

### Free Press **Viewpoint**

### Stimulus loaded with terrible price

By the time you read this, the Senate and House will be duking it out over the details of the economic stimulus bill, trying to nail down how the government will spend somewhere between \$800 billion and \$900 billion it doesn't have.

There seems little doubt a bill will pass. President Obama has been out stumping for the stimulus package, which he considers a key part of the government response to the current recession. He's planned two campaign-style swings around the country and a prime-time press conference Monday.

And, after some compromise in the Senate, he has the votes in both houses.

The total probably will fall closer to the Senate's \$838 billion, but the actual amount matters little. It will be a terrible price to pay for a slightly faster recovery.

Since the government doesn't have the money, it'll have to print some. The resulting inflationary pressure could rip the economy apart a year or two down the road.

A coalition of conservative Democrats and "moderate" Republicans succeeded in stripping billions out of the Senate version this week, but when the two houses appoint a conference committee to settle differences in the bill, some of that is likely to come back.

Support is strong enough to pass some version, and the \$800 billion mark is not small.

Not everyone was ready to jump on the bandwagon. Sen. John McCain, the Arizona Republican who ran against Mr. Obama, denounced the plan as "generational theft," buying a bit of prosperity today at the price of even larger debts for our grandchildren to pay.

"We're laying multitrillion dollars of debt on future generations of Americans," McCain said on CBS. "I can't support such a thing."

Sen. Richard Shelby, an Alabama Republican, also refused to support the measure.

"We are going down a road to financial disaster," he said Sunday on CNN. "Everybody on the street in America understands that.... We'll pay dearly."

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office reported last week that the stimulus measure, in its current form, should create between 1.3 million and 3.9 million jobs by the end of 2010, lowering a projected unemployment rate of 8.7 percent by up to 2.1 percentage points.

But the office warned that the long-term effect of that much government spending over the next decade could "crowd out" private investment, lowering long-term economic growth forecasts by 0.1 to 0.3 of 1 percent by 2019.

In the end, it wasn't government that got us into a recession, and government won't be the deciding factor in ending this one. Recessions come and recessions go. Even the "experts" admit that the "stimulus" won't do more than shave the peaks

Americans as a whole give politicians way to much credit for their ability to "save" the economy. They encourage this belief to garner votes.

It is an expensive faith. — Steve Haynes

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan. 67701.

#### Colby Free Press

155 W. Fifth St.

(USPS 120-920)

(785) 462-3963

Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749 Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout,

Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher

**NEWS** 

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor

Marj Brown, Vera Sloan - Society Editors

**ADVERTISING** 

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales

Tyler Zolinski - Graphic Design

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk estes @ nwkansas.com

**BUSINESS OFFICE** 

Tammy Withers - Office Manager

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator support @ nwkansas.com

**NOR'WEST PRESS** 

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Daniel Spillman

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas 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.



# Creative thinking can save schools money

"A billion here. A billion there. Pretty soon, you're talking real money." This quote from the famous Illinois Sen. Everett Dirksen applies to today's Kansas budget.

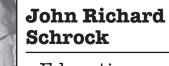
Our tax shortfall has grown into "real money." Since public schools consume over half of every state tax dollar and higher education is a significant part of the remainder, it is no longer possible for education to be "held harmless' from budget cuts.

There are two actions that could save substantial money, one at public schools and another at colleges.

School consolidation has long been political suicide. Now, only large-scale school consolidation can save substantial money. The time has come to implement some variation of the proposal for regional school districts that would draw down our 297 Unified School Districts into 40, without any child riding the bus longer than an hour.

In 1945, Kansas had 8,000 little school districts, virtually every attendance center with its own school board. By 1960, this dropped to 2,600. The Kansas legislature set up the unified school district system that gave us 303 districts in 1963. In the last three years, rural population declines have made additional consolidations inevitable, and more will soon occur but in an unplanned, haphazard fashion.

student costs due to duplicate administrations and school boards, and from undersized classes. Just as rural Kansas now has health clinics that hub around a few hospitals, most com-



 Education Frontlines

munities would keep their elementary schools and send secondary students on to regional high schools. The initial construction costs for the shift in students might be eligible for money from the Obama infrastructure plan, pending the final fine print on that legislation. In the Kansas Legislature, the Kansas population shift has resulted in a majority of representatives from urban areas. Votes that currently provide more state aid per pupil to rural schools will likewise shift.

Kansas's college and university systems also need to trim expenditures. The portion of Kansas high school graduates who entered college in the mid-1980s was just over 40 percent, and perhaps three out of four were college material. Today, over 70 percent of graduates go to tertiary institutions, but the number who are college material remains low.

Because of this, Kansas colleges and universities are spending a lot of money on remedial These shrinking schools have growing per- courses. With funding now enrollment-driven, should be done. there is pressure on universities to retain students for credit hour production, regardless of performance. Admissions criteria are low, and only apply to the six regents schools. The com-

munity colleges are a major end-run. Driven by enrollment at all costs, some schools are hiring any warm body available to give easy

Time has come for Kansas college admissions standards to be raised dramatically. Students with an ACT of 14 or 15 have no chance of graduating from a bona fide bachelor's program. There are some potentially good students who score low because they come from schools without resources or good teachers.

Kansas is in hard times and can no longer afford to take in 20 students with low ACTs, 19 of whom will never succeed, in order to save the one who will. Any raise of minimum ACT must include community colleges as well. That means the Kansas Board of Regents will have to do more than "coordinate" community colleges and technical schools.

The University of Kansas already plans to raise minimum standards by 2014. But that is way too late to address our budget shortfall now. The ACT score for college enrollment could be raised without significantly reducing the number of students who get degrees. That would save substantial money in university salaries, which is where 80 percent of the academic operating budget is.

Neither of these actions will be popular, but this is the time in history where they could and

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia.

## Labeling hurts packers, stockmen

Talk to cattlemen, livestock auction market operators and cattle buyers about the mandatory country-of-origin labeling (know as COOL), and you'll probably receive a less

than warm reception. The purpose of this proposal is to label products grown or raised in the United States, giving U.S. shoppers an opportunity to "buy American." Labeling is required on meat,

fruits, nuts and vegetables.

The rule creates some problems in the trade relationships among the United States, Canada and Mexico says Keith Miller, a Barton County cattleman who also serves as U.S. Meat Export Federation vice chairman. Some are calling it the worst thing that's ever happened to the North American cattle industry.

So why is it being viewed so negatively? Why have the Canadian and Mexican governments filed complaints claiming the United States is violating the North American Free Trade Agreement?

It seems the major problem is not with the labeling, but with the segregation of cattle – especially at the point of processing. At this point, COOL adds significant production costs with little or no recognizable benefits.

"It is difficult to keep carcasses separated in the packing plants," Miller says. "As a result, only a handful of plants are used to process livestock that are imported. This has caused a price difference for livestock that are imported into the United States."

And Mexico and Canada buy a lot of livestock from the United States. These two countries combined to account for about \$2 billion in U.S. beef export purchases last year.



#### John Schlageck

 Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

That is about 60 percent of the worldwide total. While the United States doesn't import a large volume of processed meat from these countries, it does import large numbers of live cattle and pigs.

Any disruption in trade with these three nations could have serious consequences for U.S. cattle producers. Grain producers would also be hurt

Meat exports are good for grain producers because they are able to market more grain to feed more cattle being shipped out of this country, Miller said.

If the United States were to lose these export markets, cattle producers could lose \$50 to \$60 per head, said Erin Daley, an economist with the meat export group.

The United States exports a large volume of variety meats to Mexico which are used with basic food staples like the tortillas. Rounds are also a popular item in the export market, making up a large portion of U.S. exports to eastern Canada.

"It would be difficult to absorb these products into our domestic market," Miller said.

The Barton County stockman recently met with Mexican officials. Here's how these government representatives explained their di-

Mexico typically ships 400-pound feeders into the United States. Two weeks ago, while Miller was meeting with the Mexican officials, feeders were selling for \$375 to \$400. Paperwork and health processing cost \$40 a head. Buyers of those calves are discounted another \$60 to \$80 each for being imported.

The reason – only a few plants will process these animals and that limits the places they can be marketed.

"Our rules are costing the Mexican farmer in excess of \$100 per animal to export to the United States," Miller says. "If I lived in Mexico, I would be upset, too.'

The Barton County stockman said he believes the only way trade can continue with, and among Canada, Mexico and the United States is to have a North American label to include all three.

Coming up with a workable solution for trade among these three must become a priority for the new administration, Miller says. If not, there will be consequences.

"The Mexican officials I spoke with are talking about shutting down all trade with the United States," Miller says. "We can't have that. We must find common ground and find solutions everyone can live with."

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

### Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley



2 opinion CFP 2-11-09.indd 2/11/09 12:40:56 PM