



Free Press Viewpoint

District handles state cuts well

The Colby School Board has acted responsibly in dealing with budget cuts handed down from the state and preparing for another round this winter.

Case in point is the board’s decision this week not to join Schools for Fair Funding, a coalition of districts intent on suing the state Legislature to restore the full base state aid listed in state law. The board did not take a vote, simply decided by consensus not to join at this time. This was a wise move, as this group is in a way responsible for some of the current problems.

In 2005, represented several “mid-sized” Kansas school districts in a lawsuit against the state, alleging that the Legislature was treating their students unfairly when compared to larger and smaller districts. The Kansas Supreme Court found in the group’s favor. After agreeing to a settlement, and promising big increases in school funds, the Legislature has been upping the budget for all Kansas schools.

The total increase ordered by the court was more than \$755 million. All well and good right? At least until the recession hit.

The fact is, everyone is getting cut right now. The state simply doesn’t have enough money to continue the budget all of its departments at the old levels. Tax revenue estimates continue to sink lower and nobody knows what the final numbers will be.

The budget cuts handed down this year amounted to \$600,000 for our school district so far. That’s a lot of money, and nobody is happy about it. All told, the state’s education budget lost somewhere around \$130 million. And now comes news that the governor’s going to make another \$260 million in cut across the board.

Education will likely see a big chunk of that for the very reason that public schools are the biggest chunk of the Kansas budget, due in no small part to the increases after the Schools for Fair Funding lawsuit.

Fort Hays State University President Edward Hammond hit the nail on the head when he said the same percentage could be cut from all departments, but the actual amount cut from schools would be much higher than the rest.

Suing the state government might make a difference again, but would it make a difference for the better? The state could restore full funding for schools, but how would the Legislature find the money?

It would be a case of one division of the government forcing its parent division deeper into the hole. It would be like suing someone for money you know they don’t have. The state would have to make a huge cut to some other departments, and in that case, would some other organization sue on their behalf?

Our school district administration and board have done a good job of weathering this crisis buy cutting small things here and there, not hiring for positions after a retirement or resignation and other incremental adjustments designed to spread out the pain. If they can make it through the lean times, they’ll have a tight ship when the Kansas economy gets back on its feet and they’ll leave a lasting legacy of fiscal responsibility as a model for future boards to follow.

— Kevin Bottrell



It’s our policies Muslims hate, not us

I would like to think I’m pretty laid back about most things. Little things don’t get me too worked up. But I have never had much patience for people who say one thing and then do another.

This is why I get so frustrated by politics. It’s so fraught with double standards that it makes it hard to believe in anything, even if you want to.

One way our government could improve its reputation with the public and the rest of the world would be to adopt a more nuanced stance in the war on terrorism (or whatever they are calling it today).

I would like to ask politicians and some people in the press to stop saying the only reason Muslims hate us is because of our freedom.

I think we should be brave enough to investigate whether people in the Middle East have legitimate reasons to be angry with the American government. Despite the nationalist “are-you-with-us-or-against-us” rhetoric of the Bush administration, the Bush people actually did try to understand what was behind Islamic rage.

In 2004, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld directed the Defense Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communications to review the impact administration policies were having on Islamic terrorism.

The task force report, published in September 2004, concluded that what creates anti-American sentiment and the threat of terrorism is “American direct intervention in the Muslim world” through our “one-sided support in favor of Israel” and our support for Islamic tyrannies in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf States.

“Muslims do not hate our freedom,” the report said; “rather they hate our policies.”

On our policy in Afghanistan, I think it would be wise to consider the opinions of some people in the Afghan population.

Malai Joya, an Afghan politician and a former elected member of the parliament from Farah Province, called for President Barack Obama to end the NATO occupation in an article in the *The San Jose Mercury News*.

“In 2001, the U.S. helped return to power the worst misogynist criminals, such as the Northern Alliance warlords and drug lords,” said Joya. “These men ought to be considered a photocopy of the Taliban. The only difference is they wear suits and ties and cover their faces with the mask of democracy while they occupy government positions.”

This is merely the voice of one woman in a war-torn country, but it’s a voice that is rarely heard. I’m sure there are other law-abiding Afghan citizens whose views are opposite to Joya’s. Both should get more attention in the American media.

We should also have the courage to acknowledge that we supported Saddam Hussein after he invaded Iran. He killed more people in his own country than were killed on Sept. 11, 2001. Human Rights Watch, with the aid of Physicians for Human Rights, found that 50,000 to 100,000 Kurds (many children or women) were executed or disappeared in Iraq between February and September in 1988 alone. President George H.W. Bush’s administration squelched any attempts to condemn the regime for genocide or to impose sanctions. It was only after Hussein invaded oil-rich Kuwait that he became an enemy of the U.S. government.

Remember, the last time Iran had a democracy, it was overthrown by the Central Intelligence Agency and the British intelligence service. The CIA helped restore Mohammed Reza Pahlavi and they trained a secret police known as SAVAK that repressed all dissent.

One of the reasons we supported Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war, which killed millions, was because we saw him as someone who could combat an Iranian government that probably would have never come to power if it were not for the CIA-supported coup of 1953. Later, President Reagan’s government armed Iran with 1,500 missiles in a deal to free seven Americans held hostage of Iranian terrorists in Lebanon. And the Public Broadcasting Service reported that about \$18 million given to America by Iran went to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua.

I don’t think Reagan and Bush supported these policies because they were evil, but I do believe we as a country should decide when pragmatism can rationalize inhumanity. We should also discuss whether it’s OK for high-ranking officials to have immunity from laws the rest of the country has to follow.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.



Andy Heintz • Wildcat Ramblings

Surplus funds claim mostly spurious

The assertion that Kansas schools have a surplus of \$1.498 billion that can be used for operations is misleading.

\$451.7 million of this is Capital Outlay funds in individual districts. The Kansas Constitution limits its use to capital items, buildings and equipment; most is collected through a special, restricted tax levy.

\$344.3 million is in bond funds. That money is to be used only to pay off bonds, and the cash will be needed from July onward to pay these loans.

\$207.5 million is for special education and special ed co-ops. That money must cover July 1 to October 25 expenses.

Yes, districts have \$175.7 million in “contingency reserves,” money saved for a rainy day by school officials being careful over the last few years to hang onto any leftover cash. The state Department of Education has kept Kansas superintendents aware of the growing shortfall in state revenue. Administrators, where they have had the opportunity, have saved. And they will start tapping those “savings accounts” in a few weeks.

Base State Aid Per Pupil was supposed to be \$4,218 for the new year. However, there’s been an increase in enrollment, a decrease of a half billion dollars in assessed valuation statewide, a 13 percent increase in students with free lunches because of the recession and slight increases in bilingual and virtual students. This would normally force the governor and Legislature to appropriate \$100 million more to hold the \$4,218 aid per pupil for the current school year. With the revenue shortfall, that won’t happen. This effectively drops basic aid to \$4,068.

With Kansas being a balanced-budget state and revenues running \$260 million short, the governor has no recourse but to take back even more. We are looking at school funding being pushed back to 2000-2001 levels.

Schools drew up teacher contracts for this full year based on the \$4,218 basic state aide, but will have to finish out the year getting less than that. That is where any contingency reserves will be critical for the districts that have them. Those without a reserve may face financial “exigency” — they will be unable to meet commitments. Some are facing this situation already.

Is it possible to break into and use the capital outlay, bond, and special ed funds? Some states have found ways to raid their committed funds. As a result, states facing financial crisis, such as California, find their bonds that are now rated barely above junk bonds. Kansas is not California, and most Kansans are proud of that.

Kansas farmers are wise enough to know



John Richard Schrock • Education Frontlines

that if you have a bumper year, it is wise to not spend it all but to put as much as possible away for a “rainy day.” Kansas did have some bumper tax years in the 1990s. But the same political philosophy that is pushing schools to raid their committed funds was responsible for tax cuts that prevented the state from saving for a rainy day.

There were over 2,100 teachers and other licenses school personnel last year who were not hired back this fall, and about 1,600 unlicensed staff (along with whole programs) lost due to the previous \$185 million budget cut. The \$138 million in stimulus money already in the budget probably kept that number from exceeding 5,000. Where we lost two educators, we would have lost three without the federal money. But the stimulus money is short term. And state revenues continue to decline.

This is the season many Kansans watch “It’s a Wonderful Life.” If you want to see the difference between the market philosophy and the public-good philosophy, compare the desolate Potterville, run by the private banker, with the public good represented by the character played by Jimmy Stewart. But instead of pointing out that the money is invested in “your house, and your house, and your house,” he is saying it is invested in “your child, and your child, and your child.”

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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