



Free Press Viewpoint

Filibuster reform overdue for Senate

We'd like to congratulate the U.S. Senate on getting bipartisan support for reforming the filibuster. A filibuster is a political obstruction tactic in which a piece of legislation can be blocked by a senator or series of senators speaking continuously on any topic they choose. Under Senate tradition, they keep the floor as long as they keep talking, and no other business can be conducted as long as they do. Only a two-thirds majority vote can end debate. For many years, neither party has held enough of a majority to end a filibuster on its own.

The filibuster actually dates back to ancient Rome, where it was used to obstruct Julius Caesar, though perhaps that is a positive example, as Caesar's imperial ambitions needed obstructing.

In the U.S. Senate, it is more often used as a threat so legislation that the minority doesn't support will never come to the floor.

Last week, Democrats and Republicans came together and approved new language for Senate rules that will, if passed, avoid filibusters. The Democrats pushed for broader reforms, such as changing the two-thirds majority rule to a simple 51 out of 100. Republicans argued that as the minority party, the filibuster was the only thing giving them leverage. What came out of the leadership's negotiations was a compromise.

The measure includes shortening the time delay for closure motions. Another provision says that if amendments offered aren't relevant to the legislation at hand, no supermajority vote is required to end a filibuster. It also limits debate on some presidential nominations.

This kind of bipartisan compromise is an encouraging sign from a Congress that has been mired in obstructionism for decades. On Monday, there was more encouraging news, that a bipartisan group in the Senate got together and created a framework for how to handle immigration reform for the coming year.

Not every senator is happy with these deals, of course. But isn't that the definition of a compromise, when no one goes home entirely happy, but something still gets accomplished?

Politicians always talk about ending the political gridlock in Washington. Perhaps this is finally a step in the right direction. Perhaps our leaders have finally got the message. Divided government is good, unless the important work goes by the wayside while the two sides fight. We can only hope they will keep up the good work.

— Kevin Bottrell, the Goodland Star-News

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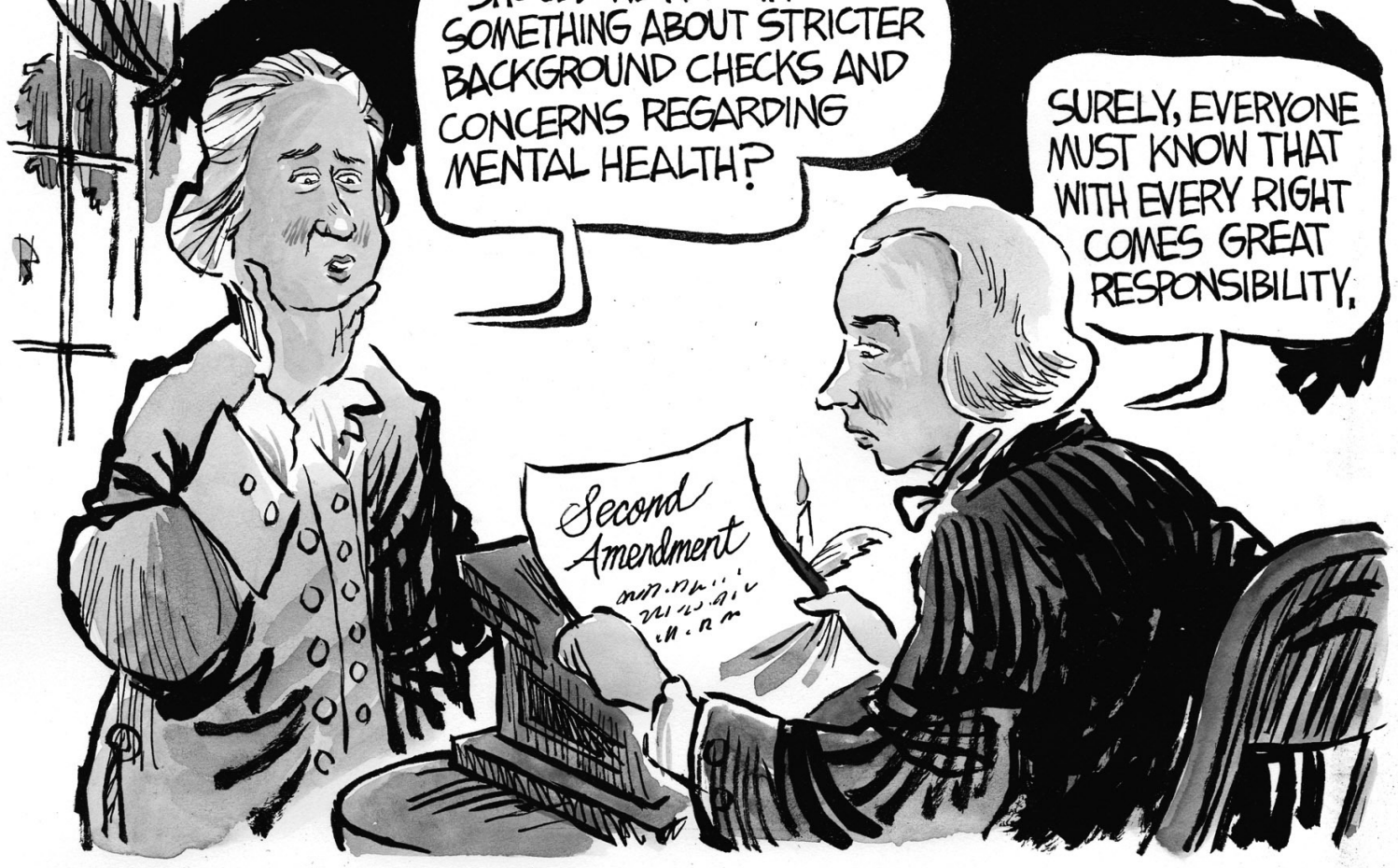
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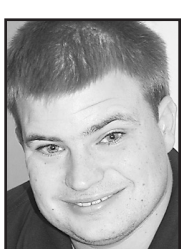
Ignore deficit hawks, focus on jobs

The deficit hawks never miss a chance to tell the American people Washington has a spending problem — I think they mumble the words “out-of-control spending” in their sleep.

Time and time again, they condemn the government's profligate spending habits and ominously warn that if things don't change, and change quickly — our children and our children's children and their children's children — will be left with a tsunami of debt that will render them unable to achieve their goals, or even enjoy the same success as their parents. Understandably, such extreme rhetoric elicits feelings of fear and apprehension from Americans who get their news on the fly.

Thanks to the deficit hawks ominous — and misperceived — clarion calls to action, the deficit has rocketed near the top of the charts in terms of important topics on the cable news channels and among legislators. So, despite the fact that the national unemployment rate still hovers at just under eight percent and the economy is still weak — the U.S. gross national product fell by one-tenth of a percent in the last three months of 2012 — the deficit scolds may still convince Congress to slash spending in a way that is bound to further impair economic growth.

While the U.S. does have a large federal deficit, that is entirely the result of the recession the country went into after the housing bubble burst and private demand plummeted. To counteract the worst consequences of the recession, government had to push through a



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

stimulus — although it should have been bigger and spent more wisely — and increase spending on things like unemployment insurance and food stamps. Without that increased government spending, the economy would be in far worse shape today and unemployment would be higher.

Despite the fiscal hawks' overblown rhetoric about out-of-control government spending, even Jan Hatzius of Goldman Sachs forecasts the federal deficit will be below three percent of the gross national product by 2015; hardly a terrifying number. While I suspect some of the fiscal hawks' real agenda is not to shrink the deficit, but to roll back the accomplishments of the New Deal and the Great Society, I do believe that some conservative Democrats and Republicans genuinely believe that shrinking the deficit is the most important issue of our time.

Some elected officials were even willing to crater the economy by voting against raising the debt ceiling. While I don't question the sincerity of their convictions, the medicine they're offering America is precisely what we

don't need right now.

To get an idea of what effect austere measures would have on our economy, one only has to look at the horrible economic situation in Britain. In 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron brushed off warnings from economists that austere measures would throw his country back into a recession and went along with his plan to slash spending while the country's economy was still weak. The result has been disastrous for his country.

“Sure enough, the sudden severe medicine cut short Britain's economic recovery; and threw the nation back into recession,” economist and *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman wrote.

Britain's dire economic situation should have completely discredited the deficit hawks on this side of the Atlantic. Their policy solutions were tried and they massively failed and there is no good reason for our government to enact the same counterproductive policies as the Brits. President Barack Obama and company should worry less about the federal deficit and more about the jobs deficit.

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.

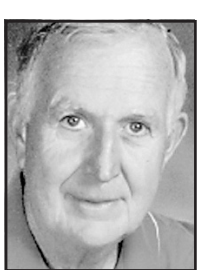
Pay-go rules keep reins on budget

Rules. They're important in every aspect of our lives. Rules can give those in powerful political positions the opportunity to run things as they see them. An excellent example of rules being used to one's advantage is something called “pay-go.”

Pay-go is a provision that allows no floor amendment to increase the amount of expenditures in an appropriations bill unless a like amount is reduced from some other part of the bill. An example would be that if you wanted to make an amendment to increase base state aid for education, you would have to propose deleting a matching dollar figure from another area, say delete that amount from health care. One group would love you; the other would be upset.

A positive of that plan is that it keeps one political party from proposing amendments that they know will not be accepted. In the past, this would be done so a politician could say they proposed a great plan but the other side voted against it.

The House of Representatives has had pay-go in effect the last two years. It gives the Appropriations Committee a lot of power, as you only need 12 members to pass an appropriations bill out of 23. The Republicans are cho-



Ward Cassidy

• This week in Topeka

sen by the speaker of the House. The number of Republicans is based on the percentage of Republicans in the House. The minority chair chooses the members from his party. This year, there are 93 House Republicans and 32 Democrats. The makeup of the committee is 17 Republicans and 6 Democrats.

This year, the Senate also adopted pay-go. The Senate has a make-up of 32 Republicans and eight Democrats. Susan Wagle, the first woman to be President of the Senate, made a rule change that allows her to be solely in charge of appointments to Senate committees. The Senate appropriations committee is known as Ways and Means. There are only nine members. If you have followed my logic, this makes the Senate president the second most powerful politician in the state, as Sen.

Wagle will only need five votes to control spending.

Personally, I had a very exciting week. My Education Budget Committee passed out two bills to the House. Both dealt with transfer of lands and involved the University of Kansas and Emporia State University.

Next week we begin budget hearings. I have 17 budgets in committee that will total 62 of the state general fund budget.

I was given the honor of presiding over the full House on Thursday. It was exciting to sit in the speaker's chair and lead the House for a day.

A judicial selection bill passed out of the Senate and will be coming to the House. I am guessing there will not be a vote for several weeks.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering the northwest part of Thomas County (including Colby), plus Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties. This is his second term in the Legislature, and he is chair of the Education Budget Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

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