



Other Viewpoints

End of income tax would be a mistake

Conservatives in think tanks and state legislatures have long fantasized about a day in which citizens and businesses would pay little or no state taxes on incomes or earnings. Those dreamers now have an ally, Sam Brownback, in the governor’s office in Kansas. In Missouri, they have a benefactor, Rex Sinquefield, who likes to sink millions of dollars into pet projects. That kind of firepower should prompt a wake-up call in both states. While no one likes paying taxes on the fruits of their labor, jettisoning the income tax would result in higher prices on goods and services and would likely force even more drastic cuts to public education and other services. Both scenarios would be ruinous for poor and-middle-income households.

“Of all the states considering this, both Kansas and Missouri are at the top of the list,” a spokesman for the American Legislative Exchange Council approvingly told a reporter for *The Star*. The blessing of the council raises a red flag. It is funded and dominated by free-market and corporate interests, who work with like-minded legislators to push various agendas.

In Missouri, a group backed by Sinquefield, a St. Louis multimillionaire, has filed 11 initiative petitions with the Missouri secretary of state. So far, nine have been approved for the November 2012 ballot if backers collect enough valid signatures from voters. The Sinquefield-backed petitions differ in some details, but all demand that the state eliminate taxes on income and replace some of the lost revenue through a higher tax on goods and services. Some versions call for capping the state sales tax at 7 percent – an awful idea that would reduce the state’s ability to raise revenues for any purpose.

In an analysis of the first nine Sinquefield-backed petitions, James R. Moody, a government relations consultant in Missouri, concluded that “they will either bankrupt the state or, in the alternative, bankrupt the poor and the working lower and middle classes.”

In Kansas, Brownback and some key lawmakers have signaled a wish to phase out the state income tax. No concrete proposal is on the table, but many predict that talk of lowering the income tax is likely to consume the next legislative session. Elected officials should always seek a tax balance that meets the state’s needs and promotes growth. In Kansas, lawmakers would be better off repealing the state’s many inexplicable and inequitable tax exemptions and use the revenue to restore badly needed state services.

It’s easy to see why income tax elimination schemes have pushed their way to the forefront of the political landscape. They are of great long-term benefit to wealthy individuals and corporations, who are in a position to fund their causes. But now is the time for those who would bear the brunt of these ideas to stand up and speak out.

— *The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press*

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansan.com

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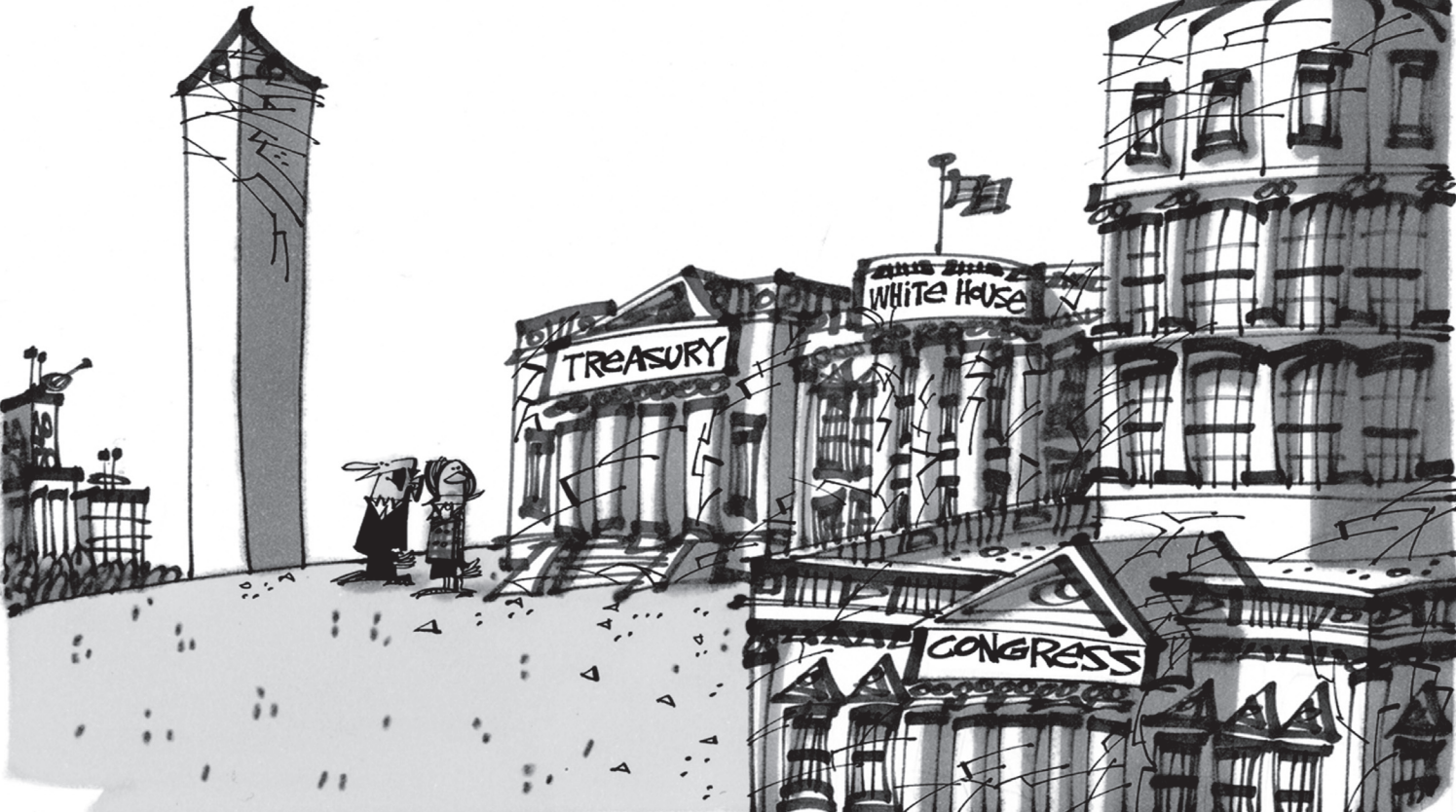
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

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"ARE THERE CRACKS IN ANYTHING ELSE?"

Good food a must for school programs

With school starting across Kansas this unfortunately can mean the return of unhealthy lunches which can certainly be labeled as fast food, most of which come to schools shipped in already prepared packaging. If you have or have had children in school, you know what I mean.

Beanie weenies, chicken nuggets, high-carb mac and cheese, fried snacks and sugary soft drinks are popular fare served at school cafeterias across the Wheat State. Still, school lunch programs can play a key role in teaching and reinforcing healthy eating behaviors by integrating activities like on-site gardens, nutrition education, locally sourced foods and endeavors that affirm the value of mealtimes.

You don’t have to have eagle eyes to see this nation has a problem with obesity and that challenge has spread to this country’s youngsters. Did you know that 17 percent of U.S. children and adolescents aged 2-19 are obese, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control?

That’s nearly triple the amount in 1980.

It’s time we turn this train around. Initiatives that connect our youth to fresh, healthy foods, a healthy lifestyle with plenty of exercise and healthy eating habits will go a long way toward changing this obesity endemic.

What’s happening here may seem more difficult than it really is. Looking back in our not too distant past, many Americans ate a balanced diet consisting of plenty of fruits, vegetables, grains and protein. Eating healthy isn’t rocket science. It does take discipline, restraint and the willingness to make life-altering changes



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

in what have become bad-choice, unhealthy eating habits.

What better place to begin than with the future of our youngsters?

Talk about an idealistic endeavor.

Let’s begin with one of the most important steps – connecting local farmers to schools. In communities across Kansas, local food producers provide beef, lamb, pork, poultry, fruits, grains and vegetables at local markets or directly from their farms. Why can’t they provide farm-fresh foods for our school children?

I recently read where Vermont has conducted a successful farm to school movement throughout the last 10 years with the aid of state’s government. Figures from the Green Mountain state report nearly 60 percent of the schools have participated. Children of Vermont have benefited with farm-fresh foods and local farmers have expanded their business into a market worth more than \$40 million.

School gardens can provide hands-on opportunities for children to cultivate and grow their own food. In high poverty areas of north Texas, school gardens not only nurture healthy lifestyles and respect for the environment,

they can also provide academic achievement through the primary experiences of gardening.

Nutritional education should be a part of every public school in this country. So funding is tight. That’s a given. What if we engaged professional volunteers to run a broad range of topics that address nutrition? You know farmers and ranchers, agri-business types and maybe even people with nutritional backgrounds.

Our goal should be to feed our children while they are in school, but feed them with nutritious meals that will help them grow up to be healthy, well-adjusted adults. It’s time to cut back on a diet that focuses on processed foods delivered in boxes.

Children spend seven to eight hours nine to 10 months out of every year in schools across our nation. These same schools have our children under their wing more time than we as parents and grandparents do during each day school is in session. Let’s reverse this trend of snacking and eating of less than nutritious foods in our school systems.

Your children, grandchildren and mine deserve the best and healthiest foods available – fresh, locally produced and made from scratch served up in their schools.

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.

Rural economy a priority

By President Barack Obama

Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to get out of Washington, D.C., and travel to small towns and farm towns in the heartland of the country. I sat down with small business owners, farmers and ranchers in Iowa; I had lunch with veterans in Cannon Falls, Minn.; and I talked to plant workers at a seed distributor in Atkinson, Ill.

I made the trip because I think the rest of this country can learn something from rural America. The heartland is central to the economic health and prosperity of our nation. Rural communities provide us with affordable agricultural products, competitive manufacturing capabilities and an independent, renewable energy supply. And you’re also stewards of America’s great outdoors – an important source of jobs and an incredible treasure for all Americans.

Now we all know times are tough for many Americans – and rural Americans in particular. Some of you may have been struggling for a long time. But we also know what it’s going to take to get America going again. And we know it’s going to start with helping families in the heartland and across the country feel like they’re moving forward.

That’s why, over the last two years, we’ve been focused on improving infrastructure – building roads and bridges and providing broadband access. We’re expanding educational opportunities and helping more Americans get access to affordable health care. We’ve made historic investments in innovation and clean energy. And we established the first-ever

White House Rural Council to promote economic growth in rural America – and to do it in a faster and more coordinated way.

But even with the progress we’ve made, it’s also clear the pace of our recovery is still not fast enough. We need to do more to create jobs.

That starts with getting your elected officials in Washington to put their differences aside and take steps right now to help businesses get more customers and create more jobs for Americans. We can cut payroll taxes again, so families have an extra \$1,000 to spend. We can pass a road construction bill so construction crews – now sitting idle – can head back to the worksite. Let’s connect the brave Americans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with businesses to use their skills. And let’s pass trade deals to level the playing field for our businesses, because I want more products sold around the globe stamped with three words: Made in America.

These are commonsense ideas – ideas that have been supported by both Democrats and Republicans. The only thing holding them back is politics. The only thing preventing us from passing these bills is the refusal by some in Congress to put country ahead of party. That’s the problem right now. That’s what’s holding this country back. That’s what we have to change.

You deserve representatives who show the same kind of discipline and integrity and responsibility that most Americans demonstrate in their lives every day – leaders who can put their differences aside to help grow the economy and put this nation back to work. Because,

for all the knocks we’ve taken, despite all the challenges we face, this is still the greatest country on earth. We still have the best workers and farmers, entrepreneurs and businesses, students and scientists in the world.

Getting out of Washington and spending time with folks like you reminds me why I got into public service in the first place. Your work ethic; your creativity; your determination only makes me more hopeful about our future. And it only makes me more confident that if we come together, there is no stopping the United States of America.

Where to write, call

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roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399

Mallard Fillmore

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