



Other Viewpoints

Immigration plan overdue, necessary

Federal lawmakers have dodged the hot-button issue of immigration reform far too long.

Most everyone would agree that change is in order. But the issue became so divisive in recent years that it was easier from a political standpoint to avoid taking a stand that may be right, but unpopular with some Americans seeking a more heavy-handed approach.

A lack of meaningful action in Congress even led policy-makers in some states – Kansas included – to consider their own ways to address those who entered the country illegally.

So, it’s encouraging to see real steps toward reform at the federal level, where immigration policies should be addressed.

A new, bipartisan immigration bill out of the U.S. Senate would overhaul the immigration system by ushering in new visa programs for low- and high-skilled workers, requiring a tough new focus on border security, instituting a new requirement for all employers to check the legal status of their workers, and installing a path to citizenship for 11 million immigrants in the country illegally.

More emphasis would be placed on employment opportunities, and hopefully address labor needs in places like western Kansas, where dairies and feedlots are among businesses that rely on immigrant workers.

Not surprisingly, criticism of the Senate bill came from both sides of the aisle.

But if there’s to be meaningful change, no one will get everything they want. They’ll have to compromise.

And therein lies the problem. Too many lawmakers – especially in the U.S. House – have an all-or-nothing approach, the kind of thinking that has hindered progress in Washington, D.C., and statehouses nationwide.

Unfortunately, 1st District Rep. Tim Huelskamp, R-Fowler, and others of the hyper-partisan tea-party persuasion have resisted any compromise with those outside their circle.

They should know illegal immigration and its fallout aren’t Republican or Democratic problems. They’re national problems.

Critics on both sides should embrace the need for a bipartisan plan to move toward comprehensive reform that would deliver reasonable controls on immigration along with strategies to address labor needs.

At least some in Congress have acknowledged as much, and deserve support as they move toward long overdue immigration reform.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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Thoughts turn to college in the spring

The graduation season is upon us.

For high school graduates, this means a look to post-secondary education. Many have already made a decision. I want, however, to pass along some advice to current and future graduates and their parents from someone who has spent his adult life within the walls of educational institutions – and who has a son preparing to leave for college soon as well.

Choose a school based on cost, programs and opportunities, not just the name. Our state has many high-quality colleges, two- and four-year, public and private. You have options.

Before you decide, do your homework. Is it affordable? How will you pay? Does the school have the educational program you want? What opportunities in and out of class does it provide? Often students choose a college based on a feeling or reputation.

Obviously, I would like every student to choose Colby Community College, but that’s not in every student’s best interest. Still, before heading off to a four-year college, consider affordability and opportunity. Why pay more for the same instruction?

When it comes time to choose a four-year school, look across the state. Kansas State University, the University of Kansas and Fort Hays State are fine institutions – but so are Wichita State, Emporia and private colleges. Some may be distant – then again, they may have the program you want. Their costs may be more to your liking. Do not dismiss these schools without asking about them.

Apply for all scholarships and grants you can. Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid to determine if you are eligible for a grant, either federal or state, which need not be repaid. Most schools will list all scholarships and have a common scholarship application – you apply for all of them at one time. Some scholarships go unclaimed every year.



Steve Vacik

- From the president

This is no urban legend. I received a scholarship while in graduate school though I barely met the requirements. I was the only person who applied and so I got \$500 – huge for a poor graduate student. There are many scholarships out there, including those offered through private foundations and businesses. They are not based only on grades – sometimes all you have to do is ask and follow through.

Accept only the minimum amount in student loans you need. You do not need a new car, the fanciest apartment or fast food every day. Too many students borrow the maximum and then struggle to make payments.

An undergraduate can borrow \$50,000 in student loans – that is enough to buy a house! In a field that does not pay well, paying those loans off can be difficult and you cannot simply quit. If you default on student loans, it will not only ruin your future credit but wages can be garnished. Sacrifice the frills and keep loans to the bare minimum.

If you cannot live at home, live on campus – at least initially. When students live on campus, they have fewer worries like bills, security or transportation. They also become more involved with student life and enjoy an easier transition to college. And they save money.

At Colby, a student living on campus pays around \$5,000 a year – \$556 per month. Where else can you pay rent, utilities, food and transportation costs for \$556 a month?

The same is true for the public four-year

schools. At Kansas State, for example, it costs around \$7,500 a year to live on campus, or \$833 per month. Do a simple search on apartment costs and add in bills for Manhattan. You cannot live more cheaply than on campus.

You may have a roommate, but that helps prepare you to cooperate with others, an important skill. Living on campus, especially as a freshman, is a good thing.

Finally, working is good, often necessary, but should be limited. Keep work during the school year, to 20 hours or less a week. For some that is impossible, and I applaud those who balance work, family and responsibilities. It makes college more challenging, however.

For most students, a full load is 15 semester hours per term. For every hour in class, you need to be prepared to spend at least two hours outside of class – 45 hours a week. When you consider school work with other college activities, time becomes scarce. When students spend too much time in outside employment, school work suffers.

There is more I could share, and my colleagues at the college would probably have some additions of their own. For the upcoming graduates and their families, make wise choices based on good information. College can be one of the best times of your life. It was for me. But there are also challenges that lie ahead.

Do not find yourself at the wrong college, in the wrong program, with the wrong priorities while struggling financially to survive.

With the right decisions and a little sacrifice, college can be everything you need – and maybe even all you want.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

KanCare puzzle piece doesn't fit

To the Editor:

On April 11, the *Hays Daily News* printed an editorial on KanCare (the overhaul of Kansas' Medicaid system, affecting 380,000 people).

The author understood the gravity and complexity of the issue and gave insight about the stories of those who have rubbed shoulders directly with KanCare, providing a common-sense call to action for community services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their long-term services and support, which include residential, day and other services provided by Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas Inc. in this area.

While we are grateful to the Brownback administration for delaying inclusion of these services into KanCare, our plea for a permanent “carve-out” from KanCare has not lessened. Most people may not realize that intermediate care facilities and Working Healthy programs were already are covered under KanCare.

Since the late 1980s, partnering with the state in the closure of the Norton State Hospital, our agency has been providing these services. In anticipation of the shift to KanCare, providers met in December to talk about the details.

Under KanCare, we went from straightforward to complex and confusing and from a billing process that took mere minutes a week to a continuous process requiring hours each



Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

day. Delayed payments surpassed \$130,000 for us in early March. Some providers in the state have had to borrow money to cover payroll.

Here are some additional pieces of the KanCare puzzle:

- A perplexing price tag or “Fiscal Note” of nearly \$100 million to “carve out” our services.
- Savings touted to be the result of “better care and outcomes.” This is difficult to understand when the cost of providing community services has been held nearly flat for almost two decades
- A consultant with NewPoint, a pro-managed care advisor, revealed troubling insights regarding inclusion of our services into KanCare. The report identified that savings for services under managed care come by way of “de-institutionalization.” Kansas has by and large already done that.

- Finally, if you were not aware, there has been an effort from within the Legislature this session to make radical changes to the Developmental Disability Reform Act.

Many advocates have expressed a desire to work with the administration on the implementation of KanCare for medical and behavioral health services for our clients. We have repeatedly expressed deep concerns with other services being included into KanCare, overseen by for-profit insurance companies, an idea with a mismatch of expectations, experience and philosophy.

I believe there are sensible thinkers in Topeka who see the clear warning signs. The majority view of the community service system has untiringly advocated that the state not gamble by force-fitting these services into KanCare.

Decades ago, parents, families and community advocates wanted better outcomes for their children. From this, the community service system was born. Now, the next generation of parents, families and advocates are joining these pioneers in crying out again to our legislators and the administration to protect this system. This piece does not belong in the KanCare puzzle.

Jerry Michaud, Hays president, Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

