up with someone's dead horse on the door."

He was referring to basements which had as their only means of access the lift-up type door on the outside of the house. Kind of like the "Wizard of Oz" picture that comes to mind at the sound of a tornado siren as it wails. But, having grown up with uncle Ben saying stay out of the basement, I'm the one who would rather chase a tornado than hide from it.

I'm the one who, having just moved to Lawton, Okla., in the late 1970s and had a tornado fly over the house would have rather been out watching it than wondering how to explain to my then 4-year-old son to stay still in the bathtub. No, I'm not stupid enough to have taken him out in the storm, but I momentarily thought about it.

I'm not afraid of the weather, but I do respect it. And, as a resident of a mobile home, if the tornado sirens go off in Hoxie I do head across the street into an open-faced concrete former garage-



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

type structure. Always armed with a camera, I peer out the front of the structure hoping for that once-in-a-lifetime shot of Mother Nature.

While I will never downplay the horror the Greensburg tornado victims suffered last week, I will say I'm a firm believer everything happens for a reason. Whether that reason is to lose everything one owns on the face of the earth or whether it's to lose life itself.

I believe what the Bible states that God knows the number of hairs on our heads, and likewise, he knows what he's got planned for each and every one of our days. Long or short, it's not our role here on earth to wish for a crystal ball to foresee the future. It's our role here on earth to glorify God and all he does for us, whether it be face a tornado or never be exposed to such activity.

Again, speaking of activity, don't forget all across Kansas today, Pizza Hut is donating 20 percent of its profits to the Greensburg tornado victims so why not let Pizza Hut cook for you tonight?

And, speaking of graduation isn't it fun to watch the younger generation (speaking as a 52-year-old) as it prepares for their graduation?

I remember preparing for the graduation of both of my children. While my daughter's graduation was what I'd call routine, what was significant about my son's graduation was he graduated from the same high school that I did, just 20 years and a few days later.

But even more significant was the fact he graduated from high school a couple weeks after I graduated from college.

I was one of those moms who studied college algebra in the bleachers as her son dribbled a basketball up and down the court.

I started college when my daughter was in second grade and her brother was in seventh grade, and it took me five years to finish.

While I was one of those who started with an undecided major, I switched twice before landing in one place and completing with a double major.

I'll never forget the semester I took 21 credit hours, did work study, drove 35 miles one way to class five days a week, was married and had two children. That was the semester of craziness.

Anyway, each and every May, I stop and ponder the word graduation and have determined that Mr. Webster didn't have a clue when he wrote his definition.

Graduation has nothing to do with the state of being graduated, or the ceremony of conferring degrees or diplomas or even the "arrangement in degrees, levels or ranks. In reality, graduation is a four-letter word. W-O-R-K.

— Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

Our kids have a shaky launching pad

By Meihzu Lui

You're young and living in the richest and mightiest country in the world. Your path to the future should be amazingly bright, stretching before you like a smooth, open road toward a shining city on a hill, a virtuous and democratic society that has nothing to hide from the gaze of the world's people.

Your elders should be widening that road, and making the city more beautiful than ever to prepare it for your entry.

But something is wrong.

For many of our nation's children, the paths are unmarked, the way ahead rocky, the city tarnished. Hey, where are the grownups around here?!

Those of us with limited money are urged to show our concern for our children by camping overnight in Wal-Mart's parking lot to line up for some new video game. You can afford it with that pack of credit cards that came in the mail. Consume today, and worry about the bills tomorrow.

Similarly, for our nation, the rule is: Consume today, and forfeit future investments.

Far from leaving no child behind, rules seem more and more designed to hurt our children. Let's look at what's happening to the underpinning of democracy — education:

• A steady diet of tax cuts, fed to the few who already can well afford to send their kids to private boarding schools, makes a high quality

public education unaffordable for the rest of us.

• Many children in our schools have parents from other countries. Partly because they know what it's like to live in places where the only road out of poverty leads out of their home country, they are often hard working and highly motivated. Yet we won't let undocumented-immigrant class valedictorians attend college at in-state tuition rates.

• For young people who live in poor rural areas, especially in the South, joining the military is often the only way to get more education. But while average army privates make \$25,000 a year risking their lives for their country, and earn educational benefits far less than their granddads got with the GI Bill, the average defense industry CEO gets \$7.7 million a year, without worrying about any self-sacrifice.

It doesn't have to be this way!

As the recent election has shown, a shift in thinking about misplaced priorities is beginning. Beyond personal responsibility, we need social responsibility in order to create a good life for all our nation's children.

As in dysfunctional families, sometimes the children are more "together" than the so-called adults.

All over the nation, young people are organizing to ensure that they have a voice and a future. For example, Youth Speaks is a youth of color organizing project in San Francisco. In

conjunction with United for a Fair Economy, it will be putting out a Hip-Hop brochure, "Vote the Dream," that will inspire young folks to get involved in the 2008 election.

Leaders are educating their fellow students on topics not covered in school, and finding their friends thirsty for information relevant to their futures. And youth are not buying anti-family messages.

When young folks were told to support privatizing Social Security so they wouldn't have to pay for their grandparents' retirement, in an unusual alliance with AARP, they publicly voiced their refusal to throw granny from the train.

Our children will make the road again by walking it, and the rest of us will need to put our shoulders into the effort as well. The next generation is poised to broaden civic participation, widen the pathways to success, and get this country back on the road.

We'll say with pride: "There goes our Brendan/Lesha/Tran/Roberto/Rachel/Anyah/Nkomo/Auguste/Keulin..."

— Meihzu Lui is director, *United for a Fair Economy* (www.faireconomy.org). *UFE* is a non-partisan national non-profit that spotlights the growing economic divide in our country. info@faireconomy.org. Distributed by minutemanmedia.org

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

