# Opinion



### Other **Viewpoints**

### Could sales tax be least bad option?

Raising taxes during a down economy is a bad idea. But as a study released this week found, cutting government spending may be even worse.

John Wong, interim director of the Hugo Wall School of Urban and Public Affairs at Wichita State University, analyzed the economic impact of either cutting state spending by \$350 million or not cutting that spending and raising the statewide sales-tax rate from 5.3 to 6.3 percent, as Gov. Mark Parkinson has proposed.

Wong determined that the spending cuts could result in a loss of nearly 5,200 jobs across the state, while the sales-tax increase could lead to about 3,200 lost jobs. Thus, the sales-tax increase could result in about 2,000 fewer job losses.

That may seem counterintuitive, but Wong offered three reasons why a sales-tax increase would have less negative im-

A higher percentage of government spending than private spending initially stays within the state's economy, going either to employees in the form of salaries or to local businesses for the purchase of goods and services.

The negative effects of a sales-tax increase are spread throughout the state, both geographically and across all residents, while the spending cuts severely affect a smaller number of state residents and businesses, causing greater economic harm....

Wong's analysis focused on the economic impact of either option, but there also are social and policy considerations.

The sales-tax increase ... would place more burden on struggling families. It also would move Kansas from having the 23rd-highest combined state and local sales-tax rate in the country to the ninth-highest....

On the other hand, cutting \$350 million more from the state budget could do real harm to crucial programs and the people who depend on them. And Wong told The Wichita Eagle editorial board that the value of the lost services to lower-income families likely would be greater than the additional sales tax they would pay.

The fact that a sales-tax increase could be better for the overall economy than spending cuts does not mean the state should recklessly raise taxes. The state needs to control spending and seek a proper balance between providing needed services and maintaining a competitive tax and business climate. It also should reconsider eliminating some sales-tax exemptions and look at creative ways to help close its budget gap, such as by selling some state assets.

But some anti-tax groups act as if there is no economic cost to cutting government spending, and any money taxed is a complete loss to the economy – as if the government puts those tax dollars in a pile and burns them.

Conversely, some supporters of education and social services are too dismissive of the impact of tax increases, downplaying the sales-tax proposal as merely an extra penny on the dollar.

As Wong's study makes clear, both are bad options. The

question is: Which is the least bad?

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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(785) 462-3963

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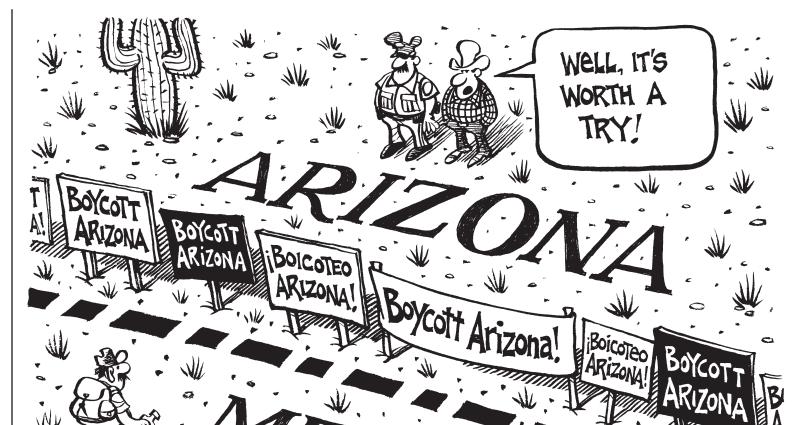
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## Chattanooga fun for choo choo fan

We rushed to Georgia to meet our granddaughter, but Cynthia wanted to spend some time seeing the country on the way back. We both had some ideas.

First on her list was Chattanooga, where she wanted to see the aquarium and I wanted to see and ride the trains at the railroad museum.

It's only a four-hour drive from Augusta, in east Georgia, so after greeting Brad's parents when they arrived from Chicago, we left the baby in their arms and took off, listening to a Rockies game on the way up.

Cynthia had booked us into the Chattanooga Choo Choo, in the old Union Depot at the south end of downtown. This unique hotel started with rooms in a collection of 60-some old railroad coaches just retired with the advent of Amtrak.

I'd worried that the quarters might be tight, but you don't sleep in an old Pullman with pull-down bunks, but in half of a day coach turned into a hotel room. Designers kept the baggage racks for pillow and blanket storage and used the lounges at either end for bathrooms, so there's a real "train" feel. Oh, and they kept ALL the windows.

The place is popular with families, who also fill three hotel buildings put up since the 1970s. The old station concourse serves as the lobby, with "rooms" parked along the tracks and dinner in a real diner available on weekends.

downtown, where restaurants line the main one end. streets. We tried our luck at a brew pub, and it was good. Lunch the next day at the Boat House along the riverfront was even better.

Next day, we headed to the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum, a legendary place which has played a key role in preserving steam locomotives in the South. The excursion line is only three miles of former main line, but there's a tunnel through Mission Ridge, site of an epic Civil War battle, and a real, live steam engine.

No. 610 came steaming in from the shop. While I was outside, the lady at the gift shop

Steve Haynes Along the

Sappa happened to mention to Cynthia that for \$20

extra (fare was only \$15) you could ride in the locomotive cab. You know what I said. I shed my good jacket, because it's hot, dirty and moist in a coal-burner's cab. Riders get to sit on the fireman's seat box while he (or she,

That keeps them out of trouble, but I did get to turn on the blower and put water in the boiler with the injector, so I learned a few things. And, of course, I got to blow the whistle. Jim, the engineer, showed me how. The engine, it turned out, was the last built by the famous Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia -

in 1954. It worked for the U.S. Army, mostly

in this case) shovels and works the engine.

training crews to work overseas. "Our diesels are older," Tim noted.

Tim, the second fireman, was a retired college professor who was being trained. I got the feeling if I lived anywhere near something like this, my weekends would be shot.

Six miles doesn't take too long, though, We were late, so we took a city shuttle bus even at 10 mph with a ride on the turntable at

> Aquarium next so we could ride an excursion boat down the river, but it was pouring rain. We decided to tour the Chickamauga battlefield south of town instead, giving history a couple of hours.

> The field were 125,000 Americans fought each other is small in some senses, but you can't begin to take it all in with two hours. We learned a lot in that time, though.

> It was here, along Chickamauga Creek, that Maj. Gen. George Thomas earned his reputa

tion by holding against massive Confederate assaults, even after Maj. Gen. James Longstreet's charge broke the center of the Union

Maj. Gen. Alexander McCook faced a court martial and was acquitted, but relieved of command for his part in the collapse. He later redeemed himself defending Washington. Phil Sheridan and W.T. Sherman were but division commanders in 1863.

Fascinating, but we had a date with the fish. We drove back downtown in the rain, winding down Mission Ridge past various state monuments to fallen troops Chickamauga was the nation's first battlefield park, and scattered around town are nearly 900 plaques, pillars and monuments.

At the aquarium, we found three buildings, a river journey, ocean journey and IMAX theater. You start on the river. Wow. After a couple of hours, it was time for the film and I hadn't made it halfway through the Amazon toward the exit. Cynthia – she must not stop to read the little interpretive signs – said she'd go watch the movie for both of us. Me, I managed to get out in time to rush through the ocean voyage

They had trout, crappie, catfish, bass, gar, carp, minnows and shiners, big ones and little ones. Oh, I can watch fish all day, and as a museum, the place was well done. The ocean journey – think sharks and pretty tropical fish, tuna and lots of other stuff – ended with a beautiful show of jellies Wow

The rain stopped, the sun came out while we were inside, but the excursion boat never moved, so I don't think we missed anything on the river. Next day, we ambled across Tennessee, and man, that's one long state. But that'll have to be another column.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

### Education run by politics, not teachers

Education Week published the results of a survey sent to 834 education leaders asking who were the most influential people in education policy in America over the last decade. In the study, "Influence: A Study of the Factors Shaping Education Policy," there was not one teacher or educational practitioner in the top

Bill Gates led the way. The Bill and Melinda Gates foundation has invested million in promoting high school reforms and Gates has spoken many times.

President George W. Bush was second, thanks to his notorious No Child Left Behind program that, like the pink bunny, keeps going and going and going.

Some names you might not recognize: G. Reid Lyon for promoting Reading First, Mike Smith who heads the education program for a major foundation, and Kati Haycock of the Education Trust.

But political power carried the day. The late Sen. Edward Kennedy promoted Headstart. President Bill Clinton was considered influential. Two governors, James B. Hunt Jr. and Richard Riley (also a federal secretary of education) were included. Our prior education

secretary, Margaret Spellings, was number 10.



#### John Richard Schrock

 Education Frontlines

most influential people in education.

OK, Stanford education professor Linda Darling-Hammond made the eleventh position. Many folks saw her as a contender for the education cabinet position. But Education School fads are rarely based in classroom reality and usually have a short lifetime. Education has yet to develop a stable body of knowledge that can be built upon.

Money and power — not classroom experience or expertise - buys you influence in making national policy. If you want to direct the future of education, run for state office or get rich. But don't bother studying education or teaching. The current drive to common "core standardization: is the product of governors, few of them with any working knowledge of the classroom.

At the local level, this twisted concept of Not one academic made it into the top 10 competence continues. Think of what makes

for a great hospital and you will correctly give credit to great doctors and great nurses. A hospital administrator's main role is to provide those doctors and nurses what they need.

But the current perception is that schools are great either because of great administrators or external pressure to keep the teacher-workers in line. Sure, we hear that the most important factor in turning out good students is a good teacher. But the policies teachers are working under are all punitive. If teachers had any voice in educational policy, there would be no "No Child Left Behind."

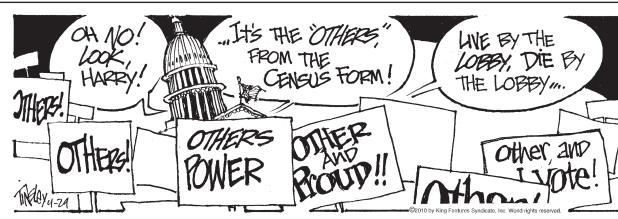
Compare this education survey with any survey of the influential people in the advancement of medicine. It would yield a completely different set of lasting giants. No rich patrons or politicians, but in-the-trench workers such as Pasteur and Koch, Halstead, Osler and the late heart surgeon Michael DeBakey.

Everyone has been a patient, but no one considers themselves to be an expert in medical policy. Why should we consider the rich and the powerful to be experts in education because at one time they were students?

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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