



Free Press Viewpoint

Colleges' costs must be reined in

The state's major colleges haven't been shy about asking for more money in recent years.

The state Board of Regents did so as recently as September, recommending that the state increase the budget for higher education by 4 percent despite the slumping economy.

Three months before, the board approved tuition increases for the six Regents universities. Nothing new there. College costs have risen sharply in recent years, so much so that a national study indicated the average family spent 28 percent of its income to send a student to a four-year school in Kansas in 2007 as opposed to 18 percent in 1999.

Now, though, it looks as if the university system may have squeezed students, their parents and Kansas taxpayers all it can.

Considering the state is facing a potential \$141 million budget deficit by next June — a hole that could grow to 1 billion by June 2010 — the request for a 4 percent increase looks like a pipe dream. In fact, the Regents already have complied with a request by Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius for state agencies to submit proposals for budget cuts.

Meanwhile, the economic downturn is bound to leave fewer students and families able to afford current tuition and fees, much less support further increases.

For better or worse, the financial crisis is forcing major colleges to take steps they should have been taking to a much greater extent in better times — reducing expenses and finding other ways to keep down the cost of higher education.

Regents statistics show significant growth in operating expenditures at the state universities. Expenditures zoomed from \$454.5 million to \$620.9 million at the University of Kansas from fiscal year 2002 to 2007, an increase of 36.6 percent. At K-State, the increase was from \$432.2 million to \$564.8 million - 30.7 percent.

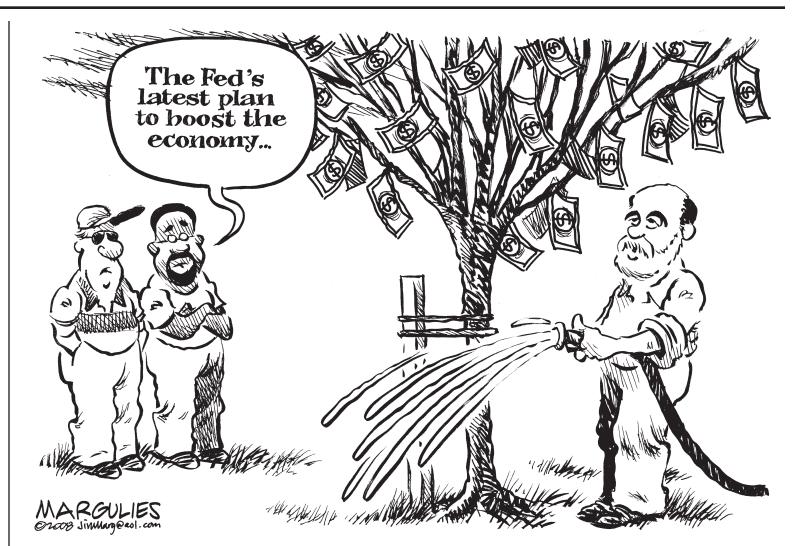
Why? It certainly wasn't because of a large influx of students. Head count at KU dropped 0.4 percent over those years, while K-State's enrollment rose just 2.4 percent.

As the university budgets got bigger while the size of their student bodies held steady, the proportion of operating expenses covered by the state declined.

To a large degree, the universities made up the gap with tuition increases

None of this is to suggest the state's higher education system doesn't deserve support. It does, for an array of reasons, from the educational and career opportunities it provides to thousands of Kansans to the money it pumps into the state's economy.

For an idea of the potential economic development power of the system, look no further than the recent preliminary decision to award the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Laboratory project to Kansas State University. K-State's animal research facilities and staff were a key calling card in the state's suc-



Christmas not the same without Jesus

It's probably no surprise that I'm a Jesus-isthe-reason-for-the-season girl. At least, I hope it's not.

This really is my favorite time of the year. The decorations, family traditions and get-togethers, caroling, turkey and mistletoe all help make the season bright.

I also love singing those timeless hymns, like "Silent Night," "What Child is This" and "Angels We Have Heard on High." And sure, reading "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" is a classic, but the narrative in the Book of Luke is even better.

Maybe it's because of my upbringing that I never could get into writing letters to Santa or leaving him milk and cookies. Even when I was little, I can't recall a memory of believing in Santa Claus. I do remember visiting Santa at Santa City and telling him that I wanted rollerblades for Christmas, but I knew that my mom was in close proximity, so I hoped she was taking note of everything I wanted.

But I'm not the only one in town who is into the Christian meaning of Christmas.

On "Merry Christmas" stationery, my dad received a letter in the mail from Colby Ag Center. An excerpt from it reads: "The blessings of Christmas are many ~ May the glorious day of our Savior's birth resound with hope



and peace on Earth! May the gift of faith, the blessing of hope, and the peace of His love be yours at Christmas and always."

As I go about town, I'm greeted with "Merry Christmas!" and numerous homes and businesses highlight the nativity scene. Even Santa City still features the nativity scene at the edge of Fike Park.

For this, I am thankful that Colby has chosen to avoid overdosing on political correctness that seems to pop up during the Christmas season. Every year America tries harder to erase the birth of Jesus Christ from Christmas - or maybe I should say "the Holidays." And every year, the depravity of America reaches a new level, including the elderly man who was killed the day after Thanksgiving by raging fanatic consumers.

I found it especially disconcerting when I heard that a mall in Aurora, Colo., was devoid

of any Christmas decorations in early December. And as far as I know, there are still none.

And while Oregon is in the same vein as Colorado as far as politics is concerned, I almost had to laugh at the irony of listening to Oregonians singing "Silent Night" at the Christmas tree lighting in downtown Portland. How does that second verse go? Oh, yes: "Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight, glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing, 'Alleluia!' Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born."

That doesn't sound very tolerant of those who don't celebrate the Christian meaning of Christmas.

Really, avoiding Jesus' birth during Christmas is like not putting lights on a Christmas tree. The tree may still look pretty enough with all those ornaments and candy canes, but it's the lights that will make the tree glow with a beautiful radiance.

It just wouldn't be the same without them.

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her campus.

cessful bid to land the \$450 million project.

It's also worth noting that tuition and fees at KU and K-State are cheaper than the average at other major universities. Still, the costs are rising much faster than inflation, and they must be reined in.

Taxpayers and those who pay tuition can only be expected to do so much.

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Favorite sayings a part of holiday

During this holiday season, let's not forget the true meaning of Christmas - celebrating the birth of Christ, love, friendship and spending time with our families.

As a youngster, I have fond memories of Mom inside our warm home fixing turkey, dressing and all the trimmings. I was outside with my brothers and sisters throwing snowballs, playing "fox and geese" and just being kids.

One thing I'll never forget about this period of my life are some of my dad and his friend's favorite sayings. It seems like we always visited more during the holiday season, and as children, we had the opportunity to hear some of these words of wisdom more than once.

These sayings came from friends, neighbors, brothers, sisters and cousins - folks he'd lived around for years. These stories were steeped in the tradition and history of the High Plains in northwestern Kansas. They were told by farmers, ranchers, family and friends who'd clawed and scratched out a pretty good living in the tough and sometimes unforgiving flat land where the wind always blows.

Here are just a few – the gems, the ones I'll remember always:

• Your friends are the measure of your real worth.

• The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man.

• Why do you think the good Lord gave you two ears and one mouth? So you could listen twice as much as you talk.

• Wait until you get a little older; then you'll understand.

• If you're going to train your dog, you have to be smarter than the dog.

• Never be too quick to criticize yourself. It ain't fair to your friends and relatives who are itchin' to do it for you.



• If all of your friends climbed up the elevator and jumped off, would you have to, too?

• If you haven't been bucked off a horse, then you've never ridden one.

• You can't listen too much when a friend needs someone to talk to.

• Some things aren't funny, even to your best friend.

• If we have to love our enemies, we have to treat our friends even better.

 A friend is someone who dislikes the same people that you do.

• The only way to have a friend is to be one.

• The best three friends a man can have are his wife, an old dog and ready money.

• A real pal will at least pretend to believe your lies.

• At the end of your life, if you have two or three true friends, you've lived a good life.

• A true friend is someone who knows that when you've made a fool of yourself, it generally isn't permanent.

• When a friend drops by about dinner time and you ask, "What brings you by here at this time?" you still have to ask him to stay for a bite to eat.

· Good friends are hard to find and harder to lose.

Most of us have a handful of good friends. Be thankful for them. Remember them during this magical time of year. If you can't stop by

to see them, call them on the phone or drop them an e-mail.

Remember during this holiday season that joy springs from the heart of those dedicated to caring and helping others. The Christmas spirit dwells inside each of us.

Merry Christmas!

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ ink.org

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (7785) 296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.

