

Opinion



Guest Viewpoint

Dealing with Saddam: keep up the pressure

News reports Monday morning indicated the Iraqis are becoming much more conciliatory toward U.N. weapons inspectors, and with good reason.

The United States has sent another 10,000 troops toward Iraq, along with a warning from President Bush that his "patience was growing thin" and the Saudis have effectively put a price on Saddam Hussein's head by offering amnesty if regime change is effected in Iraq.

In the first case, our president has learned a valuable lesson from some great leaders who preceded him, never bluff. If you threaten war, be ready to carry it out, even if it is unpopular and costs you your job.

War threats without any preparation would have had no effect on a leader who is more concerned about his own prestige and power than his people's suffering. I have no doubt that Saddam took the warnings about disarmament as another opportunity to rub America's face in our "failure" to remove him from power in 1991.

I'm not actually sure that he even knows he lost the 1991 war. Oh, he knows it on some deep-down level and he does have access to CNN, but even his generals didn't know they had even lost, much less how badly they had been beaten, until we showed them.

If you were a general in Saddam's army, and you knew his penchant for killing messengers of bad news, would you tell him how badly, and quickly, his army had been beaten after you had told him you were winning?

It is also more than likely that he didn't think we had the stomach for another fight, so he decided to call our bluff. The hope, especially among the Arabs, is that there are those in the Iraqi government who have a more realistic view of the possible outcome of a war with the United States, Britain and other allies.

A coup would play to the political side of things for Bush as well. The restructuring of the Iraqi government and the attendant need for a military presence would be a huge drain on our damaged economy for years to come.

I'm fairly certain the president hasn't forgotten that his father was an immensely popular president after winning the first war, but lost the election on a sluggish economy and a badly advised political compromise.

If Hussein could be removed without either firing a shot or rebuilding the government from scratch, that would be a great feather in Bush's cap while giving him the leeway to spend more on the economy. It wouldn't be a bad thing in regards to leverage with North Korea, either.

It would also be a good thing for the Iraqi people, who seem to have been forgotten at times in all the rhetoric. I'm told that their public school system is the latest casualty of the economic sanctions.

It has become increasingly difficult to buy food, clothing and medicine as the noose tightens and things are becoming worse and worse for those who are usually hurt the most in war, the innocent.

There have been calls to end the embargoes and the military build-up for precisely those reasons. There is much suffering in Iraq and we, meaning the western countries who participated in the war, are seen as the cause.

The real cause, however, is Saddam Hussein. Had he been willing to "play nice," I have no doubt that he would now be receiving all the food and aid from the west he could ever want.

But, he apparently wants war and we seem to be willing to give him what he wants. Let's hope saner and more pragmatic heads prevail before it really is too late. The surest way to help that is to keep up the pressure.

Submitted by A. Jay Kelley of Colby, a writer who speaks his mind on a variety of topics, from politics to religion. His e-mail is jkelley@nwkansas.com



It's back to work for Legislature

The Legislature convened on Jan. 13. The main issue facing the legislature this year is the budget and it's projected shortfall. At this point everything is on the table.

Kansas Budget

During her State of the State address on Wednesday, Gov. Sebelius proposed two budgets: a budget designed to meet statutory requirements and one intended to fulfill her campaign promises. The former has a 7.5 percent end balance, while the latter does not. The difference between the two is that she has stated her intentions not to pass the statutory budget.

The governor refused to have the statutory budget introduced as a bill. That budget cut most state agencies by almost 22 percent. As for the "campaign" budget, she told the legislature it is only a "starting point."

I really appreciate Gov. Sebelius providing us a budget so quickly when she did not have to. She may be right that a tax increase is not needed but I will need lots of convincing to fully support that point of view (no tax increase needed). I am excited about working with the governor.

Non-Statutory Budget Summary

- Increase in spending towards education is only a case load adjustment for bonds and per student weighting. At the same time, she is recommending a reduction of higher education spending by 0.8 percent (\$5.1 million) in FY 2004 for the Regents. However, the governor recommends a \$242.6 million reallocation in expenditures for Education on governor's recommendation to roll



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Capitol Review

special education aid into base State Aid Per Pupil as a per pupil weighting.

- Governor's proposed budget stops payments for the KPERS Death and Disability Fund for the FY 2004 and last quarter of FY 2003. Saves \$26.9 million from funding sources, including \$17.8 million from general budget. There was opposition to Gov. Graves' proposal of this measure when the fund had enough money to handle the cessation of payments. So, it will be interesting to see if it is supported this time.

- No State General Fund transfers to the State Highway Fund. Governor's recommendation shifts portions of the Kansas Highway Patrol budget to the Department of Transportation.

- Calls for a 1.5 percent base salary increase for state employees. Estimated at \$26.9 million, including \$13.5 million from general fund.

- \$112.7 million increase in spending for Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services "largely for caseload increases."

Committee Reports

Committee meetings have been brief this

week. Here are some selected highlights for selected committees:

Taxation: 63 bills offered to repeal tax credits and exemptions. Internet taxes will be reviewed. Reviewing Class-C Inheritance taxes.

Agriculture: Bill to stop the Federal Government from treating prairie dogs as endangered species.

Corrections and Juvenile Justice: Bill introduced to create two more prisons to accommodate overflow.

Commerce and Labor: Hearing with Lt. Gov. Moore, discussion of Sunday sales of alcohol.

Rules and Journal: Discuss joint rules on Tuesday, January, Jan. 21 specifically ways to tighten our rules to meet our deadlines and finish our work on time.

Ethics and Elections: Secretary of State will appear on Wednesday, Jan. 22.

Utilities: Hearing from proponents on the massive broadband bill.

Health: The committee will be the first legislative committee to experiment with paperless technology. It is also available live on the Internet at <http://172.16.25.98:1089> ><http://172.16.25.98:1089> daily from 1:30 to 2:50. I chair this committee and hope to improve committee discussions with the use of technology.

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All's not well in Kansas GOP tent

The state GOP's annual Kansas Day festivities give political activists a chance to schmooze, party and celebrate all things Republican.

But as this year's events approach, some Republicans aren't feeling much love for some of their GOP brethren, and two events last week demonstrate the infighting between moderate and conservative members of the party is as intense as ever.

First, the State Board of Education took two days to elect a new chairwoman, its members wrangling over how to share power and suspicious of each other's motives.

Second, the all-Republican Senate panel that appoints members to committees stripped conservative Tim Huelskamp of his coveted seat on the budget-writing Ways and Means Committee two days after he tried to place an ally in leadership.

Those developments contrast with the "big tent" rhetoric that often pours out during Kansas Day.

"The big tent theory works for those who control access to the tent," said Huelskamp, R-Fowler, after losing his committee seat.

Kansas Day festivities begin Friday, with North Carolina Sen. Elizabeth Dole scheduled to speak at the main banquet Saturday night.

The timing of the annual celebration — close to the Jan. 29 anniversary of the state's admission to the Union in 1861 — emphasizes the long dominance of the Republican Party in Kansas politics.

The tone can become less than festive and activists face scoldings at caucus meetings if Democrats have scored victories. That's what happened in 1991, after Democrat Joan Finney was elected governor and her party claimed a

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Kansas Focus

majority in the House.

This year, Republicans have a lot of election victories to celebrate, having won four of six statewide offices, kept three of four U.S. House seats and maintained large majorities in both legislative chambers.

But their one big loss smarts: the election of Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius. Because Republicans enjoy a significant edge in voter registration, she needed GOP support to win.

"It should be interesting to see if some of those people who endorsed Sebelius show up and what kind of reception they get," said House Speaker Doug Mays, R-Topeka. "They won't get a good reception from me."

Many GOP defectors were moderates who believed Republican nominee Tim Shallenburger didn't have a strong enough commitment to public schools.

Shallenburger is a conservative. Last year, many of his allies resisted GOP Gov. Bill Graves' efforts to increase taxes to prevent cuts in education and other programs.

"The Republican Party is still engaged in finger-pointing over who lost the election," said Sen. Derek Schmidt, R-Independence.

Huelskamp supported Shallenburger over Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, in

the GOP gubernatorial primary. He recently nominated fellow conservative Stan Clark, of Oakley, for Senate vice president over a moderate Graves ally, Sen. John Vratil, of Leawood.

Kerr said Huelskamp wasn't a constructive member of the Ways and Means Committee. Huelskamp replied, "We disagree on major issues of the day."

A similar split bedevils the Board of Education, where the GOP holds eight of 10 seats.

Five conservatives face three moderates, who have formed a coalition with the board's two Democrats. In years past, the two factions, with varying degrees of strength, have battled over curriculum, teacher certification and the place of evolution in science testing standards.

The chairmanship is more than a symbolic post, because the holder sets the agenda for board meetings for two years.

The Democratic-moderate coalition wanted Janet Waugh, a Kansas City Democrat, as chairwoman. Conservatives initially resisted.

When conservatives agreed to give their antagonists what they wanted — leadership under Waugh — plus the vice chairmanship, Waugh and two of the three moderates were so leery that they voted no.

One, Sue Gamble, of Shawnee, suggested conservatives were acquiescing only so they could "blackmail" her faction later with charges of ignoring conservatives' views.

Those kind of feelings fuel the feuding within the Republican Party, even as its annual lovefest approaches.

John Hanna has been covering state government and politics for The Associated Press since 1987.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

