Opinion



Other **Viewpoints**

State budget cuts could cause pain

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' budget proposals for 2009 and 2010 avoid across-the-board cuts, as she said they would. But if implemented, they could cause some serious across-the-board

It is to Sebelius' credit that she sought to dissipate the impact with strategic reductions — and that she got the numbers to work out at all, frankly, in the face of a \$200 million shortfall this budget year and a potential \$1 billion gap next year.

But cities, counties, corrections, economic development efforts and vulnerable Kansans with disabilities or mental illness all would be negatively affected. And higher education was rocked by her proposal that universities do without \$120 million between 2009 and 2010, including \$15 million for deferred maintenance.

When budget analyst Alan Conroy greeted the House Appropriations Committee recently with the words "May God have mercy on your souls," he aptly reflected the moment.

Even in seeking that K-12 school funding remain flat, Sebelius would have public schools do more with less, because of automatic salary increases and other rising costs, including special education. All in all, though, it could have been much worse....

It isn't in Republican legislators' nature to do exactly as the Democratic governor wants, of course. But it was disappointing to see the GOP immediately blast her modest proposals to suspend the phasing out of the corporate franchise tax and estate tax as "irresponsible" tax increases. It also was disingenuous of Republicans to express shock at her plan to suspend fund transfers to local governments. Though hardly laudable, the offloading of state budget woes on locals has long been a bipartisan pastime in Topeka.

The suspensions of transfers and tax cuts are matters for legislative debate, like everything in Sebelius' budget proposal. And Sebelius may not have been pessimistic enough; lawmakers should proceed with the expectation that the state revenue shortfall may get even worse.

But many Kansans would view the suspension of a tax cut's phase-in as in keeping with the times. And Sebelius has a point in preferring smart, strategic cuts to an indiscriminate, acrossthe-board reduction. Rather than run down Sebelius' reasonable proposals, lawmakers should run with them.

-The Wichita Eagle via the Associated Press



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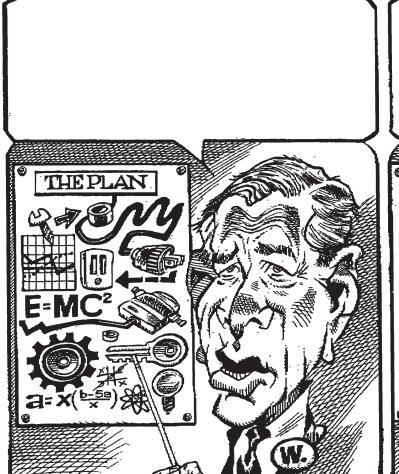
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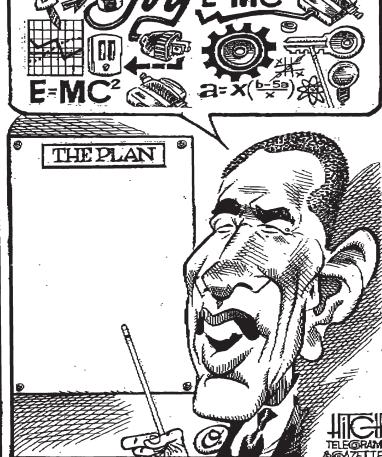
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THE CHANGE

Speak out against human trafficking

After such an historical moment of President Obama swearing into office on Jan. 20, it seems all other historical moments of the past have been overlooked. I'm not saying his inauguration should have been ignored. I believe we will see a shift in history in the following months and years.

But 36 years ago, this was a very historical time for the United States.

In response to the infamous Roe vs. Wade verdict in 1973 to legalize abortion, former President Bush declared Jan. 18 as National Sanctity of Human Life Day.

"The sanctity of life is written in the hearts of all men and women. On this day and throughout the year, we aspire to build a society in which every child is welcome in life and protected in law," he said in his proclamation.'

Though the former President was speaking about abortion, sanctifying human life can overarch into victims of euthanasia, suicide and human trafficking in all its forms. I say this because young sex slaves have lost their dignity, their safety, their sense of value, their dreams and hope.

The more I read and the more I listen, I am becoming increasingly aware of how prevalent and pervasive human trafficking is, especially the sex trade aspect. I know I have mentioned my concern about human trafficking in other too often looks away from this issue because most often at truck stops. And that always



 A Moment with Michelle

it's too evil to look at.

Linda Smith, founder of Shared Hope International, discussed the trafficking of minors for the sex industry on a radio broadcast I heard recently. Smith, also founder of War Against Trafficking Alliance, has gone undercover in truck stops, casinos, hotels, and other places she said she wouldn't want anyone to go in. She continually searches for criminals in this way, putting her life at risk for the sake of rescuing children from prostitution.

Smith guessed there are 100,000 or more children who are being sold into the sex industry in the United States alone. From her investigations, she has found that the majority are 11-13 years old. These young, vulnerable girls, who may have just been "dreaming of a boy," are finding themselves locked into situations they never would have imagined.

As I listened to Smith talk about these young girls and what her organization is doing to columns, but the first step to reversing this eradicate sex trafficking, she mentioned truck majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys problem is awareness. People need to learn stops often. She highly encouraged truck stop the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her and understand what is going on. Our culture campaigns since the exchange of girls happens campus.

made me flinch or I'd feel a pit in my stomach because I would imagine the truck stops we have in Colby. We have two truck stops, in fact, and it is very, very possible that we have encountered a slave girl without being aware

Maybe one of us has seen her at night, un-

supervised, or we assume the man waiting for

her outside the bathroom is her father. Or maybe it was that girl who couldn't look at you in the eye as you spoke to her. Or maybe she had a tattoo that would make anyone think is inappropriate for her age. All of these are signs that could mean she is a sex slave. I'm not saying the truck stops in themselves

are evil. Traffickers have just become clever and use the resources and venues that are available to them. We citizens need to be clever, as well, in order to stop these criminals.

And I would take Smith's advice in her last comment as she said, "We're just going to have to buckle down, go to war, stand on top of the evidence we have and fight. And, you know, this is worth fighting. They don't get my grandsons. They're not getting my granddaughters. And I don't want them to get yours, either."

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore.,

What does the crystal ball hold for 2009?

Last year farm income hit record highs but projections for this year aren't as rosy. Farm economists expect lower prices this year.

The global recession means a weakening in demand for corn, soybeans and wheat in 2009. The only real strong demand for corn will be ethanol and biodiesel which will drive the demand for beans.

For wheat, there is an excess supply both in the United States and abroad. Stocks are predicted to build for wheat, which should mean lower U.S. winter wheat plantings.

Bob Young, American Farm Bureau Federation chief economist, believes the United States is going through a period of bad news layered on bad news – especially in the jobs front. Young doesn't see a turnaround until the fourth quarter or first quarter of 2010.

Still there are signs the economy may be making a change for the better, the economist

says. A lot of hedge money has moved to the sidelines during this economic downturn, Young says. Finally some of this money is starting to find its way back into the commodity mar-

kets. "As these monies come back, I believe this will be a push to support prices," the economist says. "There may still be some sideways and downward movement.'

Recent USDA crop reports verify this.

In the latest release, USDA found a little more corn acreage and bumped yields. USDA also found a little more bean acreage.

There will also be significant downside pressure on the demand side as the dollar continues to hold its value, Young said.



John Schlageck

 Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

"Just as the declining U.S. dollar last year gave our ag commodities a shot in the arm in the export market, the rise in value of the dollar this year will continue to put some drag on our export markets," the AFBF economist says.

Young predicts corn prices to range from the high \$3 level to the upper \$4 level. He says the other commodities will adjust off of those

One bright spot of the weak global economy for farmers is fertilizer prices are coming down from last summer's record highs. Continued price softening can be expected and Young encourages producers to delay their fertilizer purchases.

"I even see some black ink flowing in some operations in spite of the sharply lower prices from last fall," Young says.

As revenue assurance products come out this spring, Young suggests producers look to take advantage of some of these program options. Look to tried and true marketing techniques

that have been successful. "If you can lock in a price (for your commodities) that will cover your costs and make you a little bit of money, do it," Young says. "I don't believe too many producers have gone wrong throughout the years with that kind of

Another strategy Young believes is essential requires cutting back on spending. He also recommends saving and keeping your eyes peeled for opportunities.

America is a bargain now. Many stocks are closer to their real value than they've been for "There are bargains to be had," he says.

Marketing analysts agree, saying corporate

"Look closely." While Young is confident this nation and the

world economy will once again get on track, 'we are not yet out of the woods. "There are still tough times ahead and we

must watch our spending," Young says. "Not just as individuals but as a nation as well."

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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