



Free Press Viewpoint

Short-term leader grasps big cutbacks

Gov. Mark Parkinson is in one of the worst positions a leader can find himself in. He took over state government in the middle of a bad recession, with revenue estimates sliding and no real end in sight.

There are two ways to deal with an unbalanced budget: more revenue or fewer expenditures. So far, Parkinson has favored reducing expenditures, but now it's getting to the point where it will cut deep into essential services.

The Department of Corrections is going to have to scale back parole services, the National Guard is talking about closing armories and the Department of Transportation will take a big cut in highway maintenance, so get ready for some rough roads over the next year or so.

The worst by far is the repeated cuts that have been made to schools. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been cut, and while some have been reimbursed through federal stimulus money, it still leaves more than \$150 million cut over the past year, boiling down to more than \$800,000 for the Colby School District.

This represents staff positions, reduced or eliminated programs, no in-town busing, fewer trips for student activities and lots more. We're coming to the crisis point in public education where, if much more is cut, districts will have to make drastic changes just to stay open, let alone provide the same quality education that they have until now.

But we shouldn't be too hard on Parkinson. The governor is doing what he has to do. At the moment, the job of dealing with the budget crisis is his, and he's doing the best he can. We have to endure these cuts when revenues are down if we want a balanced budget.

We don't want to go in the hole like the federal government, do we? Kansas does not need a budget deficit.

We mustn't forget that Parkinson began political life as a Republican. He was big in the state party until former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius brought him over to the Democratic side. And being what could be described as a conservative Democrat, it's in Parkinson's nature to balance a budget through spending cuts rather than by tax increases.

By why not a balanced approach? Why not make small tax increases here or there (or end a few tax exemptions) and make a few cuts to spread out the misfortune? If you do both in moderation, it will hurt state agencies less and taxpayers just a little.

It's a blessing for Parkinson that he's decided not to run for governor in 2010. Being a lame duck, he can make the hard choices and not worry about still being popular enough to be re-elected.

But how many hard choices can we endure before the trains stop running on time?

— Kevin Bottrell

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters.

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College team has a taste for winning

Anyone who has been to a Colby Community College men's basketball game will tell you there's a world of difference between this year's team and last year's.

This year's squad just hates to lose.

When the Trojans lose a game, they never go down without a fight. Last year's team certainly didn't enjoy losing, but this team despises it. Every time the opposing team has looked like they were about to leave Colby in the dust this season, the Trojans have found a way to get back in the game.

I don't know why Colby is so much scrappier this year, but I have a feeling it has something to do with first-year coach Dustin Pfeifer.

Pfeifer is a competitor and he is not afraid to challenge his players. He may have picked some of that up when he played on the 1999 Colby High School state championship team.

I watched the coach rip into freshman Regis Schafer during a timeout in Tuesday's game against North Platte at the Community Building. Schafer had committed a few turnovers and the Trojans were suffering through a bad first half.

My first reaction was pity for Schafer, but my second reaction was one of surprise. It was the first time I had seen Pfeifer get that mad at anyone. I was used to the friendly fellow who gave me words of encouragement when I was filling the Colby Grade School gymnasium with bricks and air balls in a few pick-up games we were both involved in. The intense, fiery side of the coach was new to me, although I doubt it was new to his players.

But that's probably what makes him such an effective coach. He can hold players accountable when their not playing up to their potential and he is quick to offer encouragement and praise when they are doing well.

That little pep talk seemed to work, too, because Schafer recovered from his tough start and went on to score 26 points.

The character of the Trojans is perfectly embodied by the play of their starting point guard, Aireus Stephenson. The Colby sophomore has gone from being a solid player to being the Trojans' team leader. He has shown he can take over a game when the team needs him.

Stephenson's performance against McCook (Neb.) Community College on Nov. 17 was incredible. The sophomore point guard willed his team back into the game, hitting big shot after big shot. It's one thing to put up good stats; it's quite another to hit four huge three-pointers when the game is on the line.

Stephenson is no Michael Jordan (who is?), but his clutch play towards the end of game resembled one of the traits that made Jordan the greatest player to ever to pick up a basketball. The truly special players want to take the big shots, and even if they miss them, they still want the ball the next time the game is on the line.

Most basketball fans remember Jordan's game-winning shots over the Cleveland Cavaliers' Craig Ehlo and the Utah Jazz' Bryan Russell, but there were times when he missed the shot that would have won the game. The basketball icon once said, "Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that's why I succeed."

Several seconds before Stephenson nailed a game-tying three against McCook to take the game into its second overtime, he had missed a key free throw that would have tied the game. The fact that he was willing to take that three-pointer says all you need to know about his character.

Stephenson struggled on Tuesday. He had one of those games that anyone who has ever played basketball has from time to time. You



Andy Heintz
• Wildcat Ramblings

get a sinking feeling that for some reason the basketball gods have made sure you are going to have a bad night. Stephenson hit 4 of 18 shots and went 0-5 from three-point range.

It was tough to watch, because he is so easy to root for. But I have no doubt he will make up for this game 10 times over with his play later this season, because Aireus Stephenson is a winner – and that's what winners do.

While Stephenson's play may be the engine that makes this year's team go, several players have helped the Trojans get off to such a successful start. Schafer and freshman Jose Peña-Benjamin have both hit big shots at key times. Peña-Benjamin has shown he can make hard-driving layups in heavy traffic inside.

Schafer's shot selection is questionable at times, but you have to respect his willingness to keep plugging away until his shot starts falling. The guy seems to have no fear, which is a trait that has eluded most of us. Sophomore Jordan Michelson has a nice touch for a big guy and he has a deadly hook shot that's nearly impossible to stop when he gets the ball inside.

Freshman Corey Woofter, a teammate of Pfeifer's on the 1999 Eagles team, is a scrapper whose not afraid to bang with guys a lot bigger than he is. Freshman Michael Morris and sophomore Ethan Stover are starting to figure out their roles on the team. When Morris is on, he is a scoring threat and a tough rebounder on both ends of the floor. Stover can hit three-pointers when the team needs some points. Sophomore Dominique Brewer is a solid rebounder who can score inside.

The Trojans deserve the town's support this year. They are talented and they play their hearts out. I have a feeling that, by the time the season is over, they will have exceeded everyone's expectations.

Everyone's except their own.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

How to burn off the turkey

What's it take to burn off the calories from a Thanksgiving dinner?

Get this! Kansas State Research and Extension nutrition specialist Mary Meck Higgins counted up the calories for a modest Thanksgiving dinner of three ounces of skinless roast turkey; (only) one half cup of mashed potatoes; two tablespoons (good grief!) of gravy; 4 ounces of green bean casserole; four ounces of glazed carrots (can't we have sweet potatoes instead?); one dinner roll with two teaspoons of soft margarine (how about real butter?); relishes of one stalk of celery and one ounce of sweet pickle; one tablespoon of black olives (now how many olives can you get on a tablespoon without them rolling off?); three tablespoons of jellied cranberry sauce (that's not even a start with the recipe I use); and a slice of pumpkin pie with one (measly) tablespoon of whipped cream.

She said this modest holiday dinner will have approximately 1,100 calories, in which there are 38 grams of fat, 150 grams of carbohydrates and 40 grams of protein. (Do we really care...it's Thanksgiving, for crying out loud!)

And she has the audacity to recommend you wait 30 minutes before exercising to burn off the calories. (Doesn't washing dishes qualify as exercise?)

How about changing that to 30 hours, so that I can eat at least two more times, 'cause it would re-e-e-ally be a shame to waste (waist?) those leftovers!

She even recommends walking for four hours, at 3 1/2 mph, or (heaven forbid) two hours of jogging at 5 mph to burn off the calories.

Good grief! Does she know what kind of an appetite I could work up if I walked for three and a half hours?

Although I do respect her knowledge of nutrition, we're not even on the same planet when it comes to holiday dinners.

Vera Sloan thinks life should be fund, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as Society Editor.



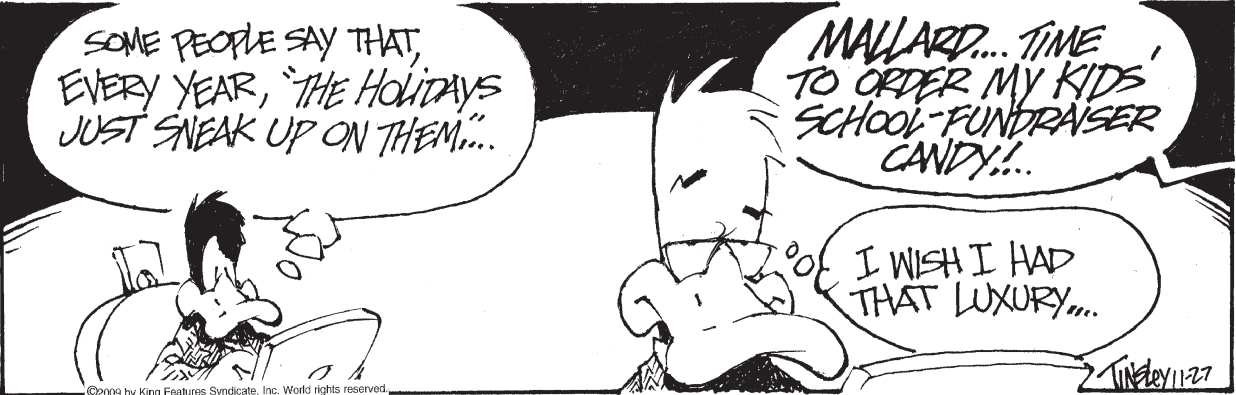
Vera Sloan
• After Thoughts

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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