



Other Viewpoints

Fund education beyond high school

If Gov. Sam Brownback is sincere in saying he wants to protect education as the state experiences a "hard dip" in revenues, that commitment shouldn't come to a halt at 12th grade. So it's worrisome that his budget office has mentioned an 8 percent cut for higher education in its planning for a fiscal 2014 budget.

Brownback told the Kansas Board of Regents in November that he doubted lawmakers would increase base operating funds for higher education, though there might be dollars for specific projects.

Fred Logan, vice chairman of the regents, told *The Eagle* editorial board recently that he's "guardedly optimistic" about Brownback's budget, praising the governor's recent initiatives focused on technical education and engineering and his leadership on the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility at Kansas State University. Brownback also aided the University of Kansas' successful effort to achieve its National Cancer Institute designation and has other good ideas for higher ed, recently calling on the regents system to encourage more startups and become the intellectual center for policymaking against human trafficking.

So an 8 percent cut in state funding for higher education, or about \$50 million, would signal an unexpected change in priorities. It also would differ sharply from the regents' requested 6.2 percent increase, which would include 1 percent raises for 18,000 employees, \$2.8 million to improve the Wichita campus of the KU School of Medicine and \$1 million of the \$75 million needed for a new health education building at the KU Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan.

The problem is that the income-tax cuts are projected to open a \$295 million hole in the state budget for fiscal 2014 and cause more problems after that. A lot of state spending will need to be trimmed in the next few budget years and, to their credit, administrators across the regents system have demonstrated they know how to increase private funding and curtail spending.

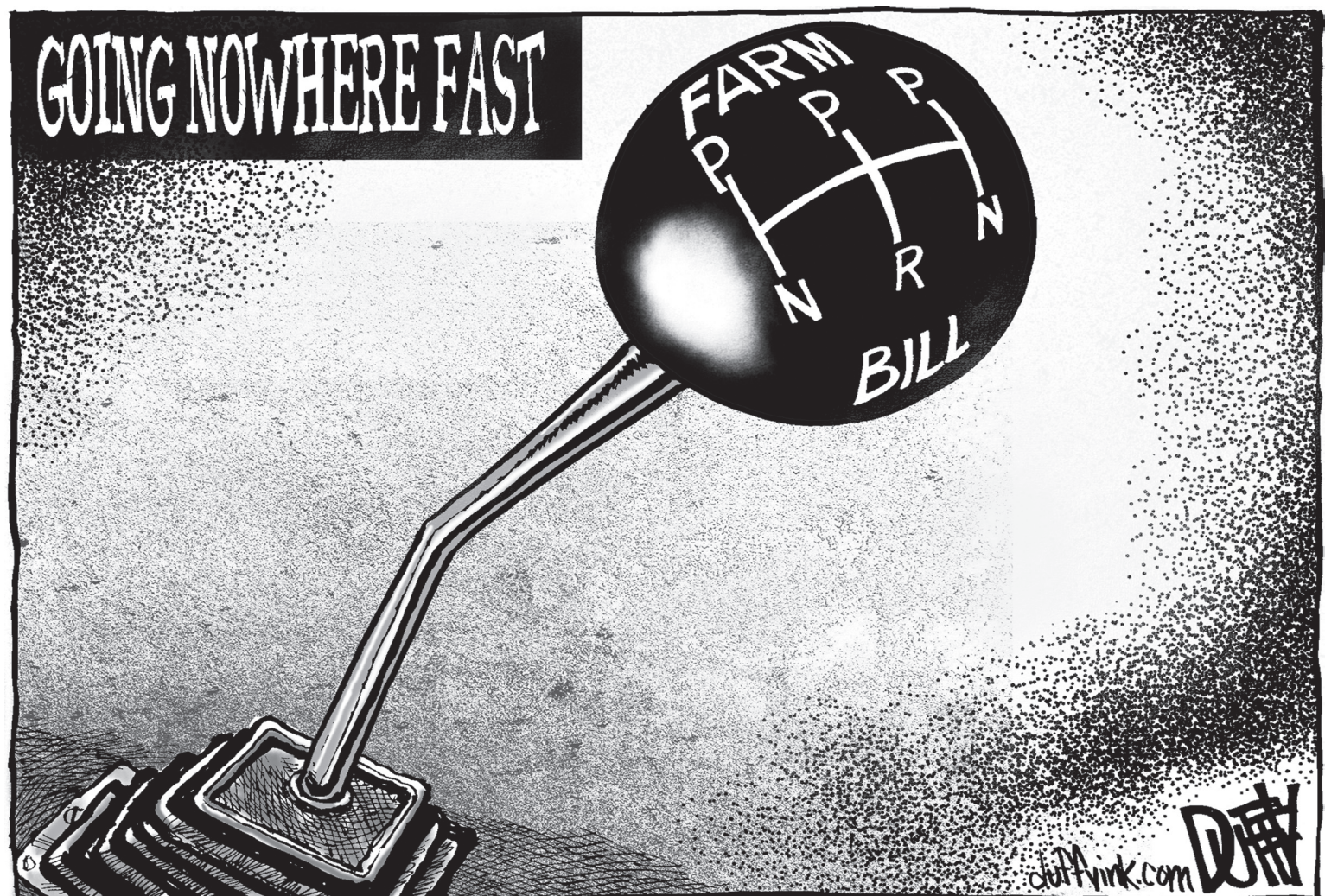
But the public doesn't want more higher-ed cuts: in the 2012 Kansas Speaks survey, conducted by the Docking Institute of Public Affairs at Fort Hays State University, 47.2 percent of respondents favored keeping state funding for colleges and universities at current levels, while 37.4 percent wanted to see it increased.

The 8 percent cut is part of a budget-reduction scenario, which is part of the standard budget process for a governor. The regents have appealed, and it may not end up in the budget proposal the governor presents to the 2013 Legislature next month. If it does, though, lawmakers should think better of it.

It would be shortsighted to cut state support for higher education when Kansas' recovering economy will need all the highly trained, career-ready, critically thinking college graduates it can get.

And as Logan told the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors this fall, "There is no better pro-growth strategy for Kansas than having a strong system of higher education."

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



Resolution: don't drink and drive

Uncle Hickory made a New Year's resolution. He swore he would quit drinking. He had been driving while he was drunk and had one of the biggest scares of his life. He claimed the angel of death had come for him. He was trembling as he told us about it.

He had been to a New Year's Eve party, and the celebration was quite lively. There were many kinds of alcohol, and Uncle Hickory was hard pressed to find one he didn't like. He sampled all of them, from the lightest beer to the hardest vodka. Of course, he claimed he only had a little of each.

Once the old year had rolled away, and everyone had toasted the new one, it was time to head for home. Uncle Hickory wobbled his way to his car, feeling happy and light, hardly noticing the cold at all.

It had snowed heavily the previous two days, and, while they had been celebrating, the wind had kicked up, causing huge drifts. Uncle Hickory's old car plowed through the drifts, sliding back and forth as he went.

"Suddenly the road smoothed out," Uncle Hickory said, "and the car quit bucking and sliding. That was when it happened. I was traveling carefully along at about 30 miles per hour when I saw him approaching in my rear view mirror. He was floating toward me, all draped in black, closing the distance between us quickly."

Uncle Hickory shook visibly as he continued. "I knew who he was, and I knew he was coming for me. Even though it was slick and

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dangerous, I gunned the engine. I reached 50 miles per hour, then looked in my rear view mirror. The gap between us was still getting smaller."

Uncle Hickory took some deep breaths, trying to calm himself. "As he was almost on my bumper I put the pedal to the floor, rather to die from a wreck than to have that ghostly demon take me away. The speedometer climbed to 80 then to 90. I looked straight ahead, afraid to take my eyes off of the road. Finally, I glanced in my rear view mirror and no longer saw him. I felt a surge of relief flood over me when..."

Uncle Hickory paused, the blood draining from his face as the memory came back. We all leaned forward anxious for the rest of the story.

"Just at the moment I thought I'd lost him," he continued, "there was a knock on my window. I turned, and there he was right by my door. I looked at my speedometer, and it said I was going over 100 miles per hour, and still he stayed right there. I knew at that point I only had one chance."

"What?" we asked.

"What?" he responded. "I'll tell you what. I slammed on the brakes and then tore my way across the car and out the passenger side. I plowed through the snow and across the field, running for the light of a house I could see in the distance. I never looked back until I made it safely there. Once inside I looked over my shoulder, and he was gone."

A few days later, Bart, a friend of mine, stopped to visit with me. "By the way, how is your Uncle Hickory?"

"He's OK," I answered. "Why do you ask?" "Well, I was driving home New Year's Day after working the night shift, and I saw his car off the road, stuck deep in a field. I got out to check on him, and the closer I got the harder he gunned his engine. When I got right up beside his car, I knocked on his window. When I did, he screamed and tore out the other side of his car and took off running across the field."

Bart paused, the concern showing in his face. "I tried to catch up to him, but I've never seen anyone run that fast, and I finally gave up. I just wanted to make sure he made it home safely."

"He did," I replied. "But if we keep this just between you and me, he just might remain sober."

Daris Howard, award-winning, syndicated columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at daris@darishoward.com; or go to his website at www.darishoward.com.

Tea Party offers Fiscal Cliff solution

What most do not realize is that Dec. 31 is but the first fiscal cliff – the little one.

Given the inability of both parties to deal with this one, although they have known about it for almost two years, how can we have faith in their ability to prevent the ultimate collapse of the economy if immediate and drastic changes are not made?

Neither party really represents limited constitutional government and both are addicted to debt. It is like an addict prescribing his own detox program. Consequently, Freedom Works, a Tea Party affiliate, selected 12 of their own members and through the Internet invited 150,000 members to make suggestions on what should be done.

The Tea Party Debt Commission was formed to provide the federal government a solution. Its final report summarized the problem: "Our government is doing too many things it can't do well, or shouldn't do at all, with money it doesn't have. We are borrowing 43 cents of every dollar we spend..."

The Tea Party Plan cuts, caps and balances federal spending. The budget is balanced in four years, without tax hikes. Federal spending is reduced by \$9.7 trillion over 10 years. The plan shrinks the federal government from 24 percent of Gross Domestic Product to about 16 percent. Finally it stops the growth of the debt and begins paying it down. Within a generation there would be no national debt. Bold indeed!

How do they do this? First, stop duplication of services. They note that the "Government Accountability Office counted no fewer than 47 job training programs, 56 financial literacy programs, 80 economic development programs, 18 food assistance programs, 20 programs for the homeless, 82 teacher-quality programs spread across 10 agencies and more than 2,100 data centers. All told, we have nearly 2,200 federal programs." Government is bloated, inefficient and wasteful.

Second, repeal services that we can no longer afford and/or that are not authorized within the Constitution. These goals include repealing ObamaCare, eliminating four unconstitutional, costly, inefficient Cabinet agencies: Energy, Education, Commerce and Housing and Urban Development – and reducing or privatizing many others, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Transportation Security Administration, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Their report calls for ending farm subsidies,

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government student loans and foreign aid to countries that don't support us – luxuries we can no longer afford.

Third, entitlement programs must be incentivized to give donors more for their money. Boldly they opened the unfunded liabilities door – the door neither party dares to open as it could destroy career politicians and political parties. They concluded that they could make Social Security "sustainable and actually improve benefits by harnessing the power of compound interest." They noted, "Three decades ago, Chile embarked on a bold transformation of its retirement security system. Today, that system (SMART Accounts) is the envy of the world, giving seniors far better benefits than the old, government-run system ever did."

Shortly thereafter three counties in Texas adopted the SMART Accounts program in favor of personal accounts and thus those retiring today do so "with much more money and have significantly more generous death and disability supplemental benefits than do Social Security participants." Moreover, they "face no long term unfunded pension liabilities." The commission recommends that "all state and local governments should have the option of opting into the 'Galveston model.'"

The Tea Party Debt Commission saw the Medicare program as outdated, inefficient and corrupt and recommended six major changes that would save, they predicted, \$676,000,000 the first year and \$2,030,843,000,000 in 10 years. These changes are first "let individuals opt out of Medicare under ... 'Retirement Freedom Act.'" Second, let all new Medicare beneficiaries enroll in the Federal Employees' Health Benefit Program introduced by Senator Rand Paul as the "Congressional Health Care for Seniors Act." Third, reduce Medicare subsidies to actual cost of hospitals' graduate medical education. Fourth, maintain Medicare's physician payment rates at the 2011 level. Fifth, convert the open-ended Medic-

aid program into a capped block grant to the states. And sixth, call on all states to reform their medical malpractice and product liability systems.

Opting into the same Medicare program the members of Congress use, the second Tea Party change recommended, is much better for participants because it "relies on competing private insurers ... has very little of the fraud and waste problems that plague today's outdated and poorly designed Medicare system." One wonders why Congress can make for themselves such a good system and leave us one with "between 10 and 20 percent of Medicare's \$450 billion annual budget being attributable to waste, fraud and abuse..." Moreover, it suspends pension contributions and cost-of-living adjustments when the budget is in deficit.

The new plan offers a rational transition to ownership of our own retirement and more control and choice over our health care.

Why did the government fail to accomplish the same thing – even behind closed doors? Their first concern is to protect their jobs and party. Outsiders, without a personal stake in the outcome, can see more and do more without the inevitable political wrangling.

Learn more and review the details of the Tea Party Debt Commission's recommendations by going to FreedomWorks.org/the-tea-party-budget.

Will Congress explore these changes with intent to make them? Not unless you demand that they do so.

Dr. Harold Pease has dedicated his career to studying the writings of the Founding Fathers and applying that knowledge to current events. He teaches at Taft College. To read more, go to www.LibertyUnderFire.org.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774 roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

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

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Janene Woodall - Advertising Representative
jwoodall@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

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