



Other Viewpoints

School task force causes skepticism

There is cause to be skeptical about Gov. Sam Brownback's new school efficiency task force.

After all, the task force is supposed to "examine education spending and to develop guidelines on how to get more funding into classrooms," yet not a single member of the 10-member group works in education.

And the governor's press release announcing the task force wrongly claimed that state law "requires at least 65 percent of funds provided by the state to school districts be spent in the classroom or for instruction." It's only a policy guideline — and a misguided one at that.

Also, the state is in the middle of a lawsuit about whether it is suitably funding education, and some lawmakers use claims of inefficiency as an excuse to not increase funding.

"We need more money in the classroom and less in administration and overhead costs," Brownback echoed in the press release.

Still, if the task force can find realistic ways to reduce costs without harming educational outcomes, terrific. All good ideas should be welcome.

And if it determines that schools are actually operating efficiently, especially given all the regulations and demands they face, that's one less excuse for lawmakers.

One caution for the task force is that the 65-percent spending target is arbitrary and ambiguous. There is no research showing a relationship between the 65-percent threshold and improved student outcomes. Also, librarians, school nurses, counselors and social workers aren't counted as instructional costs, yet they have a direct influence on the success of students. Budget percentages also can vary significantly between districts based on transportation costs, number of buildings, age of buildings and number of low-income, bilingual or special-education students.

In other words, one size or simplistic measure doesn't fit all.

Another challenge is that the efficiency of Kansas schools has been studied several times by professional auditors, without finding much to change. And the most obvious way to significantly reduce administrative costs — consolidating school districts — is fiercely opposed by many communities and lawmakers, including conservative Republicans.

That said, districts have experienced nearly \$500 million in state funding cuts in recent years. As a result, they have had to rethink their operations.

Wichita has closed schools, dropped programs and laid off staff. Wichita superintendent John Allison also has a group of local business leaders who are helping look for ways for the district to be more efficient.

If the task force can come up with other viable ideas for lowering costs without lowering quality, more power to it.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



Praise for party overlooks much history

The *Salina Journal* publishes articles written by a retired engineer, Lawrence Wetter. He wrote a long piece explaining how the Republicans had given us so many great things over the history of the Republican party.

Of course he didn't mention that it was Abe Lincoln's Republican administration that riled the Southern Democrats to rise up in rebellion over federal mandates and regulations. He didn't explain that it was Teddy Roosevelt's Republican administration that pushed the antitrust laws — enforced by federal mandate — that broke up Standard Oil and a few other monopolies. He didn't attempt to explain how, or why, the Great Depression besieged our nation after 12 uninterrupted years of rule by Republican administrations.

Mr. Wetter wasn't in class when they discussed Republican President Ulysses S. Grant. His administration was so outstanding that he was nicknamed Useless S. Grant. He doesn't remember discussing the graft that went on during Republican President William Howard Taft's four-year tenure.

He never heard about the rumors of Ike having a female companion — not Mamie. I don't know whether those rumors were true or false. Those rumors cannot take away the fact of Ike's great military leadership, nor were those rumors reason to doubt his qualification to be our president. He doesn't recall that Ike had his choice to run on either party's ticket and chose the Republican ticket because it seemed



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

the Democrats had had a 20-year lock on the presidency.

Neither does he admit that the federal government "redistributed wealth" to build the interstate system of highways under Republican Ike's leadership. Or that the federal government established much of those routes by exercising right of eminent domain. Neither private individual rights or states' rights overruled federal control. He never heard that Ike warned us of the dangers of allowing military spending and power to dominate government's role in the economy.

Wetter doesn't remember the Watergate scandal of Republican President Nixon's folly. Neither does he see anything wrong with the Iran-Contra scandal that happened under President Reagan's pristine administration. He's forgotten the banner-waving G.W. Bush declaring "mission accomplished," only to be followed by many years of frustrating and costly conflict — both in lives and money.

Yes, Mr. Wetter, the Republicans have produced some great things, down through the

years. But they have also been responsible for some miserable failures. Some of those Republican presidents had to deal with an uncooperative Congress and rebukes from the Supreme Court. They also inherited some unfinished business, left behind from ineffective and inefficient Democrat administrations. The eight years of Republican administration certainly didn't leave a bed of roses for President Obama to nourish and maintain.

Never before in the history of our nation has any administration had to deal with the belligerent uncompromising partisan politics that we have experienced in the last four years. Moderation and compromise is looked upon as displaying weakness by the extremists in both political parties.

I'm not sure the famed wisdom of Old Testament King Solomon could bring today's extremists to an amicable agreement. Could the revered great George Washington, who successfully led our nation for eight years following the failed Continental Congress system, have stepped in and solved all the serious economic and social problems our nation faced in 2009?

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rcwinc@cheerful.com.

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander @ nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard @ nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor @ nwkansas.com

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Local newspaper fills a unique role

Your newspaper will be there for you.

A simple statement, but let's break it down a bit.

Your newspaper.... That's right, all yours, assembled just for you, tailored to where you live, emphasizing the things that affect you, keeping track of the people and players in your community. Your newspaper is put together by people in a newsroom that was built for you, where people work to supply information that matters to you, from the details of that crash you passed by on Tuesday to biographies of the candidates for your school board to notices of what's on sale at your local supermarket.

...Will be there for you. Be where? On your porch, in your mail, at your convenience store and, yeah, sometimes in your bushes. But also at your township hall, inside your local police department, attending your city council meeting, watching your elections. It will be where you can't, paying attention, keeping watch, asking questions, making the record public.

And you can take it wherever you're going without worrying about battery life or Wi-Fi connections.

Some say newspapers are dying, that people get their news today from the Internet, TV and radio. But where do the Internet, TV and radio get their news? From the newsrooms of

Other Opinions

• **Ron Dzwonkowski**
Detroit Free Press

America's newspapers, large and small, which still encompass the nation's largest newsgathering force. Other information providers may add opinion, pictures or sound, but most of the time, the facts begin in the newsrooms of newspapers, where journalists are there for you, cultivating sources, combing through records, asking tough questions.

A few generations back, TV and radio were supposed to be the death of newspapers. Instead, they were catalysts for newspapers to dig further, to offer context, analysis, perspective and storytelling that the electronic media couldn't deliver. TV and radio didn't kill newspapers; they made them deeper, smarter and more thoughtful.

For about a generation now, the Internet has supposedly been driving newspapers into extinction.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
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 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

