



Other Viewpoints

Good planning leaves cash balance

Having some cash left over at the end of the day – or the fiscal year – is not just a good thing, it's essential. Businesses, governmental entities and prudent individuals know it's important to have some cash in reserve to meet unanticipated increases in expenses and emergencies.

The state, counties and cities budget to have a cash carry-over at the end of the year for those reasons and to cover expenses before the new year's revenue begins rolling in.

Kansas' school districts do it, too, but they've come under fire from House Speaker Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, for carrying over too much cash each year rather than spending it on students in the classrooms.

Legislators last year passed a bill that allowed school districts to divert reserves in specific funds, about \$150 million, to their general funds. About 77 districts used that authority to send \$24 million to their general funds for the current fiscal year, but O'Neal wasn't happy with that level of response and has introduced a bill that would require school districts to spend more of that money or risk losing it.

From this vantage point, \$150 million spread across all the school districts in the state doesn't indicate the districts are hoarding cash on a whim. Given the status of the state's own budget before the current administration took over, districts could be excused for hanging onto some money to deal with recurring funding reductions and tardy distribution of revenue from the state.

Brenda Dietrich, superintendent of Auburn-Washburn Unified School District 437, said the district expects to have less than one month's payroll on hand when the fiscal year ends in July. That doesn't seem excessive.

Mark Tallman, of the Kansas Association of School Boards, said the current surpluses in some funds likely exist because districts became cautious with their budget projections during the recession.

Dietrich also noted the money in some special funds isn't just excess revenue. When Washburn Rural High School asked for new football equipment, Dietrich said, she asked the district's activities officials if they could purchase the equipment from what appeared to be a healthy reserve account. Dietrich was told much of that money had been allocated to yearbooks and a band trip.

We think superintendents in other districts also could talk about the difference between excess cash and money on hand that has been allocated to specific needs.

The state, at the end of its past fiscal year, had a cash carry-over of several hundred million dollars. Shawnee County ended its 2011 fiscal year with \$9.3 million in the bank. Topeka ended its 2011 fiscal year with \$8.2 million in the general fund.

The county and city balances represent a substantial amount of money, but we don't think it's an excessive amount. If those cash carry-overs were to double every few years, we'd have a different opinion.

We'd have a different opinion, too, if we thought the state or our local school districts were hoarding money unnecessarily. We just don't think that's happening.

O'Neal and his colleagues should focus on managing the state's cash carry-over and let the elected leaders of our counties, cities and school districts decide the appropriate level of their ending balances.

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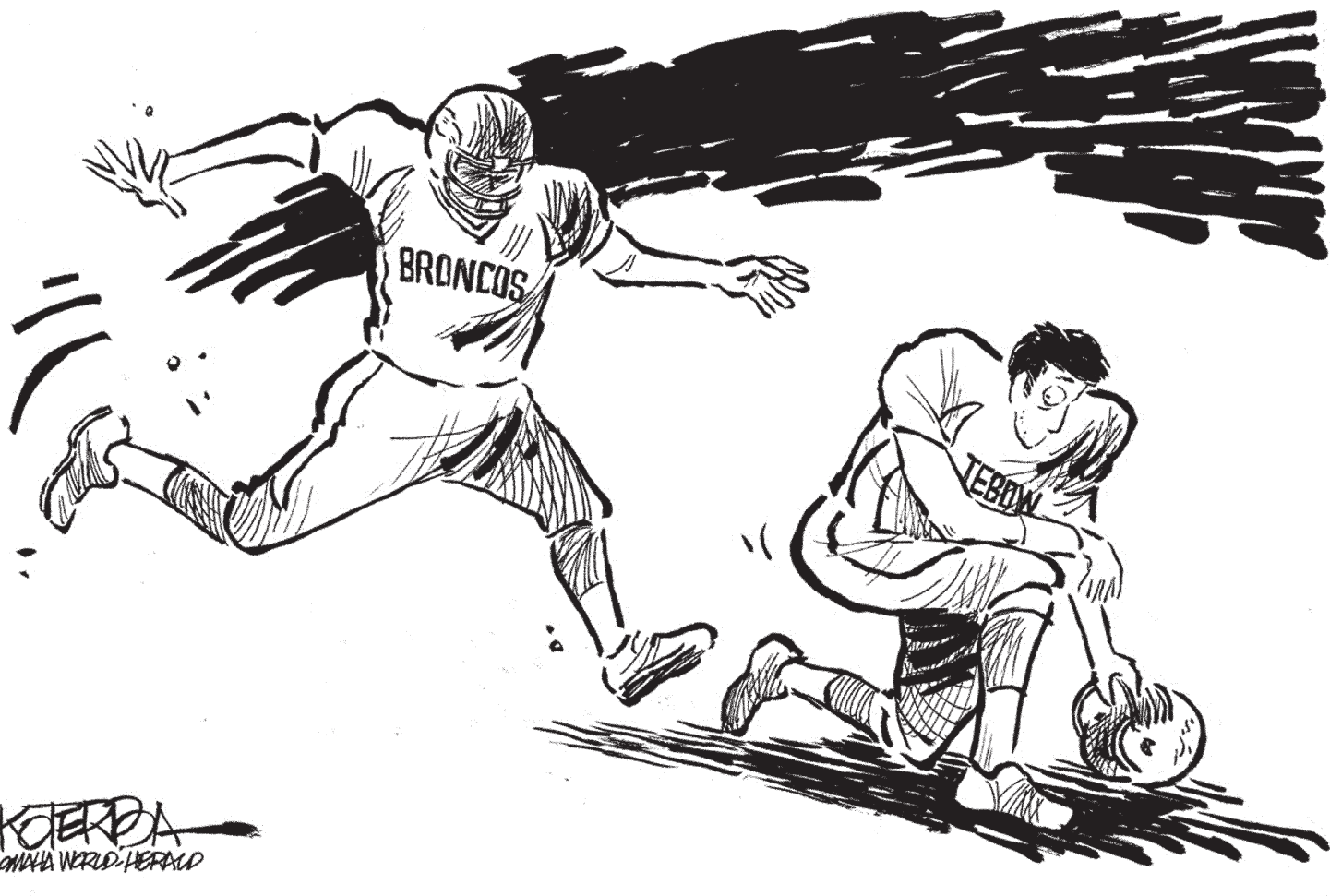
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Dear Team Romney: let Mitt be Mitt

I don't wear a cowboy hat. It's not that I have anything against the cowboy hat per se.

The style suits some folks (John Wayne, Chuck Norris, Tommy Lee Jones) to a tee. I just know it wouldn't look right on me. It just wouldn't fit with my persona. People would look at my attire, shake their head and silently ask themselves, "who is he trying to fool."

To put it simply, I would look like someone trying to be something he's not.

More than any other candidate in the Republican presidential primaries, Mitt Romney embodies the awkward man in the proverbial cowboy hat. And, despite my dislike of his flip-flopping nature, I can't help but feel sorry for the guy.

No matter how hard he tries, Romney just isn't very good at connecting with people. He lacks the aw-shucks style of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, the personable nature of Bill Clinton or the soaring oratory abilities of John F. Kennedy and President Barack Obama.

Perhaps most political speeches are carefully scripted, yet Romney's seem particularly inauthentic. It's as if the Dull Police raided his campaign and confiscated anything resembling spontaneity.

Even when he's taking verbal shots at Obama, he delivers the lines in such a mechanical fashion that, instead of garnering applause



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

from the conservative base, it reinforces their belief that he isn't one of them. Far too often, Romney comes across as an actor playing a role instead of a man making an impassioned case about why he should lead the nation.

For this he is partly to blame. It's painfully obvious that Romney's positions on many issues are based on what is politically expedient instead of what he believes is morally right.

To say he's a pathological opportunist when it comes to politics wouldn't be an exaggeration. His political style, much like his business career at Bain Capital, paints a picture of man who doesn't let his moral convictions keep him from making what he deems to be the most practical decision.

Unsurprisingly, being perceived as an indifferent, nonideological pragmatist doesn't excite the increasingly ideological Republican base. A dispassionate approach to governance may be necessary at times, but it doesn't make for good bumper-sticker slogans or catchy sound bites.

Still, Romney's results-driven approach may gain traction with some voters outside the base if the campaign is willing to let Romney be who he really is: A dispassionate, opportunistic, deal-making pragmatist. A man you could do business with, but probably not the friend you would meet for a beer – or in Romney's case a soda – after a grueling day of work. Someone you would go to for financial advice, but not someone you would fish a farm pond with.

Meanwhile, the former governor's awkward speeches and clumsy attempts to adopt an everyman persona are falling on deaf ears. The public isn't buying the revamped image Team Romney is trying to sell. It's too scripted, too forced, too mechanical, too a lot of things.

If there is one thing American's don't like, it's a fake. And when Romney talks to a crowd clad in blue jeans and a workingman-like shirt, he just doesn't look natural. Instead, he looks like somebody who is trying way too hard to play a part that's alien to him.

If he is going to have any chance at beating the president – and personally, I hope he doesn't – Romney has to adopt a new, daring strategy: he needs to be himself.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

ObamaCare is a lemon repair job

If you take your car to the mechanic, and he hands you a bill for twice the cost of the estimate, your reaction is one of rage. Sure, a couple of extra dollars would not have been maddening; but double what you had been quoted? That's irresponsible and, frankly, bad business.

Well, President Obama has handed the American people a bill for his health care law that is nearly twice its original cost. According to the latest Congressional Budget Office estimate, the President's health care law is now expected to cost \$1.76 trillion over the next decade, compared to the \$940 billion the American people were told.

How did they lowball this estimate during consideration of ObamaCare? Pure gimmickery.

Republicans who were in Congress when the law passed knew this would happen and voted against the law. But the President certainly did not convey this expensive fact to the American people.

As *The Washington Examiner* appropriately noted, the cost estimate used in 2010 included only six years of ObamaCare as law because the budget office only uses a 10-year window and ObamaCare does not officially kick in until 2014. Three years later, we now have a score for nine years of having ObamaCare in



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

law, and the numbers are not pretty.

It's like your mechanic estimating your repair bill at six hours knowing that he will need ten, all the while telling you that you are getting ten hours worth of work for six, and then handing you a bill for twice as much when he finishes.

But the "new" bad news does not stop there.

Additionally, the budget office calculated that as many as 20 million Americans could lose their employer-based health insurance as a result of the law. Surveys since ObamaCare was passed have shown that many employers plan on reducing or cutting altogether the benefits they offer their employees because of the burdens imposed by ObamaCare. It is actually cheaper for them to pay the fine for not providing health insurance than it is to offer their employees a plan that meets the ObamaCare requirements. Who can blame them?

With fewer people able to rely on their employers as a source of health insurance, more people will have to rely on Medicaid. Even though the program already under-delivers for our most vulnerable citizens, it is now expected to cover many middle-class Americans.

Underlying the revisions is the fact that the original projections banked on President Obama's economy succeeding. We all know it has not. A trillion-dollar experiment – the President's stimulus – was supposed to keep unemployment below 8 percent; such levels have not been seen since before the stimulus became law. The budget office now anticipates that economic growth will stall, keeping wages and salaries low, and forcing more Americans to have to rely on the government for their health care coverage.

When your mechanic and his toolbox fail you, you find another garage. ObamaCare is clearly not the repair America needs – nor wants. It is time to dump ObamaCare for a more patient-centered, market-driven health insurance system that actually delivers better health care for you.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents the First District of Kansas. He serves on the Veterans' Affairs, Budget, and Agriculture Committees.

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