pinion



Other **Viewpoints**

Depleted reserves pinch state budget

It's not the fault of state lawmakers and Gov. Kathleen Sebelius that a global economic downturn is creating budget problems for the state. But they do deserve some blame for not ensuring that the state was in a better financial position to deal with the recession.

State law requires that the budget include a reserve of at least 7.5 percent of total expenditures. A main purpose of this ending balance is to help the state respond to unexpected budget challenges.

For example, state revenue dropped more than 7 percent in the months after the Sept. 11 attacks. State government was able to make it through that fiscal year in large part because it had a \$365 million ending balance that it could dip into.

But since then lawmakers have ignored the ending-balance law and passed budgets with much smaller reserves.

Initially, that was a risky but understandable move, as the state was trying to get through a rough economic patch and didn't have the money to build up the cushion. But in recent years, when the economy was doing well, lawmakers cut into the ending balance to help pay for increased spending on schools and Medicaid and tax cuts for businesses. As a result, this fiscal year's budget has an ending balance of less than 2 percent of expenditures, or \$120 million. That's not nearly enough to cover the \$230 million projected drop in state revenue this year.

If the ending balance had been at 7.5 percent, the state would have had about \$475 million to help absorb the downturn.

Not having an adequate ending balance also contributed to the state's cash-flow problems, which caused a cut in school district checks to only 75 percent of their expected level earlier

In addition to raiding the ending balance, the Legislature and governor's office have dealt with earlier budget shortfalls in large part by using various accounting gimmicks, such as delaying school funding payments to a different fiscal year. Those tricks are no longer available.

The current economic downturn is so severe that even a properly funded ending balance wouldn't be enough to prevent painful budget cuts or possible tax increases. But it sure would have helped.

The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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Colby Free Press

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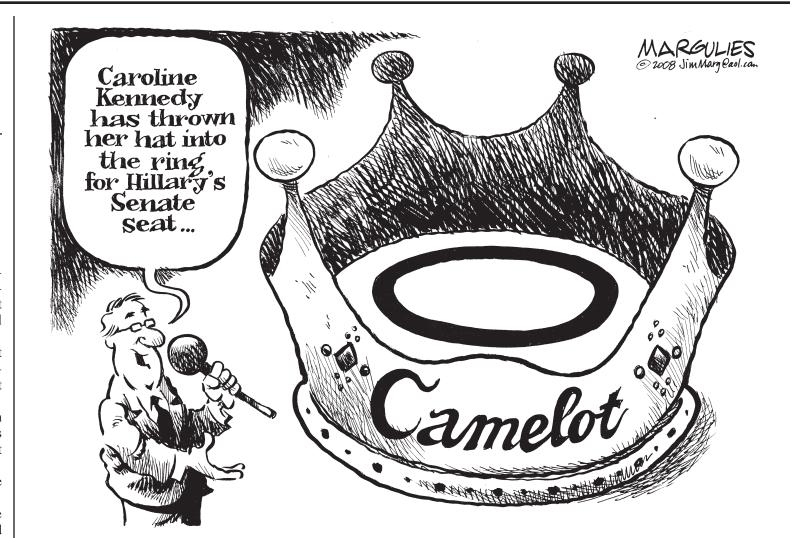
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New staff is renewing the Free Press

Here's a progress report for readers on things down at the newspaper.

We continue to deal with some problems. We've made progress on several fronts, including hiring, and been frustrated on a couple

The Colby Free Press has been here since 1888, and it's not going away any time soon. Business has been pretty good despite a recession in the national economy and bad times for big-city newspapers. Our readership remains high.

So far this fall, we've hired a new office manager, two society editors, a sports editor, a copy editor/proof reader, a part-time classified manager, a graphic artist/circulation manager and an advertising representative. We still need an editor and another ad rep.

By far our biggest problem right now is mistakes in news copy, little things like names and details in stories. A lot of this can be blamed on turnover and having a lot of new people, but we know it can't continue.

Having your name, or your mother's, misspelled in the newspaper is no "little" thing. We know that. Our primary goal right now it to reduce the number of corrections in the paper.

A problem we've been a little more successful dealing with is delivery. We're still having trouble finding and keeping carriers, but we have managed to get all the routes out of the should be home. mail. That had not been the case for most of the year.

We are not the only newspaper having trouble with carriers. It's a national phenomenon. Papers that once relied on kids to deliver after school have been forced to turn to adults or to the post office to get reliable delivery. It seems kids in middle school have way too much to do these days to want to deliver newspapers.

John Dehn, our New Media director, has experience as a circulation director. He's stepped

Steve Haynes

 Letter From the Publisher

in to help run the carrier system. We've been able to continue home delivery, and we expect

Readers can expect a little less service, however, as we switch to more motor routes. Motor carriers won't be able to put the paper in a box or by the door the way those kids once did and some still do.

A related issue is delivery times. We've been late several days, both because or poor timekeeping in the office and problems at the press which were out of our control. We're trying to do a better job of being on time, because we know that's important to us, to you and to

If the paper comes late, though, please do not blame your carrier. It's almost never their fault. Call the office if you need someone to yell at, but know that it's as hard on your carrier as it is on you to have a late paper. Maybe harder. They're working after dark when they

Having more people has allowed us to fill the paper with local news most days. We've used very little Associated Press copy lately, and no stories from other towns, and hope to continue that trend. We know readers want Colby news, not stories about someplace else.

We have started to expand our business coverage as time and space permit. We hope to have a regular column of business shorts promotions, new product lines, other changes on the street — and to feature stories on all new businesses as they open or expand.

Some of you have started sending these stories to the Free Press. Keep it up. Businesses are news in town, just like people, religion and government. Speaking of religion, we've started a new column with the cooperation of the Thomas County Ministerial Alliance. "From the Pulpit" will feature brief meditations by ministers in a rotation each Friday.

We've also started collecting school menus and activities, senior center news and other information readers may find of interest. We're trying to find a home for these in the paper each week.

News coverage still isn't where we want it. We need another full-time person to get where we want to be with features, civics and sports, plus a lot of help from readers.

We'd like to get back to more regular coverage of city, county and school meetings, nonvarsity sports and features, but even with one more person, we'll be a few trying to get to way too many events.

Readers, parents, friends, businesses all can help us here. Call, write or e-mail when you think about news. Send us tips, pictures, items, information, stories, whatever you think should be in the paper. Tell us about upcoming events and happenings. Working together, we can get more news into this paper. We cannot do everything with a small staff, so we do need

Meantime, we focus on three things: fewer mistakes, more dependable delivery and hiring a full crew. We appreciate your comments, even your complaints. We want to do a good job, and you can help us focus on that goal.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Public policy can't stop acting in faith

An e-mail arrived in my box, titled "The Month Before Christmas".

A poet I'm not, my feet aren't long enough.

The following has no rhythm and meter like the parody of "The Night Before Christmas" that I received in my e-mail. But I hope you will read and give serious thought to the following:

"Not a Christian was praying ——"

And why are Christians not praying? There are no wire taps on my private line to God! Must I fear judgment of man for what I say in my conversation with my God?

"Nor taking a stand —

And who says I'm not taking a stand? As the world observes my actions in everyday life, they observe very well what my stand really is! Actions speak louder than words.

"The children were told by their schools not

And why should our schools have to teach our children songs of faith? Don't they hear praises at home and in their faith-group gatherings?

"It might hurt people's feelings ——" And why would people have hurt feelings if we demonstrate God's love instead of voicing our judgment of those around us? Even



Ken Poland

Ken's World

Jesus, whose birthday we claim to be celebrating, said He came not to pass judgment but to reveal God's love. Does our hustle and bustle reveal God's love? Or are we demonstrating quite well our selfish desire to be first to the

"Retailers promoted ——"

And why do merchants display what we see and what pleases not God? God isn't doing the trinkets, and bobbles.

And why must we shout MERRY CHRIST-MAS? A quiet visit to a shut-in or a basket of food to a destitute family will say Merry

Christmas in a meaningful way. Even the large

lump of coal that would have filled the heating

buying. We, both Christians and non, are pushing and shoving to grab the latest rage in toys, "Shout MERRY CHRISTMAS, not Happy

Holiday'

stove, in years gone by, might have had more meaning than a glib Merry Christmas. Did Jesus not say it was Him you were neglecting when you ignored the least of society?

The words of a song, "They will know we are Christians by our love," can't be heard when our actions deny what our rantings and ravings of how we are being denied our rights clash with the raucous behavior of a world without Christ.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley



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