



Other Viewpoints

State's 'fiscal cliff' all governor's fault?

Election Day, while a distracted public awaited the day's election results, a group of Kansas officials announced that the state was about to fall into a deep financial hole.

The numbers announced by the Consensus Estimating Group, while not unexpected, are shockingly bad. The state is projected to receive \$707 million less in revenues next year than it is spending.

Part of that hole could be filled by spending down a reserve fund of \$470 million, although extinguishing the reserve balance to meet routine expenses is a sure sign of a fiscally ill state. Even with that contingency, after factoring in some new budget assumptions, analysts anticipate the state's leaders will have to find about \$328 million in either cuts or new revenues to come up with a balanced spending plan for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

That strikes fear in the hearts of school superintendents, university leaders, state workers and the people who care for the state's disabled and vulnerable citizens. They have weathered cuts and shortages for years.

Not everyone was dismayed by the findings. Giddy with election-night victories, some conservative Republicans told reporters they'd like to cut taxes – and thus revenues – even more. Talk about a state of denial.

Kansas' financial wound is self-inflicted. Gov. Sam Brownback and conservatives in the Legislature this year sharply cut income tax rates, despite warnings that expected business growth could not make up lost revenue.

The cuts will cost the state about \$400 million in next year's budget and \$4.5 billion over the next six.

Compounding the problem is the scheduled rollback of a one-cent sales tax increase that Brownback's predecessor, Democratic Gov. Mark Parkinson, signed into law to get the state through the worst of the Great Recession. Unless the Legislature extends the sales tax, the state will lose \$262 million a year beginning in July.

The obvious fix is for Brownback and lawmakers to raise income tax rates when the Legislature resumes in January. But that is virtually certain not to happen.

Apart from that, there are no good options. Here are some possibilities:

- An extension of the entire one-cent sales tax. (Four-tenths will remain in any case, for highway projects.)
- Spending the reserve fund down to zero.
- Borrowing from designated accounts, such as the highway fund.
- More cuts. Conservatives say it can be done. But schools have been laying off employees and cutting programs for years.

Lawmakers who think more cuts are possible either have no conscience or are operating in blissful ignorance. The state is in bad shape, and without a show of courage, it will quickly get worse.

– The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press



"NOW WHERE ON EARTH DID YOU GET THE IDEA THAT IT WOULD BE OK FOR A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL WITH ACCESS TO SENSITIVE INFORMATION TO HAVE AN EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIR?"

First turkey died laughing?

How did the turkey reserve its place on our traditional Thanksgiving table?

That bird is what the pilgrims feasted upon, according to fact and fable.

You've all heard how our ancestors hunted this bird. But here is the real story – the turkey scoop.

Seems our forefathers remembered to take their muskets that day, but forgot to take their ammunition. As the men marched toward the woods, they took one addition, an Indian scout.

You guessed it. To take the scout along was tradition. Besides, the pilgrims needed someone who knew where the turkeys were.

As the story played out, the great white hunters spotted an elk. It was a fine animal for a Thanksgiving feast. It sported a trophy rack, no doubt.

Several hunters took aim, pulled back their triggers and clicked. They soon discovered their muskets had no shot.

This realization made them sick to their stomachs.

What could they do?

What would they have for their Thanksgiving feast?

On what would they sup that night?

One wise, or unwise, lad suggested stewing their shoes.

"I'll gobble them up," he said.

Well, the rest of the hunting party was in no mood for jokes. One of the hunters threw the lad's musket into the field just as an old Tom turkey – who had heard the gobble – popped up his head.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

The critter's fate was sealed. What senses he had were knocked out that day. The turkey was plucked, stuffed and roasted.

In exchange for his silence, the scout was invited to eat while the hunters boasted and embellished the story about the day's hunt.

They truthfully said, "We didn't fire a shot."

Those early-day hunters had no need for ammunition. That's why today turkeys are raised on farms – to shoot them would break with tradition.

On a more historical note, Thanksgiving, or Thanksgiving Day, is a traditional North American holiday which is a form of harvest festival.

Although that early feast is considered by many to be the very first Thanksgiving celebration, it was actually in keeping with a long tradition of celebrating the harvest and giving thanks for a successful bounty of crops.

The date and location of the first Thanksgiving celebration is a topic of discussion, though the earliest attested Thanksgiving was on Sept. 8, 1565, in what is now St. Augustine, Fla.

The traditional "first Thanksgiving" is venerated as having occurred at the site of Plym-

outh Plantation in 1621.

What foods topped the table at the first harvest feast?

Historians aren't completely certain about the full bounty, but it's safe to say the pilgrims weren't gobbling up pumpkin pie or playing with their mashed potatoes. It's a relatively safe bet the only two items on the menu for sure were venison and wild fowl.

Today, Thanksgiving is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November in the United States. Thanksgiving is usually a gathering of friends and/or family. At this time, you say all your thanks and wishes.

In our country, certain foods are traditionally served at Thanksgiving meals. First and foremost, baked or roasted turkey is usually the featured item on any Thanksgiving table (so much so that Thanksgiving is sometimes referred to as "Turkey Day").

Stuffing, mashed potatoes with gravy, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, other fall vegetables and pumpkin pie are commonly associated with Thanksgiving dinner.

All of these dishes are actually native to the Americas or were introduced as a new food source to the Europeans when they arrived.

Have a Happy Thanksgiving and don't forget to count your blessings.

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

Gun lobby wrong on arms treaty

I've never been fond of the National Rifle Association despite my opposition to strict gun-control laws.

The powerful gun lobby's rhetoric and absolutist stances often go beyond mere gun-rights advocacy and enter the realm of unabashed zealotry.

The group's opposition to efforts to craft a global treaty to regulate the arms trade has only solidified my distrust. It's supposedly based on a fear that the treaty will include regulation of civilian firearms.

"It's time for all Americans to sound the alarm on this treacherous new assault on U.S. sovereignty and join the group in this all-out fight to oppose any ATT (International Arms Trade Treaty) that includes civilian firearms within its scope," said Wayne LaPierre, executive president of the group, at meeting at the United Nations headquarters.

LaPierre is a peculiar fellow, prone to vainglorious statements and seeing conspiracies around every corner. Yet, given the massive power the group wields in Washington, the gun lobby's opposition cannot be taken lightly. Furthermore, Americans are often taken in by the group's rhetoric because most Americans correctly believe that law-abiding citizens should have the right to bear arms.

But, in this case, the group's knee-jerk hostility could prevent the passage of an important treaty that has the potential to prevent future senseless acts of armed violence. The main reason LaPierre's fear of a treaty infringing on American's Second Amendment rights is unfounded is because the U.S. Constitution trumps international law. This should allevi-



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

ate any concerns he has about the U.N. taking guns away from law-abiding U.S. citizens.

Today, the trade of weapons and ammunition has fewer international restrictions than the trade of bananas, according to the international relief and development program Oxfam America (I am a monthly donor). Oxfam reports that about 95 percent of the weapons most often used in conflicts in Africa – derivatives of the Kalashnikov rifle – come from outside the continent.

"I strongly believe that control of small arms will massively reduce the killings going on in Africa," said Bishop Elias Taban, president of the Sudan Evangelical Alliance. "When I release my spear, that is all I have. I have to run away. But with a machine gun, I alone can terrorize a village of 1,000 people."

Marie Kanyobayo, the head of an organization partnering with Oxfam in the eastern province of the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo that helps educate women and families about their rights, said she is no longer able to travel on her own because of the abundant supply of weapons in the region, some available for as little as \$5.

Citizens in African countries are not the only ones hurt by the unregulated flow of arms. Stu-

art Platt, a retired U.S. Navy rear admiral who has joined Oxfam to push for an arms control treaty, explained why the unregulated international arms trade also imperils the lives of U.S. troops overseas.

"For those who worry about the return of our young in flag-draped caskets," he said, "I know the treaty will reduce the number of Americans harmed in future years."

Now that the election is over, working with member countries to craft a global treaty that regulates the arms trade should be a major priority for President Barack Obama's administration. The final product won't be perfect, and the involvement of countries like Iran will probably dilute the ban's overall effectiveness, but any effort to lessen the horrific consequences of armed violence would be well worth the effort.

It's long past time for the international community to take steps to prevent the tragic consequences of the unregulated flow of arms.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

