

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Cutting expenses could easily begin with death penalty

As the Kansas Legislature works to find ways to cut expenses in the face of a budget shortfall, Sen. Carolyn McGinn, a Sedgwick Republican, has proposed an interesting solution — suspending the state’s death penalty.

Whether one supports or opposes the idea of capital punishment, there’s no doubt capital murder cases cost Kansans considerably more than other murder cases.

According to a 2003 legislative post audit report, death penalty cases cost, on average, 70 percent more than cases in which the death penalty wasn’t sought.

Since 1994, when Kansas reinstated the death penalty, the state has spent \$4.7 million on fewer than 20 cases. Three high-profile cases alone cost the state \$2 million.

And it is important to note that not one of the people charged and convicted of capital murder has been put to death in 14 years. The last execution in Kansas took place in 1965.

Furthermore, the median cost of death penalty cases was \$1.2 million, compared to \$740,000 for non-death-penalty murder cases. Additional costs also are borne throughout the process — from local investigative costs to higher-than-usual appeals costs.

Doing away with the death penalty seems like a sensible way to cut costs without cutting programs that could actually benefit Kansans. The Legislature should suspend, if not eliminate, Kansas’ death penalty.

— *The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press*

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- 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: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
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Extreme left should take second look

It is long past time for the political left in this country to take a good hard look in the mirror.

There exists a militancy among certain sectors in the progressive movement that has prevented liberal and leftists from gaining a mass following among the American people.

Many so-called progressives have decided the best way to combat imperial right wing group-think is to adopt a militant anti-government stance based on knee-jerk pessimism towards American foreign policy. Neither way of thinking will create the informed participatory democracy this country sorely needs.

One of the more repugnant examples of far-left fanaticism has been the way some progressives continue to idolize Che Guevara and defend Cuba’s communist regime. Guevara and Castro were just as ruthless as the U.S.-backed right-wing armies and U.S.-supported brutal dictators in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East that our government has backed in the past and in some cases continues to back.

It’s hypocritical for leftists to bash the U.S. for its past support of the Somoza dynasty and Augusto Pinochet while defending Castro’s horrific human rights record. Not all progressives are apologists for Castro and Guevara, but there are enough of them to give the whole movement a bad name.

It is insensitive to defend Castro when Cuban Americans have relatives remaining in Cuba suffering under his regime. If progressives want to stand for human rights, they should be supporting the political prisoners in Cuba, not a regime with no respect for basic human rights.

Having said that, I must say I have been against the majority of U.S. governments poli-



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

cies toward Cuba over the years. America’s involvement in Cuba’s splendid little war with Spain in 1889 was followed by the United States’ splendid little occupation of Cuba. Instead of letting Cuba’s freedom fighters run their own government, America decided to turn Cuba into a neocolonial protectorate.

While Cuba had a far more vibrant economy during the pre-Castro years, many Cubans simmered with anger over American domination over its economy and our support of its unpopular dictator, Fulgencia Batista. It can be argued that if the United States had allowed the Cubans to run their own country after their war, Castro would never have come to power.

The left also needs to rethink its pessimism regarding the current situation in Iraq. This doesn’t mean that we should declare the war was worth it, but it does mean we should acknowledge and celebrate the success of the Surge.

Too many progressives have regarded the drop in violence in Iraq with silence or desperate attempts to discredit the obvious gains that have been made in that country. This is despicable behavior that goes against everything progressives are supposed to stand for. We should be celebrating the fact that Hussein has been removed and that Iraqis are no longer being killed in massive numbers everyday.

Supporting a group of repressed people who are finally free of a genocidal leader should trump progressives’ animosity toward former President George W. Bush.

Personally, I’m not convinced the Iraq War was worth it. And it’s discomfoting to think about how many thousands of Iraqi men, women and children died from U.S. air strikes. The fact that these people were never asked if they felt their lives were worth overthrowing a dictator makes me uncomfortable.

The fact that the administrations of former Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush had friendly relationships with Hussein during his worst atrocities shows how our government is inconsistent in its commitment to human rights. Hussein used poison gas against Iran and Iraq’s Kurdish population without even receiving a slap on the wrist from Washington.

The genocide Hussein’s regime committed against the Kurds in 1988 also was ignored by the our government. The campaign against the Kurds killed 50,000 to 182,000 people. No economic sanctions were leveled against Iraq because the prospect of severing U.S.-Iraqi trade relations was seen as harmful to U.S. farming interests.

So progressives have every right to be wary of America’s war in Iraq. But that’s no excuse for ignoring or discrediting the progress our troops have made in Iraq.

We must celebrate justice everywhere and fight injustice anywhere, even if that means occasionally working together with conservatives.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Cost-cutting necessarily affects all

I am inundated with e-mails pleading with me not to make budget cuts. Whether it is education, social services, public safety or otherwise, the message is the same.

When I invited recipients of state money to suggest where cuts should come from if not their budget, the universal answer is “I don’t know, just don’t cut me.”

The state’s deficit is real. Barely skating by in 2009 won’t help us much in 2010, 2011 or 2012. We simply must cut to the point where expenditures match revenue.

While it may appear to be politically “safe” simply voting against cuts, or voting for reduced cuts, to do so is fiscally irresponsible in both the long and short run and does not address our requirement to balance the budget and remain in the black. Having said that, our House accommodation in SB 23 to public education (for which I voted) illustrates my continued commitment to and concern for our schools while at the same time challenging them to accept their role in helping to balance the budget.

I’m not elected to do what is simple, safe or expedient. I’m not elected to protect the few at the expense of the many or protect the many at the expense of the few. I am a representative. I am, in hard economic times and good, a member of the “board of directors” of the State of Kansas and have a fiduciary obligation with regard to our treasury and taxpayers.

My obligation to tax consumers is no greater



Jim Morrison

- Capitol Review

than my obligations to my tax payers. I must help balance our budget and protect our state’s future. I’m often reminded that our children’s future is the state’s future. I agree, but it’s worth reminding you that our state’s future is also our children’s future.

As was said on the opening day of session, it will do us little good if we provide the best public education in the nation but our children go elsewhere to work and raise families due to the economic climate in Kansas:

As an advocate for _____, you have the advantage of being able to say “I don’t know where to cut, just don’t cut me.” Believe me, every e-mail from those supporting schools, public safety, social services, etc., all say the same thing. I agree; I don’t want to cut you. “Want” is not the issue. I have no choice.

You, understandably, probably don’t know where else to cut because you don’t know what all the other programs are that are also on the chopping block. We do. It’s not pretty. E-mails pleading with me to reject proposed cuts to public schools currently outnumber all

others about 50-1. But with schools being 51 percent of our total budget, cut we must, just as we must cut other budgets.

Everyone has a good argument as to why their program is unique and special and absolutely essential. Again, I do not disagree. We simply don’t have the money to fund 100 percent of every current program. When revenues fall such that expenditures outstrip receipts, cuts are required. Cuts have been required in the past under similar circumstances and we survived. We will survive this downturn as well. All must share the burden, though.

I believe we have an obligation to inform you of the extent of the problem. I need to shoot straight and be plain spoken. You may not like the message but should appreciate my candor and sincerity. Sugar-coating our problem does everyone a disservice. We need to move everyone from denial to realization and then commitment to helping the state come up with long-term solutions.

I still truly enjoy this job you elected me to and intend to continue. I ask for your prayers and help in guiding through this rough period. All thoughts and suggestions have been and will continue to be welcomed. Please, though, form letters are a distraction. I want to hear your thoughts not just see your signature on e-mails and letters that only differ in who sends them.

Use jmorrison@ink.org as my e-mail or call me at (785) 296-7676 if I can help with anything.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

