

Government spending is a high-stakes game

As Congress moves toward a compromise on spending after nearly two weeks of the partial government shutdown, people need to realize that this is not some frivolous tiff or indolent inaction in Washington.

Rather, it is a high-stakes game where the chips involve the philosophical differences between the two parties. Democrats want to defend their favorite spending programs, especially the huge new health-care law. Republicans keep trying to cut spending and move toward a balanced budget, and big items are on the table for both.

For the Democrats, it's continued growth in social programs. They want the GOP to drop or ease the "sequestration" cuts which have barely made a dent in federal spending. For the Republicans, it's a burning desire to derail, or at least modify, the health-care law, curb its cost and keep spending down.

It's not like either side was just fighting for the sake of the fight. It's that they started poles apart, and while Congress might want to get things moving, President Obama on one side and the tea party group on the other both vow not to compromise.

Our bet is that a settlement will be reached to keep the government limping along, but with short deadlines that will mean another fight over the debt ceiling and a continuing resolution before the end of the year. Congress should be able to prevent any default on the federal debt, but that will only put the underlying issues off.

And while it's common to hear that "there's not a dime's worth of difference" between the two parties, in fact, the distinctions have seldom been more sharply defined. Democrats, led by Mr. Obama, are insisting that tax increases on "the rich" need to be part of any move to a balanced budget, though that goal is distant indeed.

Republicans say any tax increase in the face of a weak economy would be foolish. They want to curb burgeoning costs of "entitlement" programs such as Social Security and Medicaid, which they see as programmed to go up year after year.

It's OK for people to demonstrate against the shutdown. It's everyone's right to petition the government, after all, and a little heat should help push things along. Just remember that there are real differences at stake, and both sides in a divided government are trying to defend their own sacred turf.

This basic division of spending is not likely to go away, as deeply as it is intertwined with the structure of the budget and the federal spending process. These are the basic tenants of the two parties.

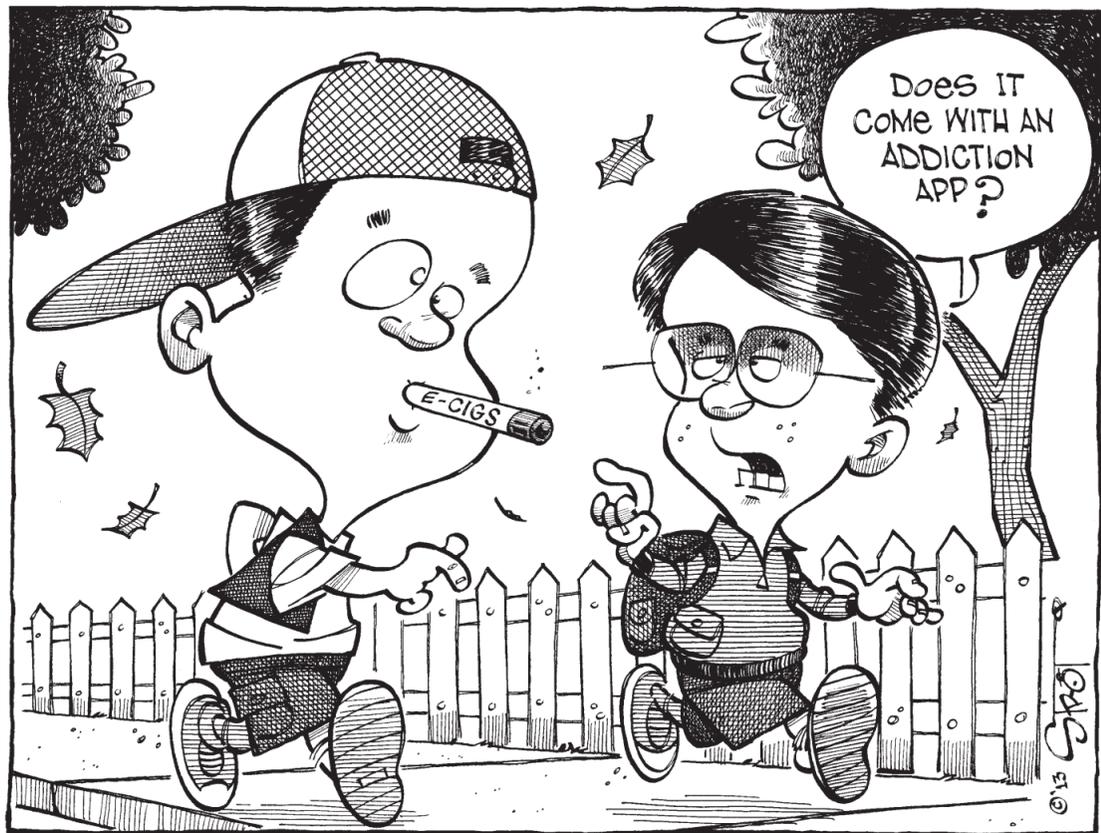
That does not mean compromise is impossible, or that one won't be reached. Far from it. It simply means no one is going to roll over easily. That is why this debate seems to go on forever, and why nothing seems to get resolved as the sides kick this can down the road.

Whichever side you fall on, or lean toward, if you are tired of all this uncertainty, remember it's been five years since Congress actually passed a budget and longer since appropriations bills were routinely passed before expiration of spending authority in major areas. Everything has gone on temporary authority, "continuing resolutions," for years and the dispute has made permanent changes difficult.

Everyone agrees a "balanced budget" should be the goal, but how to get there? Which way will we go? Evenly divided as the country is, there's no way to tell. So far, neither side has the power to jam something down the other's throat.

But the show is far from over, and the long-term consequences are great.

— Steve Haynes



We have to start somewhere

Recently a friend asked if I really understood how the Affordable Health Care Act will work and the answer is, "no." Why, then, do I support it? There are two things I strongly feel. One is, I cannot, in good conscience, deny any neighbor insurance. Perhaps they are incapable of working, cannot make enough to have insurance, have an employer unwilling to offer insurance, or have a preexisting condition. Second, I believe we have to start somewhere. It may not be perfect, but it is a start.

The Affordable Health Care Act went through the hoops and President Obama signed it into law. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld its constitutionality. Affordable Health Care is a start. If the process fails, then we tweak and tweak and tweak, until we come up with the best possible program. Even then it will evolve, because times change, people change, health care needs will change.

Yes, Obamacare is costly, but re-

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



member we engaged in a war funded with borrowed money. Money we borrowed from China, which is coming back to bite us now. At the same time, taxes were cut in 2001 and 2003 during the onset of the war. The \$2.7 trillion war price tag through mid-2011 is expected to grow at least another trillion and doesn't include veterans health benefits in the coming years.

Affordable Health Care will be funded, not with borrowed money, but, in part, with better administration of health practices. The cost of the Affordable Health Care Act over the next

ten years is estimated to be about \$1.3 trillion dollars. This program will improve and strengthen our country from within. Healthier people means more productive people and more productive people means a growing economic environment. The implementation of covered preventive care will hopefully reduce the need for extensive medical treatments because of a delay in diagnosis.

Although some have falsely stated investor Warren Buffet wants to "scrap" Obamacare, the truth is he continues to support it, even with some reservations. A man more knowledgeable than I am, he continues to stand behind the basic premise of the Affordable Health Care Act. It may not be perfect, but as he says, "It relates to providing medical care for all Americans. That's something I've thought should be done for a long, long time." Me too. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

If healthcare was like grocery shopping

First off, I must correct a statement in last week's column. Most of our elected lawmakers are not lawyers. More than half of the United States Senators are attorneys, but only a little over a third of the House are. It was a lazy attempt at humor, put out there with no fact checking whatsoever! I hate it when other people do this sort of thing and I thank the person who called me on it.

Please always let me know when I make a mistake about facts. The worst thing about these situations is there may be people who only read the first column and do not realize the error. I really feel terrible about this. Is it time to turn in my keyboard?

So on to a problem we can solve: Healthcare!

I sometimes shop at an area grocery store that has a rewards program. You can pay with a check, cash, debit card, credit card, money orders, etc.

If you write a check it goes through immediately. They know instantly if there is money in the account to cover it. I know this because I once watched it happen to the person in front of me. To this day regret I did not step up and cover the young woman's bill.

When an item comes up that rewards cover the cashier asks "Do you want your milk free today?"

I don't understand how I get rewards,

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



but I like free! I'm always amazed: just like that they know what I am entitled to.

No matter how many coupons I have, how I pay, or the rewards program; when I walk out I know what my groceries cost.

Going to the Doctor is another story. Six weeks after an appointment there's a letter asking if the little injury to my finger happened on the job. Or perhaps it was the result of an automobile accident. If so I need to file a claim with Workmen's Comp or my auto insurance.

I send back an explanation. Another couple of weeks pass. The insurer lets me know the issue has been resolved. The provider wrote off part, part was a co-pay. I still do not know what, if anything, I owe but that is okay because "THIS IS NOT A BILL!"

If there is a bill I'll get that maybe November first for a very minor procedure that occurred in mid-August.

Let's turn it around and think what would happen if we purchased groceries like we buy health care. We would discover we could not shop in some stores because they are not preferred providers or we did not have a referral.

The price would depend on how the bill was paid: cash, credit card, and so on. It is true many stores give discounts for cash. Rewards cards also affect the final bill. But the differences are nowhere near as wildly variable as they are among various insurance providers. Plus rewards cards are very easy to get (I have a wallet full) and cost nothing.

When you leave the store you would not know what your groceries cost! And you might get a bill a year and a half later because your insurance determined you did not need noodles during the week in question.

If buying groceries were as complicated as health care, we'd all be going to the store a less often. We'd slim down, we'd be healthier! Less doctor visits, cheaper health care!

Did I not say this is a solvable problem?

I started out thinking we should simplify health care and realize the best answer might be to complicate grocery shopping!

Welcome to my world, it is strange and twisted but sometimes it all works out!

CITY OF NORTON ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor: David Corns
785-202-1305
dcorns@ruraltel.net

WARD I

Jerry Jones
785-877-2170
Harriett Gill
785-877-3051

WARD II

Roberta Ryan
785-877-2182
Donna Foley
785-877-3585
rocknomm_43@hotmail.com

WARD III

Ron Briery
785-877-3807
Jeff Urban
785-877-5535

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

E-mail: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

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OFFICE HOURS:
8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.
8 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Friday
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732

STAFF

Dana Paxton..... General Manager
Advertising Director/Managing Editor
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
Michael Stephens..... Reporter
Society Editor/Area Sports
mstephens@nwkansas.com
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production
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