

from our viewpoint...

Budget politics gets close to shut down

Political gamesmanship at its best and worst is underway in Washington as both Republicans and Democrats try to wrestle with the country's mounting debt, but at the same time trying to paint the other side as the villain in the story.

Republican Speaker of the House, Rep. John Boehner said, "When we say we are going to cut spending, read my lips: We are going to cut spending." is reminiscent of the infamous phrase from President George W. Bush from 1988 "read my lips no new taxes" and he had to eat those when he raised taxes.

Boehner and the Republican majority in the House are making their first stab at cutting the budget for this year passing a bill on Saturday to cut \$61 billion – a bit below the announced \$100 billion back in November – but the cuts are made in such a way it is unlikely the Senate, which is narrowly controlled by Democrats will approve the bill.

The major problem is the approaching deadline of Friday, March 4, when the continuing resolution approved in December runs out and the prospect looms of a federal government shut down.

Boehner and most of his party don't want to see the government shut down, but many of the new members who have ties to the Tea Party are pushing for more drastic cuts and are more willing to see the shut down happen feeling it is the kind of brinksmanship it will take to get their stop spending message become the priority.

Another short-term extension to keep the government funding at the existing level for another 90 days is not in Boehner's plans, and he has said he would not allow such an extension to reach the House floor.

For their part the Democrats are suggesting other budget cuts, but as is usually said in many negotiations the two sides are far apart.

"It looks like Boehner has come close to freezing himself into a position in which a government shutdown is inevitable," said Thomas Mann, a congressional scholar at The Brookings Institution.

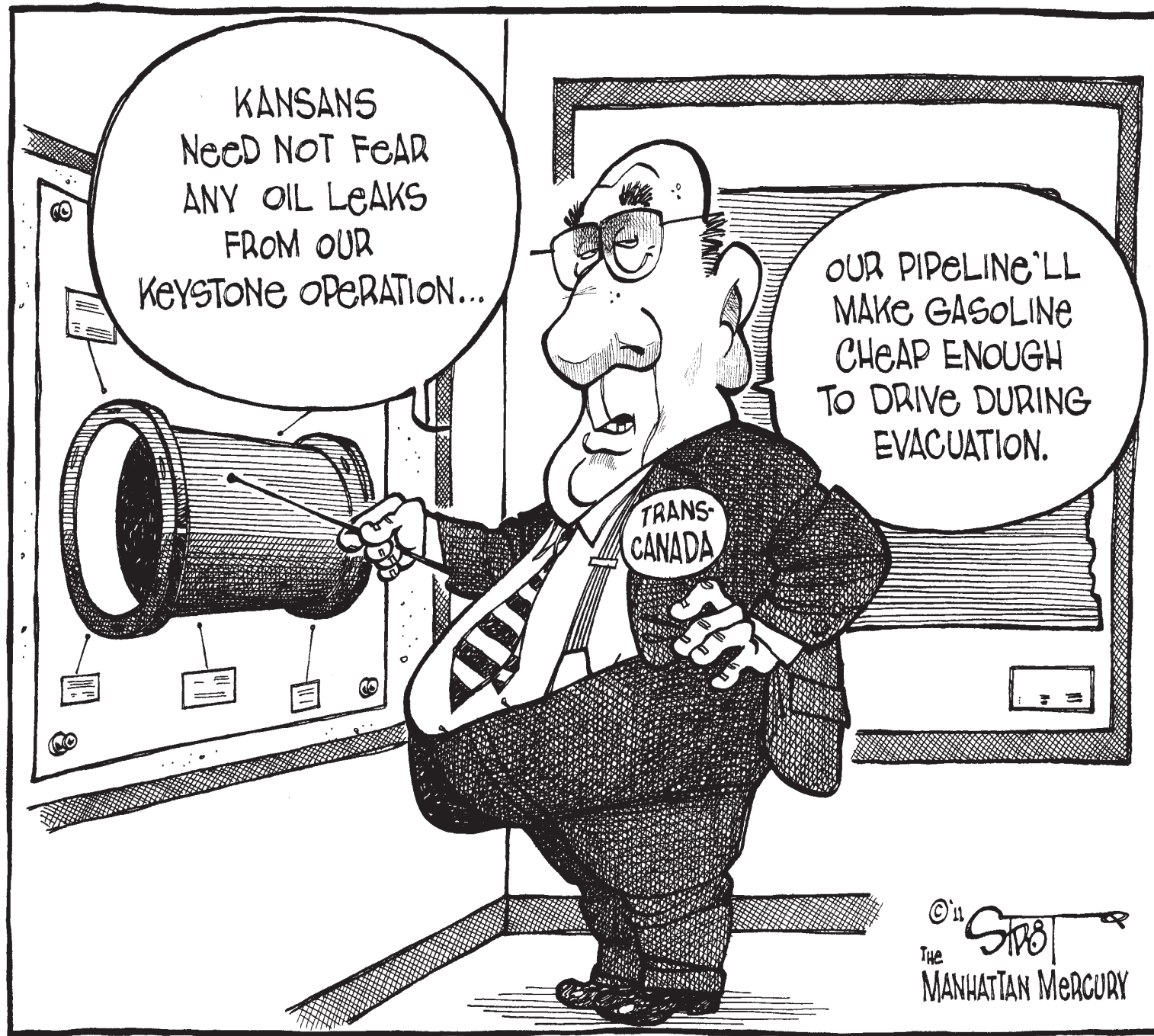
Mann pointed out the threat of a shutdown comes as Republicans fight to secure cuts to a relatively small part of the budget. The cuts aren't to the large programs – Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security – that make up two-thirds of the budget. They are to non-defense discretionary spending, which totals about 12.3 percent of the budget.

Both parties know the big issues of Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security have to be dealt with to have any chance to reduce the budget deficits, but neither side wants to be the first to say what changes need to be done in these major programs. The first side who does more than say they have to do something will find themselves in the same corner as Boehner and President George W. Bush with the "read my lips" comments.

For the Democrats part the Health Care Reform passed last year had a cut of \$500 million to Medicare, that was pointed out and opposed by Republicans at the time.

Both sides in the political arena are playing with billions of dollars, but behind many of those are the people who live on Social Security, Medicaid or use Medicare for their medical needs.

Cutting spending is never easy, and neither side seems to be able to get beyond the grandstanding as the deadline nears. The Republicans tried the government shutdown avenue once before, and it did not do anyone any good. We hope for all Americans the two sides can reach a compromise. – Tom Betz



Favorite communion memories

While visiting with friends over a glass of wine, the conversation turned to communion.

We had three or four Christian faiths represented, so we traded our favorite memory of the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. More specifically, we talked about wine.

Cheryl, who is Methodist, told us of visiting a Lutheran church when her boys were preteens. The family was invited to partake in communion and accepted.

As the 9-year-old left the communion area, he punched his younger brother with the whispered comment, "Hey, this is the real stuff."

Yes, she said, the Lutherans use real wine, not the grape juice my First Christian grandmother always complained about. She just wondered how her son would know that the communion wine was "the real stuff."

While the First Christian Church my grandmother attended only had communion about once a month, and my grandmother didn't drink, she complained every month about their use of grape juice instead of "the real stuff."

I wouldn't have known the difference. Even though the Catholic Church always used



cynthia haynes
• open season

wine, in those days only the priest partook of that part of communion. The people got the bread but no wine. Some Catholic churches still do not provide the second half of the sacrament to parishioners, although nearly all of them around here do.

After a wedding Steve and I attended at a fancy hotel in downtown Denver, the officiating priest realized he had consecrated a lot more wine than the mixed-church-background congregation needed. He wasn't quite sure what to do about the chalice-full of sacramental drink. You can't just pour the Blood of Christ down the drain.

He said that it had to be drunk. If that wasn't possible, it could be poured onto the ground and allowed to soak back into the earth.

Since there wasn't a spot of earth for blocks, several people passed the cup until it was dry.

The next wedding I went to was at the Baptist Church. You don't get those kinds of problems there.

Steve was born into the Episcopal church, and they welcome "all baptized Christians" to the communion table, unlike us Catholics, some Lutherans and probably lots of others, who require membership in their church to partake.

So when our Jewish son-in-law was taking photos for the Topeka Capitol Journal at an Episcopal church many years ago, he talked to the priest before he started to shoot so that he would not disrupt her. He told her that he was Cuban but Jewish.

She apparently didn't get the disconnect between baptized and Jewish, because when it came time for communion, she issued him a special invitation to partake with all baptized Christians.

He smiled, shook his head and replied, "Still Jewish."

Well, I'm pretty sure he's not going to get any of that extra wine at the next wedding he attends.

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e-mail: star.news@nwkansas.com

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
(nt.betz@nwkansas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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Nestled in the hills of the Saline River Valley, the Berndt family cowherd has weathered the below-zero temperatures and the bitter-cold northerly winds during the first half of February. Their 115-head cowherd came off summer pastures in great shape and headed into the winter months fat and sassy. Grazing time spent on milo stocks throughout the fall also contributed to this healthy condition.

Weather conditions cooperated during January. Two minor snows, little wind and seasonal temps helped the cowherd remain in tip-top shape. Another bonus was last year's fall rains that provided lush growth of the Berndt pastureland and abundant grazing for the family cowherd until the first flurries in January.

Two "mini-blizzards" during the first half of February dumped a total of nearly a foot and a half of new snow. Terrible winds and temperatures that fell to nearly 20 degrees below zero accompanied it.

Throughout this recent cold snap, the Berndt cattle did remarkably well.

"We fed them a little extra silage and big round bales to keep their heat generation up," Leslie Berndt says. "Those gals are looking for more food when it gets bitter cold like that. Grain in the silage provides much-needed protein."



Insight this week
• john schlageck

Fortunately the cows did not begin calving until the second week of February. When the first cow delivered twins, the Berndts rounded up the new-born calves, along with their momma, and took them to a shed to keep warm.

During the calving season, the Berndts spend long hours day and night checking their cowherd. While the cows are acclimated to the cold temperatures, below zero wind chills will impact their stock in a negative way.

Not only were the Berndt cattle nestled in the hills, this pasture is heavily wooded and provides complete protection from such winds. The cowherd has another invaluable asset – a natural spring stays open and provides water year 'round. This spring flows out of the hillside and runs into a pool in the ground.

And while they haven't had to doctor any livestock yet this winter should such an occasion arise, the Berndts are prepared. Cattle needing medical attention are loaded up and taken to their local veterinarian.

Livestock in winter

where to write

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

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, Russell Senate Office Building RM C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002. (202) 224-6521;

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 1st Congressional District, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington D.C., 20575-1601. (202-225-2715)

State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking State

Office Building Rm 724, Topeka, KS 66612. Phone (785) 296-7659, cell (785) 899-4770, home (785) 899-5824. E-mail rick.billinger@house.ks.gov.

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 225-E, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address – ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Kansas Attorney General, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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