



Other Viewpoints

Are juvenile justice changes premature?

A Kansas Legislature that is three-quarters Republican risks being a formality when it comes to implementing Gov. Sam Brownback’s sweeping agenda. So it was encouraging last month that lawmakers from both parties listened to stakeholders and challenged the governor’s juvenile-justice proposal as unneeded and ill-considered.

As part of its reforms aimed at curbing the growth in Medicaid spending and reorganizing related state agencies, the administration would move some Juvenile Justice Authority programs, including prevention grants and juvenile offenders’ intake and assessment, to the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, which would be renamed the Department for Children and Family Services. The restructuring, which Social Services Secretary Rob Siedlecki described last month as “spectacular,” also would shift responsibility for disabilities and behavioral health services and the five state hospitals from Social and Rehabilitation Services to the Kansas Department on Aging, which would become the Department for Aging and Human Services.

But the House-Senate Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice approved a motion last week by Sen. Dick Kelsey, R-Goddard, recommending that Brownback not issue an executive order to reorganize the programs and agencies until more study could be done.

“This whole thing hasn’t been vetted enough,” Kelsey said, according to the *Lawrence Journal-World*.

The committee heard testimony from law enforcement and corrections experts that the move of juvenile-justice programs would be bad for troubled kids and public safety. Those who testified against the program shuffle at the packed hearing included Mark Masterson, director of the Sedgwick County Department of Corrections.

Some speakers noted that the authority was created in the late 1990s out of a desire to remove juvenile justice from the state welfare system, so young offenders could be dealt with in community corrections settings. Given the history, Brownback’s plan seems like a step backward.

It’s of further concern that, according to lawmakers and speakers, the administration crafted the proposal without consulting those who work in juvenile justice.

“This sounds like ready, fire, aim,” Committee Chairwoman Pat Colloton, R-Leawood, told Siedlecki, about the decision to announce the plan Nov. 8, then call a Dec. 12 meeting for stakeholders.

Siedlecki, who said other states handle children and family programs similarly, told lawmakers the status quo works well in Kansas but “I think we can do better.”

Noting Siedlecki hadn’t explained the details of how it would be better under the plan, Sen. Tim Owens, R-Overland Park, said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

To that good advice for Brownback’s administration we could add: If it needs to be fixed, consult those best able to say how.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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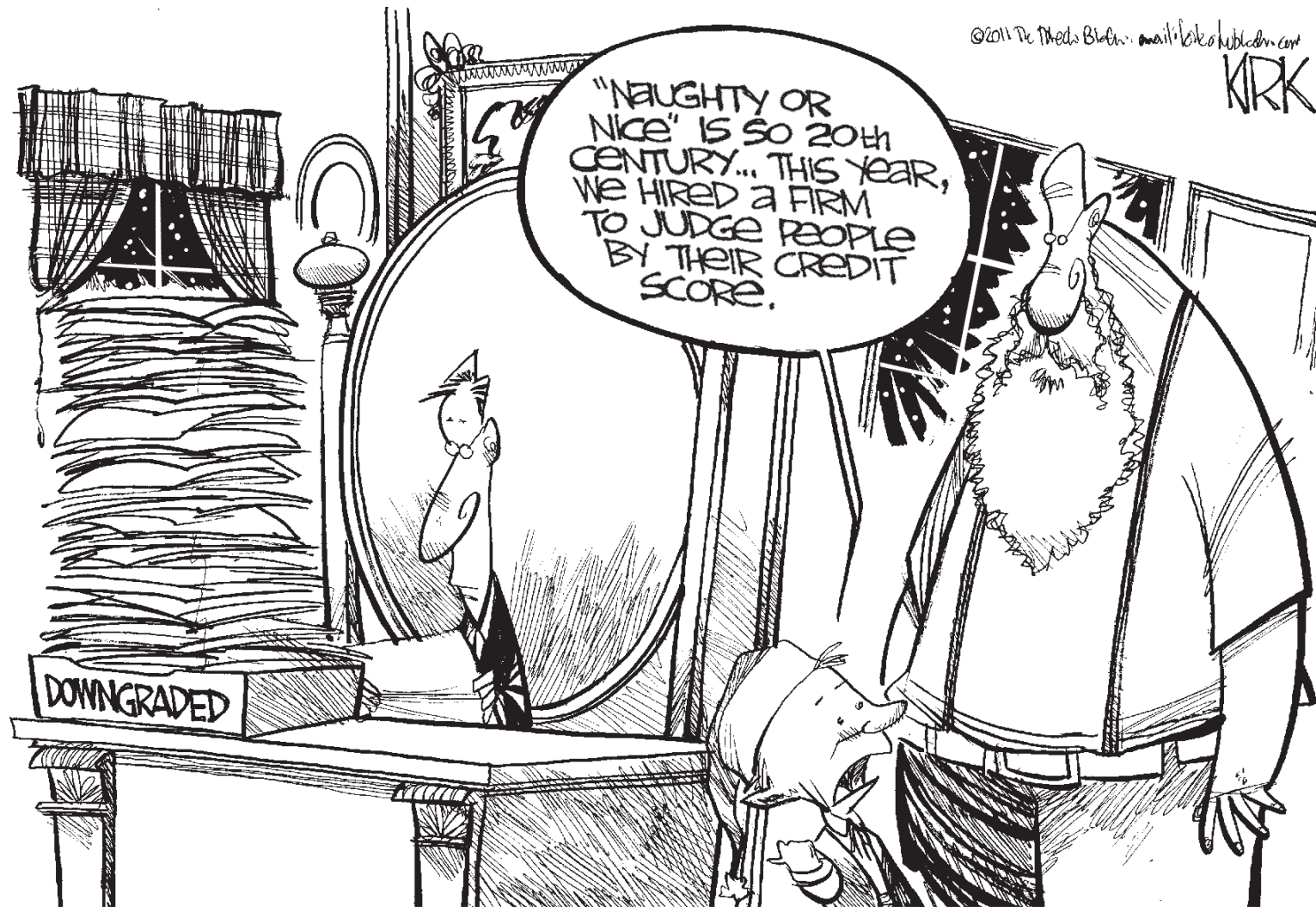
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Postal Service listens to communities

To the Editor:

The famous quote, “the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing,” may apply if this community, out of apathy, lets the informational meeting for the mail sorting situation to go by without at least trying to have a voice.

Postal authorities will hold a meeting at 6 p.m. Monday in Room 108 of the Colby Community College student union to talk about changing mail sorting centers again.

The movement of mail from Colby to Salina for sorting was bad enough, but to move it to Wichita is even worse. To move it absolutely will affect Colby mail patrons, and there’s even talk of Colby’s mail going to Denver for sorting. This would be even worse.

Neither place is ideal for the “us” who are stuck in the middle. It just doesn’t make sense to mail it here, ship it to Wichita or Denver to sort and then send it back. That doesn’t look like progress to me.

If the postal department wants to save a few bucks, maybe they should take a look at their advertising budget. For the United States Postal Service to be a “proud Olympic Sponsor,” seems ridiculous. In my opinion, if anyone in



Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

the entire country doesn’t need to advertise, it’s the post office.

Room 108 needs to be filled to overflowing with members of every board in this county. From the Economic Development Alliance, the mayor, the boards of the schools, the Chamber of Commerce, the city council, the county commissioners to every business owner in town, we need to let our voices be heard.

If this community can’t take an hour out of the day to stand up for ourselves, that sends a message we are willing participants in losing the battle.

In a conversation with a postal employee, I learned that in some instances good participation from the community has made a difference with those in power.

One Republican suits Democrats

The dull roar one hears coming from the White House these days is actually the sound of Obama staffers trying to contain their glee. Is it actually possible that the Republicans will choose Newt Gingrich as their nominee for President?

It’s not an earth-shaking prediction to say that Barack Obama will easily defeat the former House Speaker should such a matchup unfold. Newt’s unelectable. Political ad-makers would undoubtedly have a field day next fall with his thirty-plus years in politics, his three marriages, work as a lobbyist, history of unpredictable and petulant behavior, etc., etc.

Why are Republicans on the verge of nominating a candidate who might threaten to join Alf Landon and Walter Mondale as one of the biggest Presidential-election losers in history?

For an answer one needs to look at the recent political phenomenon known as the Tea Party. This grass-roots movement successfully galvanized opposition to President Obama’s Healthcare Reform in the midst of a sharp economic downturn and ushered in large Republican gains in the 2010 off-year elections.

The movement has always been a bit divorced from reality – criticizing President Obama for budget deficits that were the product of the Bush tax cuts, wars, and a severe recession, for example. And yes, it was tinged with a bit of racism – exemplified by the Birther movement and vociferous support of Arizona Law 1070.

But their unifying mantra has always been



Alan Jilka

- A Voice of Reason

uncompromising opposition to the policies of Barack Obama. Say what one will, the movement was successful at the ballot box in November of 2010. In doing so they pushed the Republican Party far to the right.

To expand and solidify its takeover of the Republican Party the Tea Party Movement needs to nominate one of its own as the party’s standard bearer in 2012. Therein lies the problem. One by one this year Tea Party favorites have crashed and burned.

Sarah Palin had the inside track at first. But Palin advertised her lack of substance early and often and was written off by most Republicans after her ridiculous comments in the aftermath of the Arizona shootings in January of 2011. Donald Trump stepped in for a few weeks just to fan the Birther nonsense. Then Michele Bachmann picked up the mantle and support for a time, even managing to win the Iowa Straw Poll. But her star faded just as quickly as the national spotlight highlighted her penchant for twisting or even making up her own facts.

Governor Rick Perry then jumped in with all

the swagger of a swashbuckling Texas cowboy. He quickly imploded after a series of gaffes and poor debate performances. Herman Cain inherited the Perry (Tea Party) crowd. But he too soon withered under the relentless scrutiny of modern-day presidential politics.

Throughout this soap opera Mitt Romney has remained the steady presumed front-runner. And conservative Tea Partiers do not like Romney. With all the flip-flops in his political career it’s hard to say where Romney really is on a lot of issues. But consensus has it that he is the more moderate of the candidates. And “moderate” is a dirty word to the Republican far right who see the battle as a struggle for the soul of the party.

So who’s left for this crowd? Jon Huntsman, another moderate? Forget it. Rick Santorum? What’s he doing on the stage anyway? The only other option for conservatives, providing they can get past his suggestion that it would be impractical to deport 12 million undocumented immigrants, is Newt Gingrich.

The situation on the ground leaves Tea Partiers with a lose-lose proposition. Romney is not one of them. And Newt can’t win next November.

Could it be that the Tea Party tide is receding into the waters of historical anecdote?

Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.

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Mallard Fillmore

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