



Other Viewpoints

Why spend taxes to get more taxes?

The potential costs to taxpayers of Kansas school districts suing the state is not that much in the big picture, but the principle of the matter remains.

The number of school districts that have joined the Schools for Fair Funding coalition stands at 57 and climbing. Those districts are positioning themselves for a potential follow-up lawsuit against the state to force the Legislature to give them the state aid they feel is rightfully theirs.

Just being a member of the group costs money. It will cost more if the group proceeds with litigation.

The Hutchinson News tallied costs for 16 schools districts in its readership area. Combined, those schools’ membership will cost \$48,000, based on their enrollments. The cost rises to \$121,000 is they sue.

For most school districts, the cost is less than 1 percent of the state aid they have lost. But while school administrators and board members think this is money well spent, many taxpayers — who have to foot the bill — disagree.

The idea of spending taxpayers’ money to sue the state with the goal of getting more taxpayer money just doesn’t make sense. It is a convoluted manifestation of the system. Moreover, it is a warped circumvention of the system.

We do, after all, have a system for making decisions about how taxpayer money is spent — more specifically how much to spend on public education. It is called a representative form of government.

We elect legislators to go to Topeka to represent our interests. If we disagree with them, we should throw them out and elect different legislators.

Instead, too many interest groups rely on lobbyists and lawyers. That includes state agencies and other units of governments.

Cities, counties and school boards all generally pay dues to belong to associations that pay lobbyists to get them more money in Topeka. Some hire their own lobbyists. The state universities generally have staff members who lobby for them. Now we have school districts that sue in court if legislators and lobbyists don’t deliver.

School official might feel they have no choice, but it shouldn’t be that way.

— 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: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com
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‘Kitten snow’ signals a special event

The Eskimos, I’m told, have over 200 words for snow. Since I’ve been doing the weather here at the paper, I’ve learned one or two new ones — which, of course, I can’t remember at this exact moment.

But Sunday’s snowfall made me think there’s probably one name for snow missing from nearly every language. I propose a new designation — “kitten and toddler snow.”

Like virtually every such suggestion, this one has a story, dating to the year we got two kittens for Christmas.

At first, the kittens were too young to be outside. Then, when they started going outside for short periods of time, there was no snow, as is often the case in western Kansas. But sometime near the end of January, there came a storm very much like the one we had yesterday, with lots of very fluffy, very dry snow directly on the grass.

Step one was the first step out the door. That’s a cold step for a bare-footed kitten. These two had very different personalities; one was a cautious observer, while the other would charge ahead full speed.

The watcher had to think about that cold stuff on his foot. He touched it with his toes, shook his foot, and hunkered down to wait a bit. The doer shook the snow off, gave it a sniff, and charged full speed ahead, aiming for his favorite tree about 15 feet from the back



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

door. Since the snow was about as deep as he was tall, this looked a lot like a snow blower mowing across the yard.

Cautious brother, seeing this, made his decision and took off full tilt across the yard after him. Scrambling around the base of the tree like a couple of squirrels, they were soon wrestling in the snow. Not long after that they discovered they could swing a paw sideways and “splash” the loose powder up while pretending to chase a mouse under the snow. Like any kids, they forgot about the cold in the joy of the moment.

Within a day or so, of course, it had settled and packed, and was no longer the great kitten playground it had been in the beginning. There must be a moral there somewhere, that some pleasures are too transient to be postponed for even a moment.

Such fresh powder is also the best way to introduce a toddler to snow. It’s fun. It’s dry, so wet mittens and soggy snowsuits are not really

a problem. It’s low-tech. A kid doesn’t need to know how to make a snowball, because it’s not snowball snow. It’s great for snow angels. It’s wonderful for shuffling through and making a trail. It’s great for catching on your tongue — or on a little mitten. It’s perfect for laughing and smiling, and just enjoying life.

One of the earliest pictures my parents had of me was standing on the sidewalk in front of our house on just such a day, looking like I wasn’t quite sure what to do. I’ll bet I figured it out very shortly after the shutter snapped, because I always was a sucker for a fresh snow-fall.

It must be hereditary, because I’ve got pictures of my own kids on such days, too. Snow never stopped them, or even slowed them down.

We’re in for another round of winter storms this week, which will probably hit harder and last longer, making more work and trouble all around.

But at least we’ve had one for the kittens and kids, before it settles into a long, cold winter. And whether or not there’s a white Christmas, we’ve had a white Christmas parade.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Dairy farms feeling the pinch

While the cattle and swine industries have received their fair share of attention concerning the recent downturn in prices, dairy farmers have also been experiencing the pain.

In Kansas and across the country, farmers find themselves with too much milk and not enough markets.

Lynda and Gary Foster have operated a family dairy for more than 33 years in Bourbon County. The couple met while attending Kansas State University and Lynda says Gary was literally the boy next door.

More than three decades later, son David now works in the family business. They milk 130 Holstein dairy cows twice a day.

If anyone epitomizes the ideal dairy producers today, it would be the Fosters. They work hard and smart and use the latest technology in their milking operation. Lynda has served on state and national dairy promotion boards, and serves on the Kansas Dairy Association board.

They’ve always managed their operation optimally, ever looking for better ways to trim feed costs and make their milking business more economical while still getting the most milk out of their cows by using the best genetics.

In spite of their fierce dedication and investment in the dairy vocation, the last two years have not been kind to the Fosters and other family dairy businesses.

“It has been the most stressful year, financially, we’ve ever experienced,” Lynda says.

This is ironic, because 2007 was a great year for milk producers in Kansas and across the United States. Dairy farmers were receiving more than \$20 a hundredweight for their milk, but when the economy went south, it took along these profitable prices.

“Our export market for milk had picked up, but now these countries couldn’t afford to buy



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

milk and everything backed up,” Lynda says. “You just can’t tell those cows to quit producing milk overnight. It takes time to reduce production.”

At the tail end of ’08, milk prices began to drop, and by mid 2009 they had fallen to unseen levels — down to \$9 a hundredweight in some instances. At the same time, feed, like soybean meal, jumped from \$180 a ton to \$523.

It’s backed off some but it’s still more than \$300 a ton, and even at that price, it’s impossible to make ends meet, Lynda says. There just aren’t many alternatives for a protein source.

With a 130-head cow herd like theirs, the Fosters are losing \$12,000 a month. Milk producers can only keep that up for so long, they sat.

“We’re using up our family’s equity,” Lynda says in a whisper. “Thank goodness we have a good banker who’s not ready to milk cows yet and is willing to stick with us and understands there has to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Our problem is, we don’t know how long that tunnel is.”

In spite of this difficult year and eroding farm equity, the Fosters remain optimistic about their future. They also realize that others in farming and other businesses are also struggling.

The Bourbon County couple believes the answer for their industry is a stronger economy and increased export markets.

“There are still people in our country and the world who need to eat and drink the products we provide,” Lynda says. “That’s why we do what we do by providing a nutritious product.”

And even though the price of milk has increased on the shelves of grocery stores, it still remains one of the most inexpensive sources of nutrition.

Milk costs about 25 cents per eight-ounce glass, and you get a lot of nutrition, including calcium, protein and other essential nutrients, Lynda says.

“I can’t stress to youngsters, teens, adults and everyone how important it is to drink milk daily,” she said. “We’re living in a world where people are calcium deficient. Everyone needs to consume milk, cheese and yogurt every day — at least three servings of dairy products daily.”

With the pendulum swinging ever so slowly back toward better economic times, more people here and around the world will once again begin to upgrade their diets. At the same time, dairy farmers like the Fosters can once again do what they do best, and increase their production of nutritious milk.

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



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

