



Other Viewpoints

School formula due for update

Back when Kansas legislators were handing the last major revision of the state’s school funding formula over to Gov. Joan Finney, George H.W. Bush looked like a shoo-in for a second White House term and Americans were bemused, but not overly concerned, by the splintering of Yugoslavia. Things have changed a lot since 1992.

But the state’s funding formula hasn’t, beyond a few tweaks and patches.

Now Gov. Sam Brownback is right to consider a wholesale revision. The way Kansas distributes its diminished slice of education money will have a great deal to do with the future success of the state and its citizens.

But while the governor’s general plans for revision have merit, it is important to wade into this issue carefully.

Under the existing formula, Kansas per-pupil funding this year is \$3,780. But nobody gets exactly that amount. Large districts are assumed to have economies of scale, so their per-pupil funding is lower than very small districts, which have outsized expenses. Underprivileged children have needs that wealthier children do not.

This is why the Shawnee Mission School District gets \$4,305 per pupil from the state, while the tiny West Oak School district in western Kansas gets \$11,499.

A district with a dozen kids in an entire grade level has very different staffing and building needs than a district with more than a dozen elementary schools. The transportation costs of sprawling districts with few students can be enormous.

Yet it is essential that all students have access to a good education, or what Kansas courts have termed “an adequate” education.

While the governor’s plan is for districts to retain the funding they currently have, his policy director added a caveat: Schools with declining enrollments could get less money. While this is expected and often appropriate in normal circumstances, the challenges of rural or urban schools can often mean that even with declining enrollments, costs remain the same or even increase.

Still, Brownback should be applauded for taking on a long-overdue revision and for a guiding principle that once all schools are adequately funded, local populations should have the right to increase their own taxes to pay for education that goes beyond adequate.

As Jean Schodorf, a Wichita Republican and chair of the Kansas Legislative Educational Planning Committee said recently, regarding the proposal, “The devil’s in the dollars.”

The challenge is ensuring Kansas education doesn’t simply limp by, but thrives in the years to come – and does so in an equitable fashion. Clearly, the time is right to address the funding formula.

– The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press

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TV sci-fi became holiday tradition

’Tis the season for holiday traditions, so let me tell you about one of mine. It involves a little-remembered but well-loved cult television show from the 1990s and an little-known and little-loved movie from the 1960s.

The television show was “Mystery Science Theater 3000.” It began as a cable access show in Minnesota in the late 80s and eventually found a place on cable networks including Comedy Central and the Sci-Fi Channel.

It starred Joel Hodgson as a hapless janitor blasted into space by his mad-scientist boss and forced to watch bad movies until they drove him insane. The bulk of the show involved Joel and two robots, Tom Servo and Crow T. Robot (puppets voiced by Kevin Murphy and Trace Beaulieu), sitting in front of the movie of the week and hurling insults, riffs and impersonated lines of dialogue at the screen. In between movie sessions, Joel and the ’bots would participate in skits, usually based off whatever movie they were watching.

It was campy and cheaply made, but it was some of the funniest stuff on television at the time. I stumbled across the show a few times in the early 90s, but it wasn’t until I met a very good friend in middle school who was an avid fan that I became one myself.

One of the movies Joel and the ’bots took on was called “Santa Claus Conquers the Martians.” Just the title inspires images of bad B movie, though this is more on the order of a bad D movie.

The 1964 picture involves Santa and two orphans kidnapped by Martians who want to bring Santa back to Mars to cheer up their own kids. Nothing goes as planned and a rebellious Martian even attempts to have Santa killed,



Kevin Bottrell

• Simple tricks and nonsense

which backfires.

The movie, of course, is terrible. But the Mystery Science Theater 3000 formula was such that the worse the movie, the better the episode since the rifiers have more material to work with. They make fun of misspellings in the opening credits – “custume” designer – and the terrible script. At one point Santa forgets the names of his reindeer and suggests one might be named Nixon. “But the kids know their names,” Santa assures us, to which Crow replies “Yeah, ’cause they’re sober!”

The episode is chock-full of gems, like “Gentlemen, we can’t all be the Honey Nut Cheerios Honey Bee...” “Santa’s gonna cut you man, Santa’s a blade man man!” and “Something stupid this way comes.”

It also contains one of the best musical numbers Mystery Science Theater ever came up with, “A Patrick Swayze Christmas” inspired by Crow’s favorite movie, “Roadhouse.” It’s a tasteful carol that marries the peaceful reverence of a traditional Christmas song with the over-the-top violence of Roadhouse.

I came across this particular episode at Colorado State University. I discovered a group called MySTies Anonymous, who screened episodes every Friday in the student government room. I felt it was my duty to introduce

as many people as possible to this forgotten little show. As a resident assistant I would often bring groups of freshmen to the screenings. It only clicked for a few of them, but that’s how it goes with cult shows.

Through those Friday night screenings I was able to see a lot of episodes that I had missed. By that time the show had long-since been cancelled – it’s last airing was in 1999 – and it was where I discovered Santa Claus Conquers the Martians. That episode and a few other Christmas-themed episodes were a holiday tradition for the MySTies, and they became so for me as well. There some other good ones, including a ridiculous movie that pit Santa Claus and a gang of creepy multicultural children against Satan. A classic if ever there was one.

Only a few Mystery Science Theater 3000 episodes have been released on DVD, since the distributor often has trouble securing the movie rights, and to my knowledge, Santa Clause Conquers the Martians is not among them. My copy comes from a video a friend had on his computer, which I imagine was copied off a video cassette at some point.

The past few years I have been getting together with family the weekend before Christmas, so on the 24th and 25th I’m often left to my own devices. Seems a perfect time to continue the tradition of screening Santa Claus Conquers the Martians, so every year I get my copy out, sit down with some popcorn and enjoy poking fun at a really horrible movie.

Kevin Bottrell, news editor of the Colby Free Press, is a Colorado State University graduate who believes that the middle road is often the high one. Contact him at kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

‘Occupy’ protest is no Tea Party

To the Editor:

It’s been a few weeks since I wrote my last letter to the editor. There has been so much to write about, I just couldn’t pick a topic. So here we go:

Veterans, happy belated Veteran’s Day. Thank you for your service to our country and protecting our freedoms. You are all appreciated.

Solyndra: This is one of those “green jobs” Obama pushed for in 2008. According to the reports I’ve heard, this company put in for a loan during the Bush years; a loan was denied. Then 90 or so days after Obama took office his administration granted a \$500 million+ loan to Solyndra. In recent weeks, it has come to light that Solyndra wanted a second loan because they would run out of money by September. Guess what? They did run out of money. Folks, this is taxpayer money the government is gambling, because the selling price of the final product was much less than the cost of production. Not only a stupid way to do business, but what is government doing in business?

Occupy Wall Street protests: The First Amendment of the Constitution reads: “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the Freedom of speech; or the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” There are reports of assault on fellow protesters and on law enforcement, drugs, rapes, urinating and defecating in public – caught on camera – people can’t get to work, stores broken into and robbed, kids can’t get to school.

This protest has become hateful and violent



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

and they leave destruction in their wake. Riots have broken out, at least one murder, more than a few unexplained deaths (drug overdoses?), and well over 3000 arrested nationwide. Recently the protesters have been removed from the parks they occupy. It has cost the cities several million dollars to clean up.

Many lawmakers in Washington, D.C., are comparing the movement to the Tea Party Rally and that is simply obscene. The Tea Party Rally had none of those things – zero. Young kids were welcomed and encouraged to come with their parents. There were no riots, and the Mall in Washington was cleaner when the Tea Partiers left than before they got there.

How can anyone with any sense compare the two as equal? Key words in the first amendment are “peaceably to assemble.” Not too many Occupy Wall Street protesters seem to know exactly what or why they are protesting. I think they see it as just a big party, a chance to cut classes and generally create chaos.

Tea Partiers know exactly what they stand for: smaller government, less taxes, following the constitution and the laws.

Fifty-six percent people polled have voted

‘no confidence’ in Obama’s administration. Do you know why? Bailouts to banks and major car manufacturers, cash for clunkers, Solyndra, “Fast and Furious” that put thousands of guns into the Mexican drug dealer’s hands, the murders of two border agents by those same drug dealers, more restrictions in airports, the fondling of children, babies and the elderly by airport security, the non-transparency of the “most transparent administration” according to Obama, the lack of leadership, Obama’s “America has gotten lazy in the last 20 years” statement, Obama bowing to the Saudi king in the Middle East, Obama insulting Israel, our closest ally in the Middle East. There are more.

Finally, why hasn’t Obama produced his real birth certificate, not some computer generated, altered, falsified piece of paper? Even to my untrained eye I can see discrepancies.

By the way, we do not have a “do nothing” Congress. The House of Representatives is sending bills to the Senate that Harry Reed refuses to put before the Senate. I say we have a “do nothing” Senate and a “do-nothing-but-campaign” president! He’s been campaigning for the last two years, maybe even since he got into office. We don’t have a commander-in-chief. We have a campaigner-in-chief.

Jari Skiles, Colby

Editor’s note: The 56 percent no confidence vote referenced is from a November Fox News poll, which asked 914 registered voters whether they would vote “confidence” or “no confidence” in President Obama in the style of European parliaments.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

