Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Challenges ahead for state Legislature

The state legislature goes back to work on Monday.

Well not exactly back to work. Interim committees work off and on between sessions, deciding rules and language and studying issues, but the full Legislature will be back in action in Topeka starting next week.

The one thing on everybody's mind this year is the budget. The state has less money coming in, so how do we deal with it? Do we make the governor's cuts permanent? Do we repeal some and pass others? Do we raise taxes? All of these issues will have to be addressed.

One of the battlegrounds on the budget is going to be schools. The governor has said he would support a tax increase rather than cut any more out of education. Spending for each student has already been cut below that of 2006. A court case decided that year ordered the Legislature to increase spending, and required that it not go below the 2006 level.

Education isn't the only area hurting, of course. Transportation, the judicial branch, higher education, aid to cities and counties, the Revenue Department, all parts of state government have all felt the belt going tighter.

There are going to be many attempts in the session to try and solve the problem, some which will will go through and some that won't. One of these will likely be a tax increase and, given these circumstance, it would be logical. However, it could be problematic.

Tax increases are not always popular, especially during a recession, and after the session is over, the legislators would have to go back to their districts and explain why it got ap-

Taxes can levied in many ways. They can be a blanket increase, such as an income tax hike, or they can be targeted, such as an increase in the cigarette or fuel taxes. Each way has its flaws. Targeted taxes don't generate as much revenue, and so you might need more of them or you might need to make them a bigger increase. With targeted tax increases, you also run the risk of alienating part of your constituency.

And what happens when the economic situation improves? Do we keep the tax? Do we repeal it? Do we write in a sunset, so the tax expires on its own?

Expect to see all sides of this issue well argued, but we have a Republican-dominated legislature, and Republicans as a whole usually decide against tax hikes and for spending cuts.

So what would happen if they approve a spending plan that cuts a lot out of state agencies and doesn't raise taxes? This seems likely, but would the governor approve it or veto it?

Given the atmosphere in the state, Parkinson likely would have to approve it, or risk looking like he's not doing enough. It's a false impression, but politics is perception, and often the current perception of what a politician is doing eclipses what-

ever they've done before. The only sure thing is that the issue will outlast this session. We can hope that whatever our senators and representatives come up with will improve the situation, but nothing will be fully resolved until Kansas is back in the black.

— Kevin Bottrell

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail kbottrell @ nwkansas.com or colby.editor @ nwkansas.

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It's time to overcome fear of differences

Fear is one of the most powerful emotions a person can experience. Once it grabs hold of someone, there's no telling how they will react.

There's nothing sadder than watching someone try to confront a situation they're not capable of dealing with. Their eyes reveal a petrified, helpless look resembling an animal trapped by a predator or a boxer who has just realized he's in the ring with an opponent he has no chance of beating.

I'm writing about fear this week because I think it's a subject that should be discussed here in Colby and in our nation in general.

One of the best ways to combat the fear that causes so much pain for people of all religions, races and ethnicities is to have an inclusive, tolerant culture that empathizes with all people no matter what they look like or who they

I think one of the reasons so many people have anxiety disorders in our country is because they are afraid to show who they really are due to the fear that they will be rejected by society. They indulge their fear by wearing a mask (or several masks) every day that presents an image of a perfect person who has no problems and makes no mistakes. The problem with this strategy is when they do make a mistake or get stuck in an uncomfortable situation, all the problems they have been hiding are exposed.

the public and even themselves they are gay. I think this reluctance to be open about their ho-

mosexuality is almost entirely based on fear. A few people I knew in high school have



Ramblings announced they are gay. One was a friend of mine. I was surprised when I heard the news. In all the years I had known him, the thought

He was involved in athletics and played several sports during all four years of high school. He seemed like the embodiment of what our culture calls manly. He didn't fit into any of the simplistic stereotypes we identify as being feminine or homosexual. This once again reminded me that all stereotypes are easy to

that he might be gay had never entered my

understand - and totally unreliable. I often wonder when he first knew he was gay. I also wonder how much courage it took to finally come out of the closet. We played on the same football team for a few years, and I remember how casually words like queer and other, harsher slurs got tossed around the locker room. It pains me to imagine how uncomfortable that must have made him.

the boy's varsity basketball team here, I heard unsure of ourselves. Let's not intentionally One decision facing many Americans is somebody use the word queer in a joking manwhether or not to admit to their family, friends, ner to one of his teammates. He was just joking around and I don't think there was any malice behind his words, but I hoped there wasn't anybody else on the team secretly enduring the same pain and discomfort my friend had

I will admit that I have harbored fears about my sexual orientation. I have always liked women every since I first saw one of my classmates dressed as Marcia Brady for Halloween back in grade school, but I was worried that I thought there were a few guys who were better looking than others. I have never been homophobic, but I didn't want to have to deal with the prejudice and discrimination involved with being gay.

After several years of worrying, I came to the realization that merely acknowledging that a guy was good looking didn't mean you were gay. While this reality check did a lot to soothe my fears at the time, it has only made me more sympathetic to gay people. And if I were confronted with the same worries about my sexuality today, and it turned out I was gay, I would be open about it.

It may make some people uncomfortable, but in reality there are several things in life we have no control over, including what thoughts go through our minds, who we are attracted to and who we fall in love with.

If law-abiding heterosexual adults are able to openly share their love with each other, there is no reason law-abiding homosexuals should be discourage or vilified for doing the same thing. We have all had to deal with uncomfort-This Wednesday, while taking pictures of able situations where we have felt scared and make our fellow citizens have to deal with this fear each day.

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.

Fear the illness, not the vaccination

Fewer than half of parents are "very likely" to have their children vaccinated for the H1N1 flu, according to a survey released in October. This anti-vaccination response is unprecedented in America. There are three sources for this unjustified fear.

Anyone who is 60 or older will remember fear: fear of polio. Up to the early 1950s, this justified fear was of the paralyzing disease, not vaccination. Our parents worried over our going outside. Cities closed swimming pools. Images of children in iron lungs touched ev-

There were polio cases in most town. Mothers marched. And their "March of Dimes" supported Jonas Salk and his breakthrough vac-

I flinched as I got my injection and a later booster, but it was a relief to see the polio cases disappear. We feared the disease, not the vaccine. Even when Cutter Labs processed one batch of vaccine wrong and it caused polio rather than granting immunity, we all weighed the dangers. Working together, we all helped eradicate polio from the continent. Vaccination even eradicated smallpox worldwide.

But today, we have no group memory of serious chronic epidemic infectious diseases to counterbalance the trivial needle-stick. It is an irony of science that in the act of conquering a problem, we remove the experience base that allows us to value the science. Videos of longgone history do not have the impact of casual-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

ties in our neighborhood. And we cannot let serious diseases return just to provide experience so we can get our fears straight.

The second source of vaccination fear is inadequate schooling about our anatomy and physiology, and what "significance" means in science. The anti-vaccination movement, with its unjustified fears of the H1N1 vaccine being untested, or containing dangerous adjuvants, or the preservative thimerosal causing autism or mercury poisoning, are all counter to research. The Internet and a diffuse media have spread unjustified fear across an ignorant

The third and most sinister fear factor is radio and television commentators who spread doubt, not because of any scientific insight, but because of their admitted "We just don't trust the Obama administration" attitude. Sniping at H1N1 vaccination merely because it is run by an opposing administration combines with the two previous factors to push the anti-vaccination movement to new heights, perhaps a majority of parents by today's surveys!

As more H1N1 vaccine arrives, for adults who choose not to get vaccinated, there is no one else to blame. But for kids, that decision is made by their guardians. Parents who lose a healthy child because they chose not to vaccinate the child - those parents will have to live with their decision the rest of their lives.

But what about the political pied pipers who railed against the vaccine? The First Amendment ensures their free speech (although that does not include yelling "Fire!" in a crowded theater). Their inciting-to-inaction is too distant; they are not the "proximate cause" of a child's death. They will walk away without any remorse in their cold souls.

What is most sobering is that under today's anti-vaccination cloud, America could no longer eradicate polio or smallpox as we did many decades ago. This high number of antivaccination parents shows that some of the American health care problem rests on ignorance of science.

Science teachers and school boards do not have cold souls. They need to restore anatomy and microbiology and immunity lessons to the curriculum - now! We cannot wait for needless pandemic suffering to realign our fears.

As for the venomous broadcasters pushing doubt, change the channel and tune them out. 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.

Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley



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