

Opinion



Editorial Viewpoint

Stop blaming, start working on budget

As the 2003 Kansas Legislature and the new governor ponder how to deal with the state's current financial crisis, the foremost question on their minds should NOT be, "Who's going to blink first?"

The question, of course, should be "What's best for Kansas?" Unfortunately, with the opening of the legislative session just weeks away, it seems that seeking political advantage still is the order of the day.

... Gov.-elect Kathleen Sebelius ... has, so far, been unwilling to compromise on her position that the state's budget problems can be solved without tax increases. This is despite the fact that the combined money-saving measures suggested by her postelection study panels would barely scratch the surface in reducing the deficit.

Republican legislators also are sitting on their hands when it comes to tax increases, waiting for Sebelius to take the blame.

... Meanwhile, education officials are scraping to keep schools afloat, and advocates for people with disabilities reportedly are drafting their own proposal for tax increases that would prevent further cuts in service.

... if this attitude continues very far into the legislative session, it could be extremely harmful to the state. In the last legislative session, both Republicans and Democrats spent weeks throwing up their hands and saying "WE aren't going to be the ones to propose a tax increase." ...

... If the governor and legislators truly believe the budget can be balanced without tax increases they should put a plan on the table ... If such a budget simply isn't possible, they should put their politics aside and be willing to take responsibility for the steps that are needed to lead the state through this difficult time.

— *The Lawrence Journal-World*

About those letters . . .

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The customer is kind, listen carefully

While almost every industry today does a lousy job of living by the motto: "the customer is the most important part of business," Kansas farmers and ranchers are one segment that adheres to this philosophy.

With the advent of the new year, Kansas farmers and ranchers must once again look to the future with an open mind and the flexibility to develop new ways of marketing their products.

Customers and consumers are driven by changes in personal preferences and increased income levels. Give the consumer what he/she wants will never ring truer than it will in the 21st Century.

Today's consumer has money and they want to spend their money on what they want. Convenience also is very important, and while price is less important, it will still be a major piece of the buying equation.

Our future agricultural economy will continue to be driven by consumer demand. Consumers continue to become wiser, savvy every day. Tomorrow's well-informed shopper will want, and demand, more information about how food is produced. It will be up to the producer to help provide such information.

Consumers must never be viewed as adversaries. Consumers are the folks that buy agricultural products and keep farmers in the business of producing food and fiber.

John
Schlageck

• Guest Commentary

We can never discount their intelligence. Rather we must seek input from them, and once we understand what their needs are - provide for them.

As has always been the case, every year, agricultural producers are called upon to become better risk managers, especially as we continue moving into a market-oriented world arena.

While extension and marketing specialists have preached keeping accurate, detailed records that chart production costs and individual marketing practices custom tailored to each individual farm, such disciplines still require additional work in most enterprises.

The successful farmer in 2003 and beyond will be the one who manages yield and price risks by knowing exactly what break-even costs of each crop will be. He/she will incorporate specific goals that ensure profits and include prudent risk-management strategies.

Flexibility will key future success on the farm. One day soon farmers may no longer be able to

rely on government disaster relief. Farmers must examine sound, new marketing techniques and the latest crop insurance options coming down the pike.

One attribute many farmers share is common sense. Don't forget to use this vital tool during the upcoming year.

Remember, that past performance never guarantees future success. Avoid greed when marketing. Never wait to sell at the top of the market because you rarely will.

If something sounds too good to be true - it generally is. Always, and this means all the time, explain risk strategies you are considering to your spouse or partner. If they cannot reiterate what you have said and have it make sense, then you may want to reconsider.

While relying on common sense is helpful, it will not always make you a successful farmer. Being thought of as a good farmer will not always ensure profitability either.

But, becoming a business specialist is a prerequisite to continuing in the profession of farming in the new year.

Editor's note: John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

The many reasons for war — all bad

I've got a holiday present for George Bush, our president. I'm going to give him a good reason for attacking Iraq. That's more than he's ever given me.

Thus far, President Bush has tried to convince us that war with Iraq is a necessity because:

1. It has weapons of mass destruction that it might turn on us at any moment.
2. Failing that, it will turn them on its neighbors.
3. Failing that, it will sell them to terrorist groups who will use them on us.
4. And anyway, it was behind the attacks of 9/11, sort of.

None of which seems terribly persuasive to me. If Saddam attacks us, or his neighbors with massive force, he runs risk of obliteration. He knows that. He's nuts, but he's not suicidal. (There is no evidence, by the way, that he was involved with the 9/11 plotters.)

As far as sales to terrorists groups go, our main threat there is the former Soviet states which do have biological, chemical and nuclear weapons—under the care of underpaid, demoralized technicians, looking for a payday.

So what's wrong with relying on U.N. inspectors to ferret out these terrible weapons?

Oh, I know, inspections don't work. Dick Cheney said so.

I don't get that.

We have spy planes that can photograph the printing on a golf ball from 20,000 feet.

You mean to tell me we haven't observed the place closely enough for the past 10 years that we don't know where the suspicious sites are?

Other Viewpoints

• From Pens of Kansans

It seems to me that inspections, pursued assiduously, should at the very least allow us to limit the capacity of Saddam for mischief. The rest of the risk can be made minimal by our threat of massive retaliation.

A more persuasive case for the war has been made by former Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey, now the president of the New School in New York City.

Kerrey argues that we have a moral duty to get rid of Saddam, on humanitarian grounds. Yes, that's what I said—humanitarian grounds.

To leave him in place, says Kerrey, is to condemn the people of Iraq to a perpetual living hell and to put the entire region at risk of a similar fate.

If you believe that the United States should be a champion of human rights, how can you not be for dislodging Saddam?

This is the liberal argument for war; one which liberals have not warmed to.

Student and faculty members at his school—a bastion of liberalism for decades—have protested his stance and called for his resignation, but he has held his ground.

It's difficult to argue that Saddam is not a very, very bad man.

The record is replete with stories of the torture and mutilation of children while their parents are made to watch, of the rape of women in the presence of their families, of political prisoners killed slowly in excruciating ways (being dipped gradually in a vat of acid being one of the more baroque).

He is a monster. And yet, I hesitate to embrace a war against him.

I don't see any way to go into Iraq without extensive bombing, with all that means in terms of civilian casualties.

And Saddam has promised a "scorched earth" policy if attacked; that is, he would destroy his country's oil fields, electrical power plants and food storage sites, leaving his already impoverished nation destitute.

Surely, if he does have weapons of mass destruction, he would use them indiscriminately on us and on his own people if necessary.

We would then be left in the position of having destroyed Iraq in order to save it. We've been there before.

So there's a case to be made for the war, and a case against it. My great hope is that Saddam will back down in this game of chicken he's playing with President Bush, gather up his stolen millions, and go off someplace to live the life of a deposed tyrant.

It's not much of a hope, but it's all I've got.

Editor's note: Donald Kaul recently retired as Washington columnist for the Des Moines Register. For information, email: donaldkaul@aol.com.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

