

from our viewpoint...

We should applaud Flint Hills efforts

Two things that happened in the past week will have a big impact on the Flint Hills grasslands region of Kansas and Oklahoma, and those of us around the state should applaud.

First, Gov. Sam Brownback announced an agreement with energy companies that no more wind farms will be built or expanded in the Heart of the Flint Hills area.

The idea of wind farms in the scenic Flint Hills has been controversial from the start. The governor announced an agreement among the state, Flint Hills ranchers, preservationists, wind developers, power companies and government officials to expand an area of the tallgrass prairie to be free from new commercial wind farms.

While the pact exempts current wind farms with commercial contracts, it prohibits further development in the hills, the last large remnant of the tallgrass prairie that once covered much of the Midwest.

The move upset some local officials and wind promoters, who wanted to see more wind turbines added to existing farms, but it will not prevent new or beefed up transmission lines to move wind energy to urban areas.

Brownback noted that of 400,000 acres of tallgrass prairie, only about 4 percent remains, most of that in the Flint Hills. He said the area should be preserved for ranching and tourism, not energy development that would mar the vistas.

County officials and landowners in some counties have complained, especially in Cowley County, site of an existing wind farm. They cited property rights and landowners' rights to develop their land in opposition to the pact.

That said, we feel the governor did the right thing to protect this precious resource.

Then this week, Sen. Jerry Moran announced along with Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma that they have introduced a bill to exempt Flint Hills ranchers from regulation by the federal Environmental Protection Agency when they burn off dead grass and other waste each spring.

The burning is considered a key to the health of the region's pastures, which have changed little since the days when buffalo roamed. However, a concentrated schedule of burning pushed by state and federal regulators has been blamed for high pollution readings in Wichita and Kansas City.

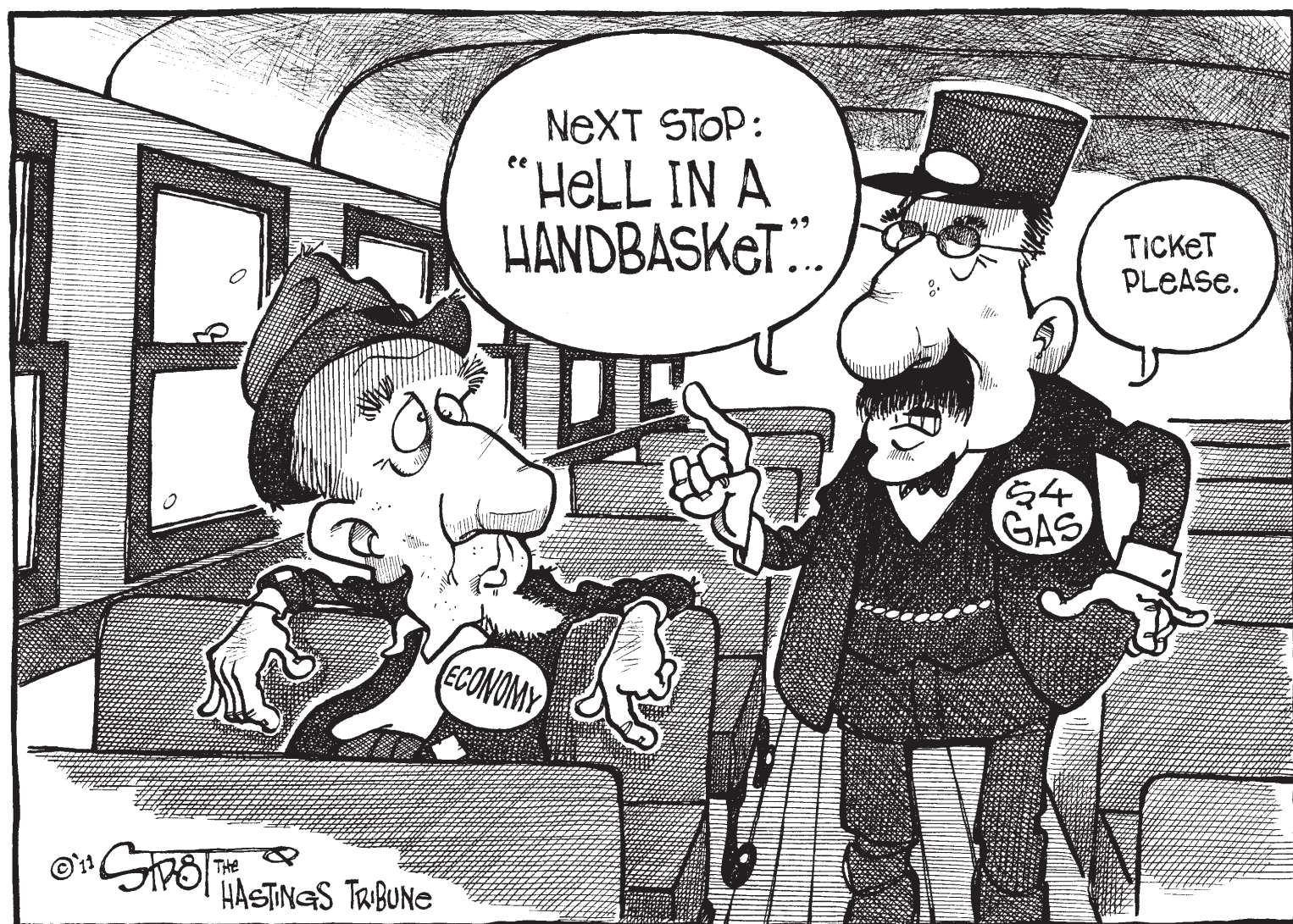
Sen. Moran's bill would exempt the ranchers from federal regulation, essentially taking the federal agency and the state Department of Health and Environment out of the equation. The agencies have been pushing a complicated schedule for burning which has not eliminated urban complaints.

These ranchers have been burning their pastures to preserve the land for more than a century, long before Wichita and Kansas City were big enough to have a pollution problem. The season lasts only a few weeks in the spring, and the smoke dissipates. It should be a non-issue.

We say Sen. Moran is right; the ranchers should be free to continue traditional practices.

While neither of these moves will much affect northwest Kansas directly, they represent a strong push to preserve a rural way of life and a scenic area important to the whole state.

Both deserve our praise. — Steve Haynes



We have reached the ceiling

"We've come to a turning point, a moment for hard decisions. We must act now to protect future generations from government's desire to spend its citizens' money and tax them into servitude when the bills come due." — President Ronald Reagan, 1985

When President Reagan delivered a call to action during his second inaugural address, our national debt stood at \$1.8 trillion. Today — 26 years later — that number has soared to \$14.3 trillion, and the federal government has reached its debt limit. Congress will soon vote on whether to raise the nation's debt ceiling for the 11th time in the last decade. Our country is at a crossroads; the time to heed Reagan's warning and right our nation's fiscal course is now.

President Obama has confidently stated, "We will raise the debt limit. We always have. We will do it again."

If only it was that simple. The hard truth is our country is broke; in the last two years, government spending has grown nearly 25 percent and we currently borrow 40 cents of every dollar we spend. This year alone, the federal government will spend \$3.7 trillion and collect \$2.2 trillion. That is a shortfall of \$1.5 trillion. Common sense — Kansas common sense — tells us this pattern cannot continue.

The fact is our national debt is the responsibility of several Congresses and Presidents — from both political parties — who have allowed us to live well beyond our means for far too long. And simply raising the debt limit, as President Obama has asked Congress to do, is a nod toward continued complacency.



jerry moran

• in Congress

But, complacency is no longer an option. This was made clear at the end of April when Standard and Poor's (S&P), one of the world's Big Three credit rating agencies, downgraded the United States' future financial outlook from "stable" to "negative." The announcement sent shock waves through the stock markets. S&P said the United States has "what we consider to be very large budget deficits and rising government indebtedness — and the path to addressing these is not clear."

S&P is exactly right; it would be reckless to allow our pattern of spending and borrowing to continue without a serious plan in place to reduce the national debt. Americans are paying attention, and are looking for leadership in Washington to confront these problems.

On May 12, I had my first meeting at the White House with President Obama since becoming a member of the U.S. Senate. The topic of discussion was deficit spending, the national debt and the pending vote on raising the debt limit. Prior to the meeting I had notified the President I will not vote to raise the debt ceiling without a significant reduction in spending and a change in the way business is done in Washington.

This change will take the leadership of President Obama and willingness from both

political parties as we work together to craft a serious plan to reduce our debt. The plan must include significant spending reductions, a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution restricting Washington's ability to spend money it does not have and reforms to address our long-term unfunded liabilities.

Some say we need to raise taxes to get us out of this mess. But we don't have a revenue problem, we have a spending problem. Experience shows more money raised by Washington, D.C., results in more spending in Washington, D.C. President Obama proved this to be true during a recent speech when he called for tax increases to pay down our debt while, in the same breath, spoke about the need for "additional investments." Call it what you will, "investment" simply means more spending.

In addition to restraining spending, we must put in place policies that grow the economy and put Americans back to work. By saying "no" to more spending and "yes" to pro-jobs measures, we will reduce the uncertainty in the marketplace, encourage business investment, become more competitive in the global economy and most importantly create jobs.

The consequences of failing to control our debt will be greater than failing to raise the debt ceiling. The time to correct our failures is now. This is not an academic discussion. It is not a partisan discussion. This is about the future of our country, the standard of living Kansans enjoy, and whether or not there is an American dream to be lived by our children and grandchildren.

Vacation did not start out well

As vacations go, this one didn't start so well. As I was getting out of the hotel van at the Denver airport, the driver put down a big plastic stool for us to step on. Nice touch, I thought.

As I stepped down, though, carrying my computer and some odds and ends of reading material, the stool slipped, my right leg went back and I could feel my hamstring muscle let go.

I've done this once before. I know what it feels like. Intense pain, quivering muscles, you can hardly walk. At that point, in fact, I could have crawled out of the way of an oncoming bus, maybe. A slow one.

Hobble was more than I could take. We made it upstairs, where Cynthia asked the airline to give me a wheelchair ride through security. Boy, was that fun. Fast, anyway.

At the "A" terminal checkpoint, the airline person wheeled me to a special lane reserved for the handicapped. It was a new experience, being pampered by the Transportation Security Administration.

I still had to stand and empty my pockets, take my shoes off, toss my phone in the bin, the usual stuff. The woman at the metal detector asked if I had a hip implant. I tried to explain, but mostly she was just afraid I was going to



steve haynes

• along the sappa

fall down on her. I'm sure I looked awful, as much pain as I was having.

From security, I got to ride an electric cart to the gate. Did you know they have a special elevator for those things? You drive the big ol' cart in one end, park, push the button, then drive off the other end.

Who could have guessed?

I got to the gate ahead of Cynthia, but then she's had to explain why she was going through security with four carry-on bags, two big and two small. And stop at McDonalds for breakfast. Couldn't carry the coffee, so we had to do without.

I worried about how the leg would do, sitting in an airline seat for three hours. Turns out, it didn't seem to mind. The angle and position were perfect to avoid pain. Hobbling off the plane was a different matter, however. Then I got to be wheeled through another airport.

My stack of papers got left on the plane. Frontier couldn't find them. Maybe they wound up in Denver. I'll check on the way home, but most of them had been waiting so long to be read I'll never miss them anyway.

The van ride downtown and out to Miami Beach was uneventful and fairly pain-free. Had to hobble into the hotel. Dinner that night, we were on our own. Went downtown by cab to a place the kids recommended; it was great. Only problem was it's located halfway between cab stands on the mall. In and out, those were two loooong blocks on a quivering, painful leg.

That evening, I learned I had mistakenly packed chino shorts in place of my chino pants. Oops. Next day, we went back to the mall and had to walk two blocks to the Gap for pants. Afternoon thunderstorm moved in; it poured. Couldn't run; had to just stay put at a bar.

No pants my size. Gap too youth oriented. Two more blocks to Macy's, where they prided themselves in having my size. Had to roll pants up, but they looked and felt nice at the rehearsal dinner.

Next day, we had to go back to the mall to get the bag Cynthia was too cheap to buy the first time. I smiled and said yes, bless her little heart.

This time I walked six blocks. After lots of hot baths and heavy doses of ibuprofen, the leg is getting better every day.

I think I am lucky, especially after seeing the size of the bruise emerging from within on the fourth day. I keep soaking, massaging, medicating and walking. It keeps getting better.

The drive to Jacksonville, clean across the state, was at least heck, however. The leg was really stiff and sore after eight hours in the back seat. Just sore, though. Not painful.

The whole thing has given me more appreciation for people who live in a wheelchair, I have to say. I can sympathize more nearly with their plight.

People who live with pain year after year have my respect as well. At least I know I'll get better.

Meantime, the leg gives me something to complain about.

Other than that, it's been a great trip, by the way.

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