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Free Press Viewpoint

Action needed, now

By Steve Haynes

Congress needs to act, and soon, to plug a gigantic hole in the federal highway aid program.

Without a new law, Kansas alone stands to lose \$120 million in federal aid next year, with disastrous consequences to the state's road program. That's almost one-third of the state's federal money, says Transportation Secretary Deb Miller.

Congress killed an amendment last month that would have plugged the gap with \$8 billion as a rider to a bill allocating money for the Federal Aviation Administration. Few other bills offer a chance to address a transportation issue, and time is running out.

The Federal Highway Trust fund is in trouble for several reasons, not the least of which is the high price of gasoline and diesel fuel. As prices soar, people stop driving as much, and the road fund suffers.

At the same time, the government has been pushing for more fuel efficiency, smaller vehicles and less driving. People are listening this time. The prices today really hurt.

And while the trust fund - like most state road funds - has many sources of income, all are hurting. Plus, the basis of all state and federal highway budgets is the fuel tax.

That's a problem, both because people are using less fuel, and because the tax is calculated by the gallon. If it was a percentage of the price of fuel, the fund might be full.

The problem will only get worse as smaller cars, higher fuel efficiency standards and the pressure to drive less further reduce the tax take. Then there's the problem of "alternative fuel" vehicles.

People who use natural gas, propane or electricity to power their cars don't pay road taxes at all, unless you count the taxes on tires or new trucks. To keep on building highways, the country has to figure out how to tax these vehicles. There's no good solution.

State and federal officials have talked about a "miles driven" tax, which is technically possible. But paying your road tax in one or two yearly lumps would be painful as heck. The current at-the-pump plan is relatively easy to take, at least compared to the cost of fuel.

Congress needs to do something, and chances for a temporary fix are good, since every state would be affected by the shortfall expected next year. A permanent solution is more distant. History says in Washington, nothing will get done until after the deadline.

Meantime, though, action is needed on a patch job by October, and in Washington that's not a long time. Congress pretty much has to gear up for action right after the summer break.

Kansas officials haven't said yet which road projects might be affected by a shortage in the federal fund, and thankfully, most big jobs in this area are done, but the impact across the state could be huge — and long lasting.

The state already faces a crisis finding money to fill its highway fund, and a breakdown in Washington can only make matters worse. - Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

About those letters ...

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Happily ever after

A love which passes all understanding was on display Saturday at the wedding of my daughter, Becca Bargmann, and her new husband, Joel Sowers.

Becca and Joel's love for each other is an earthly expression of the love they have for God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Their love is unconditional and they expressed it through their vows.

Becca told Joel through the power and grace of Jesus Christ, she will love, honor and cherish him.

Joel told Becca he too would love, honor and cherish her, and brought the church to a full laughter as he said, "And I'm so excited to finally get my rib back."

In Genesis 2:20-22, the Lord tells us he "caused (Adam) to fall into a deep sleep; he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

God brought Becca and Joel together. They met while Becca was roommates with Joel's sister, Janelle Elliott, and their friendship blossomed into what has developed into a beautiful love that was set afire by their love for Jesus Christ.

As noted in the sermon delivered by Shane Timson, God loved us so much that he gave us his son to die for our sins (John 3:16). Becca and Joel love each other so much that they have opened their hearts to each other and to being servants of the Lord. They have drawn



three families, Joel's and Becca's dad's and mine, together to witness and learn from them how to better serve God.

The wedding, typical with the bridal gown, tuxes, flowers and pew bows, was a once-in-a lifetime experience for me since Becca is my only daughter. She and Joel offered me great latitude to help them plan and execute a wedding, which was simple, yet elegant.

Right out of high school, I attended and graduated from floral design and bridal consulting school. With that background, I was able to plan the flowers and decorations, all with the approval of the bride and groom of course. All white flowers and decorations complimented Becca's white satin gown, which had an organza overlay with crystal beads, sequins and tiny blue satin flowers all over it. The same accents flowed down the back of the dress and down the train, which flowed out on the floor about 4-feet by 4-feet.

Becca's dad, Larry Bargmann, of Denver,

Larry commented to me that he was pleased to share the honor with Alan because while Larry had the easy years (birth to early teen), Alan had the rough years (16 to adult). Oh, the stories Alan and I could tell of those "rough years," which lead to the development of a beautiful woman who we proudly witnessed marry the love of her life on Saturday.

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But all three of us an earthly parents had a miniscule amount of impact on our daughter's life compared to the impact God has had on her life. Becca is the spiritual woman I want to be when I grow up.

Only once before have I seen such grace, humility and Christian beauty in a woman. That woman was my mother. While she taught me about the Lord, it has been Becca who has helped me deepen my relationship with him.

What is most exciting about Becca and Joel's marriage is that I'm witnessing first hand what God is doing in their lives and how he is allowing them to share their love for him with all those around them.

To see photos of the wedding, log on to www. kgcr.org (Becca is the afternoon announcer at KGCR Radio just outside Brewster) and find the link at the top, which says "Station Information," then find the link on the left hand side of the page, which says "Photo Album." That link will take you to several photos. Hope you enjoy them.



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155 W. Fifth (785) 462-3963 (USPS 120-920) Colby, Kan. 6770 COLBY FREE PRESS

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.

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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 within 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.

and her step-dad, my husband, Alan Ackerman, together walked her down the aisle.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

TV: Poisoning bodies as well as minds

By Andrew Korfhage

It's the beginning of the 28th Century, and the Earth is so overrun by garbage as to be uninhabitable for humankind.

It's the beginning of the 21st Century, and the United Nations Environmental Program estimates that we generate up to 50 million tons of e-waste (televisions, computers, and other electronics) every year. That's almost 70 tons a minute.

The first scenario is fictional, the plot of Disney's summer blockbuster movie "Wall-E." The second is scenario is real -- our actual ewaste situation right now. Is it so hard to imagine the reality of 2008 leading to the dystopia of 2700? In short, the bad news is that we're discarding an ever-increasing volume of toxic e-waste. For example, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Americans trashed 47 million computers in 2005, up from 20 million in 1998.

The worse news is that while our lawmakers should be figuring out ways to reverse this trend, they've actually passed legislation that will accelerate it. Congress passed legislation last year shifting the nation's television signals from analog to digital without any requirement to recycle the millions of TV sets that will be made obsolete by the switch. Electronics companies (whose lobbyists argued in favor of the switch) will see increased sales, when up to 20 percent of analog-only households see their screens go dark in February. Congress should have coupled the switch with a requirement for manufacturers to responsibly recycle their products - not just abandon the useless sets to.

we have three signs of hope:

1. Converter boxes – If you are one of the 20 million households that will lose your television signal in 2009, you do not have to purchase a brand new television. Converter boxes, costing from \$50 - \$70, can keep your TV working. The government offers free \$40 vouchers for these boxes. (Visit www.dtv.gov to get a voucher.)

2. Sony – Alone among the large electronics manufacturers, Sony offers free television recycling www.sony.com/recycle). Sony's program, which makes good business sense, can serve as a model for other companies. "The price of copper has quadrupled," Sony Environmental Affairs Director Douglas Smith told the "International Herald Tribune." By recycling, "we can get the copper back to our factory and make new circuit boards."

3. The states – Even if the federal government has been lax in dealing with e-waste, states are taking the lead. According to the Electronics Takeback Coalition (www.computertakeback.org), thirteen states have passed "producer responsibility laws," mandating that manufacturers pay for the recycling of their products. What's more, seven states have banned e-waste from landfills, and 35 more states are considering such laws.

Still, there's a downside to the states' desire to keep e-waste from accumulating within their borders, and that's the unfortunate reality that many electronics recyclers simply send it overseas. There the toxic components (lead, cadmium, mercury, beryllium, arsenic, and much more) can still poison workers and the environment.

India, China, and Nigeria are all likely des-

tinations for e-waste shipped overseas, and there, according to Forbes.com: "... [C]hildren making pennies a day troll mounds of garbage in search of computers and TVs. Lacking tools to tear open computer shells, they burn the plastic ... breathing noxious fumes. They dip circuit boards in acid and melt lead in the same pans they use to cook their meager meals. They toss remains back on the pile where toxins seep into water supplies."

Here again, the federal government has not embraced its role in mitigating the dangers of e-waste. Since 1995, Congress has had the opportunity to ratify the Basel Convention, a treaty that outlaws developed countries dumping hazardous waste on developing ones, but has not yet done so.

In the meantime, you can take action on your own. If you wish to discard your analog TV responsibly, the Basel Action Network www.ban.org) provides a list of responsible recyclers that refuse to dump our e-waste on developing nations. And you can demand that the Federal Communications Commission, charged with implementing the analog to digital switch, require television manufacturers to recycle (send them a message at www.coopamerica.org/takeaction/fcc/).

You can do your part to avoid the toxic future predicted by "Wall-E."

Andrew Korfhage is an editor for Co-op America www.coopamerica.org a nonprofit consumer organization advocating socially and environmentally responsible purchasing and investing.

For those concerned about electronic waste,

