



Free Press Viewpoint

Sequester path uncharted territory

The country will be stepping down an uncharted path this month as federal officials try to figure out how to cut 8.5 to 13 percent from their programs.

So far, despite dire predictions, no one has much noticed. The stock market hasn't bottomed out, the government keeps chugging along. Later, reports say, government employees may have to take one unpaid day off each week, state programs could be cut, the flow of federal money may slow and the Department of Defense says it will lay off many civilian workers and contractors.

This was never supposed to happen, of course. When both parties agreed to the plan last year, everyone said it was too unpalatable ever to be allowed to go into effect. Then when the deadline came up two months ago, the two sides could only agree to put it off again.

The deal to keep things rolling at the end of the year covered tax breaks for nearly everyone and some of President Obama's tax hikes for the rich, though the 2-point reduction in the Social Security tax rate nearly everyone enjoyed was allowed to expire.

At the time, the Republicans said they wouldn't discuss any more tax increases. Apparently, they meant it.

Last week, Washington writer Bob Woodward reported that it was the White House that first suggested the plan and agreed to it. Now, the president wants to blame it all on the Republicans, who he says defend tax breaks for the rich.

Yet they tell us now, taxes on the rich are the highest they have been in half a century.

Who's right?
Who's wrong?
Who knows?

Blame it on a system where posture and position are more important than results. A system where inaction often produces the desired results, where no one wants to give an inch for compromise, not when they think they have the upper hand.

Today, it's Mr. Obama and the Democrats who think they have the better hand. The Republicans, in control of the House of Representatives, have to posture and delay.

Where once the Democrats had promised to negotiate program cuts, since the election they say they need more tax increases to keep spending up. The Republicans say they aren't willing to talk about that.

Meanwhile, federal workers, states and people who depend on federal programs all are waiting to see what happens. No doubt, many will be hurt as this progresses.

Across-the-board cuts, by their nature, are rough, unpredictable, messy. But there's been no drama. The government has not shut down.

The spending problem remains. The government has been borrowing 40 cents of every dollar it spends. Something has to change there, and if it takes sequestration, as they're calling the mandatory cuts, to bring an agreement, then maybe that's what has to happen.

It's way past time to talk about the issue. — Steve Haynes

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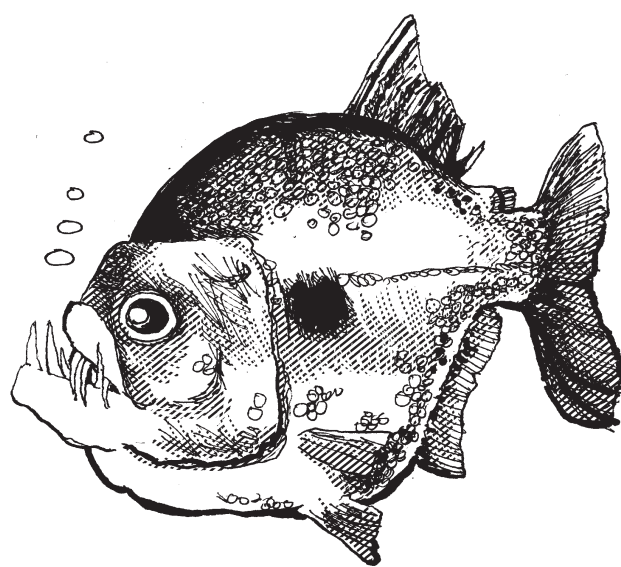
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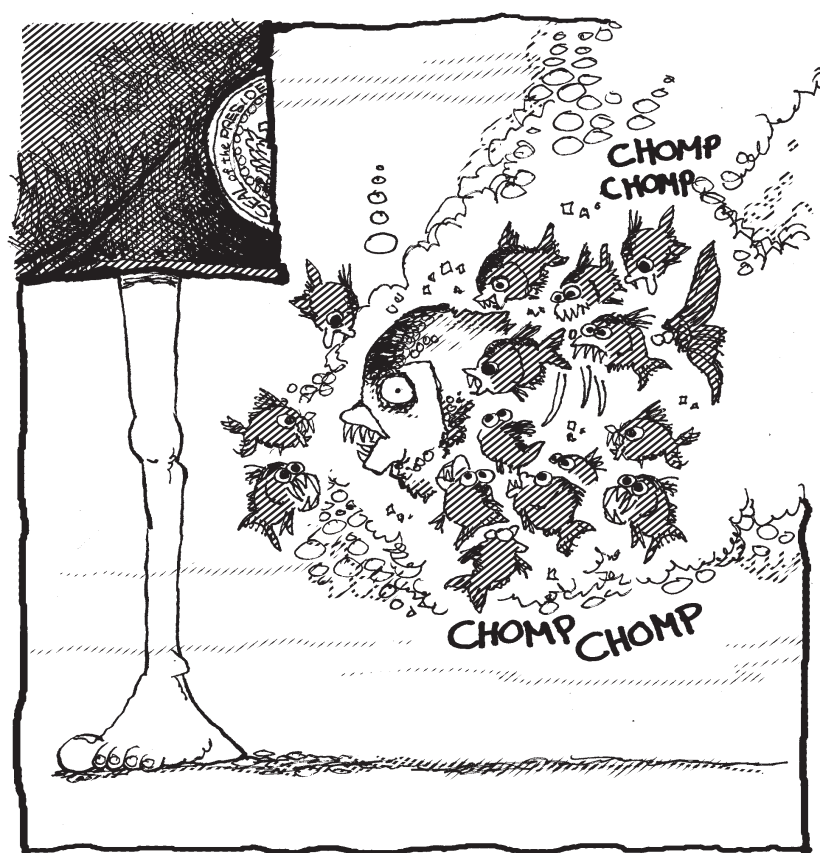
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Bob Woodward
Watergate-1972



Bob Woodward
Sequestergate-2013

Kitchen destruction comes in threes

We don't break much crockery at our house and we don't tend to be hard on other peoples', but for some reason, we wreaked havoc on the dishes while on vacation in late January.

Let me assure you, I didn't break anything. Steve only broke a couple of dishes. Our friend Merle was tough on the cookware, however.

It all started innocently enough.

Merle put on a couple of eggs to boil for lunch, then Steve said we were supposed to go over to the restaurant to eat. The resort was buying lunch, and in exchange, they gave us a short sales promotion. We do this every year, and so far they haven't figured out that we're about 80 lunches ahead by the time we and our friends all belly up to the buffet.

Anyway, Merle thought he was turning the stove off. Instead, he just turned it down.

As we returned to our condo, we noticed smoke in the air and wondered what was burning.

We found out soon enough as we opened the door — eggs and a saucepan.

No harm was done except to the eggs — they were way overcooked — and the blacked pan.

Steve comforted Merle with the story of the green beans he had toasted in his grandmother's antique wood-handled pan when the kids



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

were still home. He turned them on, we went to church and the pan has never been the same.

A couple of days after the egg incident, Steve, Merle and I all ended up juggling dishes as Steve tried to get a plate off the shelf where they were stored.

All the serving pieces — plates, cups, saucers, bowls and glasses — were stored on a cement ledge about five feet above the tiled floor and two feet above the tiled countertop. While it's attractive, I've always thought this was a recipe for disaster. However, in almost 20 years of staying in this condo, we've only broken one mixing bowl, which the children dropped 10 years or so ago.

But this year, Steve reached for a plate, which was placed behind the stacked cups and saucers. He lifted it but not quite high enough to clear the other dishes. That created an ava-

lanche of dishes, saucers and cups. We all jumped and grabbed, losing only one cup and one saucer.

Looking back, I'm amazed that was all that we broke. I'd love to have a video of us all doing the dishes-and-disaster dance.

The third thing — there's always a third thing — was a glass plate that was under a drinking glass in the bathroom. Merle got up in the middle of the night to get a drink and the plate stuck to the wet glass until it was way up in the air.

That brought us all out of bed.

I admitted our losses to the front desk, but we were only charged \$8 for a new saucepan. I figured we lucked out all the way around.

Since we'd only broken one piece of crockery in the first 20 years, I figure it'll be awhile before we're due to destroy any more. And that should be good for a few more free lunches.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansan.com

Low admission standards hurt everyone

Qualified admissions standards for Kansas students are being undermined. Watered-down and vocational units are being added to the lists of high school courses that meet standards for entering Kansas Board of Regents universities.

In the 1980s, under state Education Commissioner Lee Droegemueller, only two science courses were required to graduate with a Kansas high school diploma. They included "food science" (home economics) and "tech prep" (shop). Because barely 40 percent of high school graduates attended college, Droegemueller defended these vocational courses as science because they served the majority of students.

When Andy Tompkins became commissioner, that soon changed. Home ec and shop no longer fulfilled the science requirements. But Kansas still had broad and shallow courses such as "general science" and "physical science." And they often were taught by teachers with little science background.

The Board of Regents implemented a Qualified Admissions curriculum effective for college freshmen entering in the fall of 2001. It required three natural-science courses from among biology, chemistry, physics, earth science and technology — and one must be chemistry or physics. Watered-down and vocational courses were excluded; this was a curriculum for the college-bound student who need a solid science base to take college-level courses.

By July of 2003, the state Board of Education had eliminated teaching endorsements for general and physical science. Kansas science teachers are now prepared in depth in biology, chemistry, physics or earth science.

Among the many well-intentioned but mostly disastrous education reforms that have crippled education since 2000, the Qualified Admissions criteria stand out as the single genuine step forward that has maintained rigor in the science classroom. The quality of a class is determined by the training and skills of the



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

teacher. For one short decade, Kansas headed toward providing a solid curriculum with solid teachers licensed in the topics they taught.

But starting last year and continuing into next year, the high school courses that qualify for the Regents natural science curriculum are being watered down. And there is absolutely nothing in the recently revised curriculum to justify this.

Last year, "physical sciences" was added back to the list of approved sciences. This next year will see the addition of "animal science" and "integrated science" (another term for general science). These are vocational-prep, not college-prep, courses. By focusing on applied concepts, a course such as "animal science" lacks many of the core concepts of biology, from DNA and molecular biology to ecology. It does not prepare students for college biology. And it will usually be taught by a teacher not licensed in biology, another violation of the original requirements.

How are these watered-down and vocational courses getting washed into the college curriculum if they were not specifically part of the Regents-approved list? The answer is something called course codes.

The state department assigned all high school courses "course code" numbers based on a federal checklist. General "integrated science" is 03201, plant science is 18051 and animal science is 18101. While the course descriptions clearly indicate these are simplistic or vocational courses not for college-bound students, state staff appear to be using the coding to justify adding them anyway.

By translating the courses into federal numbers and then translating the numbers back, we are returning to the 1980s. Again, federal standardization replaces intelligent decision making. It is similar to Mark Twain's attempt to translate a story into French, and then use a dictionary to translate it back into English again — it was a hilarious disaster. But there is nothing funny about using federal course codes to defy commonsense.

The greatest irony of all is that the education commissioner who oversaw the elimination of vocational courses as science credits is now president of the Board of Regents, heading the agency that is returning these courses back into the college prep curriculum.

If we add animal science today, will we add "home ec" as science tomorrow?

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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