

Job growth report a bit deceptive

Need a job? Ask any level of government in the state of Kansas for one. They seem to be the only people hiring. According to a report released by the state Department of Labor, Kansas government agencies have 6,000 more employees in November than they did in November 2005. That's about the entire population of Colby. That's not good in so many ways. For starters, it gives the state a bad reputation. According to the Kansas chapter of the Americans for Prosperity, Kansas was 49th of the 50 states in private-sector job growth during that time. Kansas residents will also wonder where their tax dollars are going. Sure, those tax dollars are used to maintain the day-to-day operations for the state, but not every section of the state sees growth in a such a way to justify hiring more government-related employees.

Will Kansas taxes go up to pay those new employees? Western Kansas residents should get mad if they do. With a population loss, why should western Kansas pay more taxes for more government employees when western Kansas has a continuous population decline?

Logically, fewer people equates to fewer government employees, which should mean lower taxes. But government and logic don't always go together.

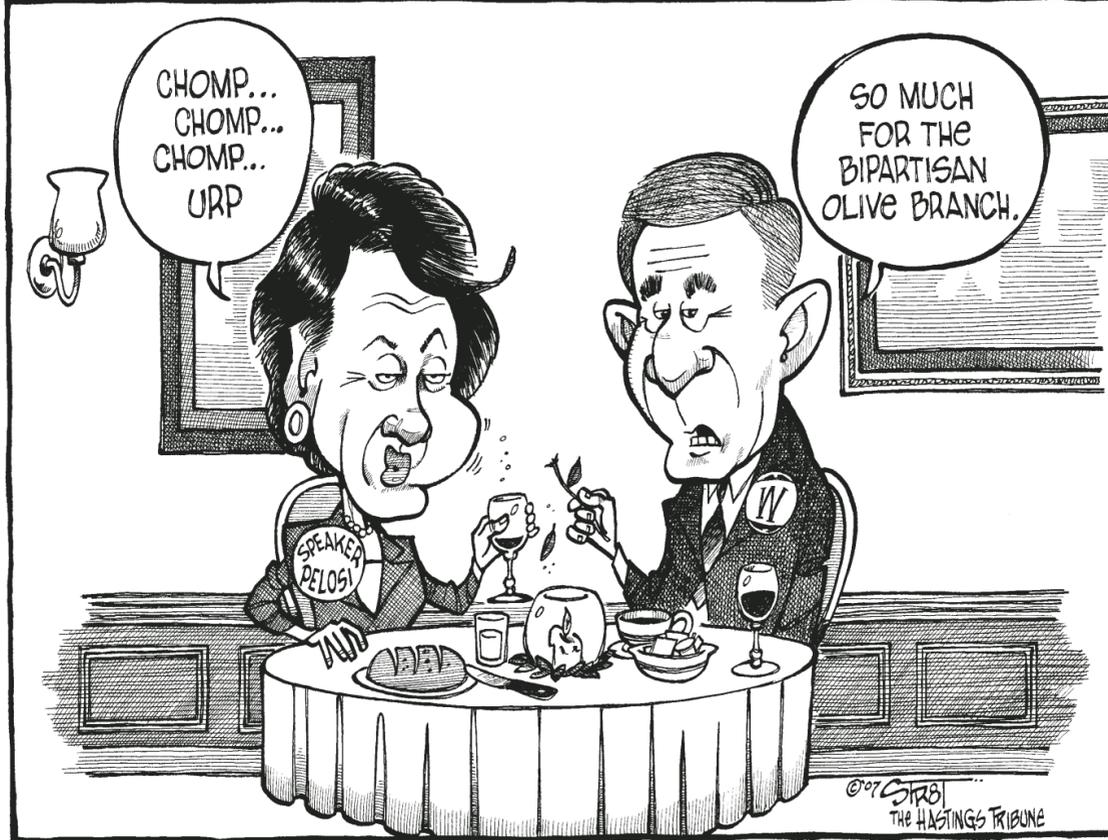
Having more government employees is not good politically. The Democrats are still smiling about their edge they have in Congress now. And, of course, the Democrat state governors are riding that bandwagon as well. Throughout this decade, the Democrats have pushed and shoved their ways into the headlines and radio microphones saying there is too much government and it needs to become more efficient.

Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius is one of those Democrats. She still says Kansas is in a better financial position now than years ago.

Now is the Democrats' chance to put their money where their mouth is, or will they be too busy posturing themselves for November 2008?

Republican state Rep. Jim Morrison is aware of the government job growth. He expects that issue to be discussed and reviewed during the 2007 legislative session, but don't expect a solution soon.

—John Van Nostrand, publisher,
Colby Free Press



News sometimes quite hard to find

The last two weeks have been slow news weeks. Combine the end of the year "blahs" plus the storm-canceled events, and you have a dull time frame on your scheduling calendar. At the newspaper office where I work, it has been a scramble to find news. No clubs are meeting, no fund raisers or soup suppers were planned because of the holidays. We haven't had any babies, no funerals and no engagements. There was a wedding, but no pictures or story yet.

Personally, we haven't done much, either. It's been too cold for Jim to work outside. He did have to climb up on our roof, though, and scoop snow. It looks like we had an "ice dam" on the north slope which caused water to leak inside the wall and run into our closet. I spent quite a while mopping water and wondering if this would be a regular occurrence. Jim assured me it was most unusual and would probably not happen again for a hundred years.

In a hundred years, it won't be my problem. In a hundred years, it won't even be my children's or grandchildren's problem. Maybe my great-great-grandchildren's problem. In a hundred years, that house would be 220 years old and it might not be anybody's problem.

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



One member of our family did pass a milestone this week. After 20 years, my sister-in-law, Donna Kelley, retired from the Farm Service Agency. Her co-workers hosted a banquet in her honor and invited Donna's family and friends. Donna handled everything just fine, even though her co-workers got teary-eyed. Donna had even prepared a little speech and delivered it with great dignity, style and aplomb. She shared some of the changes she had witnessed at the agency during her tenure there. Mostly technological. But, she said, the producer (agency speak for farmer) always stayed the same.

She and my brother, Dick, are going to have so much fun in their retirement. Especially, if she can get him to slow down his work some.

-ob-

I love it when my children call asking for advice. It makes me feel important and needed. However, this weekend my

daughter, Kara, called for advice on a topic I felt totally inadequate to answer.

Her Golden Retriever, Gracie, had swallowed a nut off a bolt. She had not passed it and was extremely ill. She wouldn't eat, drink or move. Gracie was one very sick dog and Kara wanted to know what I would do. Not so much about the dog, but about how to handle the situation regarding telling her daughter, Taylor, in case Gracie died.

I said it would be hard, but Taylor could handle knowing the truth. Death of a pet is a learning experience for youngsters on how to handle the death of someone they love.

Regarding Gracie, my advice was to call one of our local veterinarians. I figured they had probably seen everything under the sun in regards to animals eating weird things. Also, considering the price quoted Kara by her Texas veterinarian to do surgery to remove the nut, I figured she could bring the dog out here for surgery and it would still be cheaper.

Kara called with an update last night. Gracie seems to be feeling better. She is eating, drinking and walking. All internal systems seem to be functioning and the prognosis looks better.

That's good, because I didn't want to drive to Texas for a doggie funeral.

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Our storm didn't shake big media

It is surprising which jobs can end up meriting hazardous pay! This morning we are greeted by Norton Community High School alum Marylynn Barnett (class of 1999) in a hard hat at her anchor job on the ABC Nebraska affiliate.

Why? The tower at the station was covered with ice and it is melting off. Spears of ice as big around as a human arm and up to 10 feet long are coming through the roof of the building.

Reports of storm damage are rather slow getting around. Our dish package includes only Nebraska stations. Fox was off from Saturday to Wednesday. The other networks were off 24 to 48 hours. Barnett's station is still very fragile and they are not able to use all of their technology. NBC seems to be doing better. It was interesting that the Nebraska Bowl game (supposed to be on Fox which was off the air at the time) ended up on ABC, but they were not able to do that for the Oklahoma game.

But these end up being minor issues. And, as more and more news emerges, I realize how fortunate I am that I am even able to worry about which bowl games are or are not on.

Is the lack of information a problem because with so many power outages and news outlets crippled by the storm, the rest of the world has no way of knowing about this disaster? Is it another case of indifference a la Hurricane Katrina? Are we being discriminated against because we are just a few farmers? Is it global warming? Did we bring it on ourselves with our over-use of petroleum and petrochemicals? By our stubborn refusal to stop raising flatulent cattle?

Does anyone out there care? Amazingly, I have not heard of any loss of human life. Livestock is another issue. Be-

Back Home Nancy Hagman



cause information is so fragmented we are having a difficult time knowing the impact. Our feed lot was without power but it was relatively easy to get water hauled.

Relative meaning at least we knew where the animals were. At least they were not buried in a snow bank. At least we had water at the house and had open roads to travel to the lot. Where is PETA? I'd like for them to see the hardships farmers endure to take care of their animals. Don't hold your breath. It hasn't been on CNN, yet!

I have heard reports from family and friends around the periphery of the storm, Cheyenne County, Finney County. The worst reports we have heard are second hand from Gove County and the Quinter area. There is no way of knowing how accurate these reports are. Governors of both Kansas and Nebraska have done flyovers and are asking the areas be declared disaster areas.

Our local store keeper, Phyllis, called the electric company New Year's Day. They have a few head of Longhorn cattle. They had not had water for two days and were trying to decide what to do. The woman on the phone took their number and said she would try to find out how near the crews were to getting the power back on in the area.

Phyllis thanked the woman and wished her a "Happy New Year".

"I am definitely calling you back," the

woman said. "You are the first person who has said anything nice to me."

Another job that may require hazardous pay: answering the phone at the power company (Does a tongue lashing require stitches?)

One of our teacher daughters was back to school on January second. She reported the kids were very subdued. A lot of the country kids did not have power. They were in town with family or friends or trying to make do with a generator or without. She thought they were exhausted from the upset of their routine, from watching their parents worry. What will the psychological impact be? Will USA Today do a story?

The other daughter said the power had been off at her school and heat in her part of the building appears to be a casualty of the storm. No school for the kids. The teachers are having in-service. What will the economic impact be? Are we going to read about it in the Wall Street Journal?

Other items of interest: Saddam was executed. This morning on Headline News, I saw a reporter asking people if they felt guilty for watching the phone video allegedly taken by one of the guards present.

WOW, is that the only thing they can figure out to report on? It makes me mad! Kansas, Colorado, and Nebraska are trying to cope and recover from a devastating storm.

To their credit they did show some pictures of some cows standing in the snow and told us the storm may have caused TWO BILLION DOLLARS in damages. The whole thing took 15 seconds. One woman agonizing about watching Saddam die got 30!

Do we know what a real problem is anymore? Let's ask Marylynn Barnett. Spare me any input from Headline News!