

# Highway fund is running out of money soon

There's still a chance Congress will act before the latest money crisis hits the wall, but only a chance.

The administration is pushing for action on the Highway Trust Fund, which will run out of money sometime in late August. Without a bipartisan fix, states would have to shut down most highway projects, putting thousands of workers out of their jobs. The economy, still struggling to recover from the late recession, could grind to a halt.

Why? The federal government pays 80 to 90 percent of most highway improvements and upgrades out of the fund, but the times have not been kind to it.

The trust fund comes mainly from federal taxes on highway fuel, gasoline and diesel, plus other road-related fees. These haven't been raised in years, though people are driving less and using less fuel, and construction costs have soared.

No one wants to vote for a tax increase, especially in an election year, no matter the need. And here is a tax where you know how the money will be spent. Most of us will be able to see a direct benefit from better roads.

But raising taxes of any kind is one of the "third rail" issues in Washington. The third rail is the one that carries high voltage to power commuter trains and subways back East. No one wants to touch it.

The trust fund has been in bad shape for years. Between the government forcing manufacturers to build smaller, more efficient cars, high fuel prices and people driving less to save money, revenue is down. Then there are electric or hybrid cars and propane- or natural-gas-powered trucks, more of them all the time. Right now, they pay little or no road tax.

State officials have seen this coming for years. Many believe we'll have to switch to a miles-driven tax, but that will be painful to pay and hard to administer. Others just hope we'll keep raising the old taxes as costs go up.

We don't expect Congress to tackle these lofty issues, not this year, with an election coming on and then a lame duck session. The best we expect to see is a temporary patch, a last-minute fix in the best Washington style that will get the country saved for a few months.

That might not be exactly statesmanlike, but you don't expect much statesmanship in an election year. Everyone is too worried about getting re-elected.

The highway fund has barely been able to keep up with the nation's deteriorating roads and bridges the last few years, even though Congress has been throwing general-fund tax money in to keep up its commitments.

That has kept the road program going, but with the deficit, it's like using money the government doesn't have to build roads. It's standard practice in Washington, but we shouldn't keep it up forever.

Meantime, the need will only grow, and any permanent fix will get more painful as time goes by. Now is the time for Congress to act, before the money runs out.

— Steve Haynes



## Government second guessing our decisions

Talk about shutting the barn door after the horse is out.

Oklahoma has passed legislation making it mandatory for married couples with children, considering a divorce, to attend classes that outline the ill effects divorce has on children. All well-intentioned, I'm sure, but it seems to me there should have been some sort of class required before they got married. Or perhaps a test before they had kids.

I'm being facetious because I don't want government involved in one more aspect of our personal lives.

Don't get me wrong. I've been there. By the time my kids' father and I came to the big "D" decision, we had already been through the counseling thing and the separation thing. After 18 years it was not an easy decision, but one that had to be made. I remember saying to him, "If we can't make the marriage work, let's at least make the divorce work."

### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



I think we did. We didn't make the children pawns to be fought over. There were visitation schedules, but the kids came and went at both households as they wanted and as their school/social/job schedules allowed. It wasn't ideal, but it worked, and we didn't need a government social worker looking over our shoulders, second-guessing our decisions or our motives.

Bottom line: divorce is a terrible thing. It is the death of a marriage, but nobody brings casseroles over to the house on the day it becomes final.

-ob-

Rain, rain. Beautiful rain.

Monday morning Jim got up and said, "It's been raining all night. It was raining when I went to bed, and it's still raining." Then he added, "And, you're going to find me, flat-out, in my recliner."

He did have some outside work planned, but that was quickly scraped for the pleasant thoughts of spending the day inside. If that's what it takes to get some of those "honey-do" things done, then bring on the rain.

-ob-

A few people mentioned the extra length of last week's column. Believe me, it was an accident. It was not my intent to go on and on, but somehow, it just came pouring out and I couldn't stop it.

Reminds me of when I used to be on the radio. Sometimes your mouth would keep "running", but your brain wasn't connected.

## Reach out and touch someone

Each day, farmers and ranchers pull on their boots, roll up their sleeves and go to work outside in rural communities across Kansas. They perform a litany of chores — feeding and doctoring livestock, cultivating crops, pulling maintenance on machinery, paying bills — you name it and farmers and ranchers do it.

While all of these activities are necessary, agricultural advocacy has become farmers' and ranchers' most important chore. Today, they have an obligation to offer the public an understanding of their profession.

Helping consumers understand agriculture is vital to the future of the industry and the high-quality, low-cost food Americans enjoy.

How do farmers help consumers understand their profession?

It begins with the commitment to tell your side of the story whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Whether you talk to grade-schoolers, members of service clubs or state legislators — practice the art of relationship building between rural and urban, between agricultural producers and consumers of agricultural products.

When you have an opportunity to talk about production agriculture, do just that — talk about agriculture. Leave the other so-called "hot" topics of the day alone. Let someone else talk about them.

With less than 2 percent of our population engaged in food production, do

### Insight

John Schlageck



not miss an opportunity to tell your story. If you are asked to comment about a recent election, talk about it with an agricultural flavor. Talk about how you believe your elected official will be able to work with you to ensure our state makes rural transportation one of its top priorities.

Give people a glimpse into your profession — a subject that affects your bottom line and one that impacts the well-being of your family, their families — everyone. It's easier than you might think to initiate a conversation about farming with your urban cousins.

Begin with a common denominator. You can start by noting that the fertilizer they buy for their gardens is no different from what you, as a farmer, put on your crops. The rose dust, herbicide or insecticide used to control scab, dandelions or mosquitoes is similar to the plant protection chemicals you use.

Sometimes the common denominator revolves around nutrition. A good analogy could be the parallel between a person's need for healthy food and a plant's need for a well-balanced diet.

It's easy to move from nutrition to

some of the more difficult challenges facing agriculture. One such hot topic is groundwater contamination.

Today, many people are concerned about chemical run off into lakes and streams. As a farmer, you cannot afford to overuse these expensive crop inputs. Let them know that. More than anyone else, you are concerned about the land where you and your family live and work.

Public understanding of how a modern farmer manages his operation is only half the challenge. Perhaps equally important is the need to be sensitive to the concerns of the community.

Remember that people — most of them living in towns or cities — are the ones who call for regulations and new laws. It is this same public that will enforce them. In the end, ironically, it is the public that will suffer if the laws have a negative effect on our food production and consumption system.

Tell your story — the story of agriculture. No one else is going to. Someone who works at Boeing or Frito Lay is not going to talk about farming and ranching when they speak to the public or press.

Let consumers know the value of the food they eat. Tell them how you go about producing the healthiest, best tasting food in the world. It's a story only you can tell and tell well. After all, this is your livelihood. You are food producing specialists. You must tell your story.

Dear Editor,

On Sunday afternoon, 01 June 2014, I was traveling thru Norton and stopped at the water tower park to stretch and use the toilet. It was starting to sprinkle. Upon re-entering my automobile a young man quickly stopped by and warned of an impending storm with hail and flash flooding possible — he advised that I head to Woody's to take cover (he then quickly explained where that was). I heeded his advice and sat out the storm under the safety of Woody's awning.

I do not know the name of that young man, but I do appreciate his call of warning. His actions speak volumes of the values of Norton: friendly, caring and attentive ... even toward strangers from a strange land (Minnesota).

Thanks, Norton ... you have my respect and I have a car without hail damage.

Sincerely,  
John L. Murphy  
Minneapolis, MN



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Thumbs up this past week to Jeremy Wetter, manager at the Norton Theatre, for coming in to share about the approaching bad weather and allowing us the opportunity to leave if needed with a pass to come to the show again. That is Small Town Caring! Not found in the big city. Thanks Jeremy! E-mailed in.

Thumbs up to Moffet Drug for the excellent service they provide. Called in.

Thumbs up to all the sponsors and volunteers that helped in putting on the OK Kids Day at the Lake. It couldn't be done without you. E-mailed in.