

Other Viewpoints

Transparency fades in Statehouse study

Kansans have a right to know as much as possible about the people they elect to govern them. Arguments to the contrary show a lack of respect to the citizens of this state.

Legislators and candidates seeking seats in the Legislature frequently talk about their life experiences and how those, in their younger years or as professionals, will benefit their constituents and the state. They are right. Many legislators bring to Topeka knowledge and experience that will prove helpful as they try to improve Kansas and the lives of its citizens.

Those experiences include their school background, although some legislators recently decided citizens didn't need to know how they were educated or what decisions they had made about their children's educations.

At a time when the Legislature is considering bills that range from school funding and charter schools to how educators will be allowed to pay their union dues and on what items they will be allowed to bargain collectively, citizens certainly have a right to know how much knowledge and experience legislators bring to the table on those issues.

When this newspaper conducted a survey to gather information on legislators' educational backgrounds and their children's education, the Senate majority leader urged lawmakers not to respond.

Senate Majority Leader Terry Bruce, R-Hutchinson, said his children's education was not of public concern and asking about it was in bad taste.

Of 165 legislators, only 57 – 12 senators and 45 representatives – responded to the survey, which asked lawmakers if their education had been through public, private or charter schools or through home schooling. The survey also asked lawmakers what type of schooling they had placed their children in.

Those are fair questions, especially given the educational issues legislators have been dealing with. Citizens have a right to know about the backgrounds of those elected to govern.

Some legislators and readers agreed with Bruce, who did say he attended public schools, that bringing legislators' children into the survey was in poor taste. They missed the point. The survey was not about the children but rather the education legislators had received and the education options they chose for their children.

Legislators attended the schools their parents selected for them. Legislators' children attend or attended schools the legislators selected. Therefore, the second question was just as important, if not more, as the first.

That's not to say legislators who attended private schools aren't interested in making the best decisions for our public schools, or that legislators who attended public schools wouldn't be interested in expanding charter and private school options.

But legislators should be willing to let citizens know where they're coming from and what they bring to the table on any issue, including education.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*



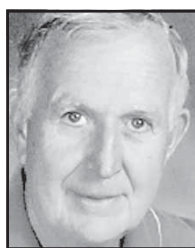
Final week mixed positive and negative

I don't know what to say about this past week. Going into the week, we were hoping to have a tax and budget plan by Friday, but the House and Senate were unable to compromise on many key issues.

It was interesting to chair a conference committee for the first time. There are many procedural steps, and to learn the procedures plus working with the other house on bill content was challenging.

This past week, the House did approve a bill allowing a veteran designation on Kansas driver's licenses and identification cards. Anyone who served in the military and left with an honorable discharge can choose to have "veteran" printed on their driver's license by providing documents. Also, the Department of Revenue will share the names and locations of veterans with the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs, which will notify the veterans of facilities, benefits and services available.

There has been no move to change current laws to the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. The House passed a measure that would take a big step forward in getting use out of the \$9 billion shortfall in the system.



Ward Cassidy

- This week in Topeka

HB 2403 proposes to sell \$1.5 billion in state bonds to invest in the system. We already have the liability side for the system, so this is not new debt. What it does do is take advantage of the state's ability to borrow money at low interest and use it to get a higher rate of return in other investments. The thought is that interest cannot go much lower, so this is a low-risk way to earn returns that take advantage of current circumstances.

I return to the Capitol for the Omnibus ses-

sion on April 28 and 29 for Appropriations Committee meetings. We will adjust the budget recommendations in the House on bills passed so far this year that have fiscal notes adding cost to the State General Fund.

I am writing this in the House chamber. We have been debating since 10 a.m. this morning and it would appear we have many more hours to go. Next week, I will discuss important bills that passed both Houses by the end of the evening.

Rep. Ward Cassidy of St. Francis represents the 120th District in the Kansas House of Representatives, covering the northwest part of Thomas County (including Colby), plus Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Wallace counties. This is his second term in the Legislature, and he is chair of the Education Budget Committee and vice chair of the Education Committee. Send e-mails to ward.cassidy@house.ks.gov.

Animal research vital to our health

Animals are not only an important part of Kansas' agricultural economy, but the animal research corridor stretching from Manhattan to Kansas City houses many laboratories that conduct animal testing for international pharmaceutical companies.

This research settles in Kansas because Kansans have a long history of knowing animals. Therefore, when the president of the Humane Society of the United States (unrelated to the humane animal shelters in our Kansas communities) represents a recently published report on the limitations of mouse models for certain human inflammatory diseases as "a scientific indictment of animal research," it's important to point out this attempt to use science to justify the group's drive to end all animal use in research is dead wrong.

The report published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* was a further refinement of our knowledge about which animal models are useful for studying various diseases, and was not a blanket condemnation of animal research at all. The argument that research animals are only useful when they mimic humans is simple-minded. Much modern research is done on other animals because they possess a basic primitive trait but do not have a complexity that confounds experiments.

One example is a primitive one-celled organism, *Tetrahymena thermophila*, that allows us to study the ultrastructure, physiology, development and biochemistry of cells without our added-on complexity. Solutions to the chemical problems of living are usually solved only once and remain operational in the lineage up to humans today.

Nobel laureate Andre Lwoff grew *Tetrahymena* in pure culture in 1923; this led to the later Nobel-prize-winning discovery of ribozymes, as well as lysosomes, telomeres, etc. Indeed, all but two of the Nobel Prizes in physiology or medicine have been based on animal research.

Researchers have no reason to use research animals that do not contribute to our understanding. They have lists of animals that are useful for researching certain diseases and a



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

longer list of animals that are not appropriate. The recent paper merely advances that knowledge.

A partial list of critical breakthroughs from animal research includes:

- Sequencing the genome of a primitive sponge revealed genes for the first signaling pathways and structures of animals, including early genes implicated in cancer.
- Hydra and comb jellies allowed us to understand body patterning, the origin of epithelia and regulation of development.
- Flatworms helped us understand regeneration of body parts, stem cells and the beginning of complex behavior.
- The roundworm *C. elegans* showed us the genetic control of development and revealed that some cells must die during normal development.
- Huge neurons in the squid allowed us to study nerve signal transmission because human axons are far too small.
- The 20,000 neurons of the sea hare *Aplysia* permitted us to match nerve cell chemistry with behavior.
- Millions of fruit flies drove our understanding of genetics.
- The chicken was our model for tissue grafting and research on the over-expression of gene products.
- Ferrets made recent news in studies of mammal-to-mammal transfer of the bird flu virus.
- Downsizing of the chimpanzee research population still recognizes that there are some research applications for which these animals are the only option.
- Only when the nine-banded armadillo was discovered to harbor leprosy in the 1970s did we have an animal model for this disease; ef-

fective drugs were soon developed and Western leproseries closed.

No computer simulation, tissue culture or other model begins to approach the complexity of a whole living organism. Alexander Fleming tested penicillin in a petri dish and decided it did not work as a clinically-effective antibiotic. But Florey and Chain tested it using mice and found it was effective. The history of biological research contradicts any claims that we can set aside all animal research and just use simulations.

Failure to have used animals in research would mean nearly all vaccines, antibiotics and other pharmaceuticals could not have been developed. Are advocates of ending animal research willing to bear the responsibility for continued polio, leprosy and other diseases?

We are in a new golden age of discovery connecting DNA to its physical expressions. Our understanding of life processes forms a vast fabric with threads that tie together protists and sponges and worms and mice and chimpanzees and humans.

The society's no-animal-research position also ignores animal research that allows us to provide better care for our animals by advancing veterinary science. And ecotoxicity testing, based on the diversity and complexity of animal systems, also serves animals by protecting our shared environment.

To end animal use in research makes no more sense than ending plant research or research in the physical sciences. It threatens your health and the health of future generations.

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.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

