

Other Viewpoints

Mental health needs more money

KanCare isn't the only state health reform that needs scrutiny. So does Gov. Sam Brownback's mental-health initiative, which has some promise but lacks funding and focus.

In the aftermath of the Newtown, Conn., school shooting, Brownback announced in January that he would redirect \$10 million in mental-illness treatment funding to target people who are most at risk of hospitalization or incarceration. The plan is to create five regional service hubs for intensive case management and crisis-stabilization services.

"I am committed to strengthening this system and making it more effective," Brownback said at the time.

Better coordination of treatment options within service regions could be a good thing. But local mental-health professionals and stakeholders object that the money to operate these regional hubs is being taken out of funding for mental-health services for at-risk children and families.

"This \$10 million is money that's already allocated to mental health," Janet Zwonitzer, a member of the Jackson County Commission, said at a recent meeting about reform in Manhattan. "They're just taking it out over here and putting it back in over there, which means something that's being funded now isn't going to be funded."

Marilyn Cook, executive director of Comcare in Sedgwick County, said that there are 6,000 at-risk children and families now being served by this funding, including 700 in Sedgwick County.

"There is no new money, and we are taking away from a population who needs it," she told *The Eagle* editorial board.

And funding already was stretched. Though Medicaid spending on mental health in Kansas has increased since 2007, state grants to community mental health centers have decreased.

Robbin Cole, executive director of Pawnee Mental Health Services in Manhattan, said that her center has struggled for years with dwindling resources, the Kansas Health Institute News Service reported. "We had layoffs in 2009 and again in 2010," she said. "We have 25 percent fewer staff today than we did in 2007."

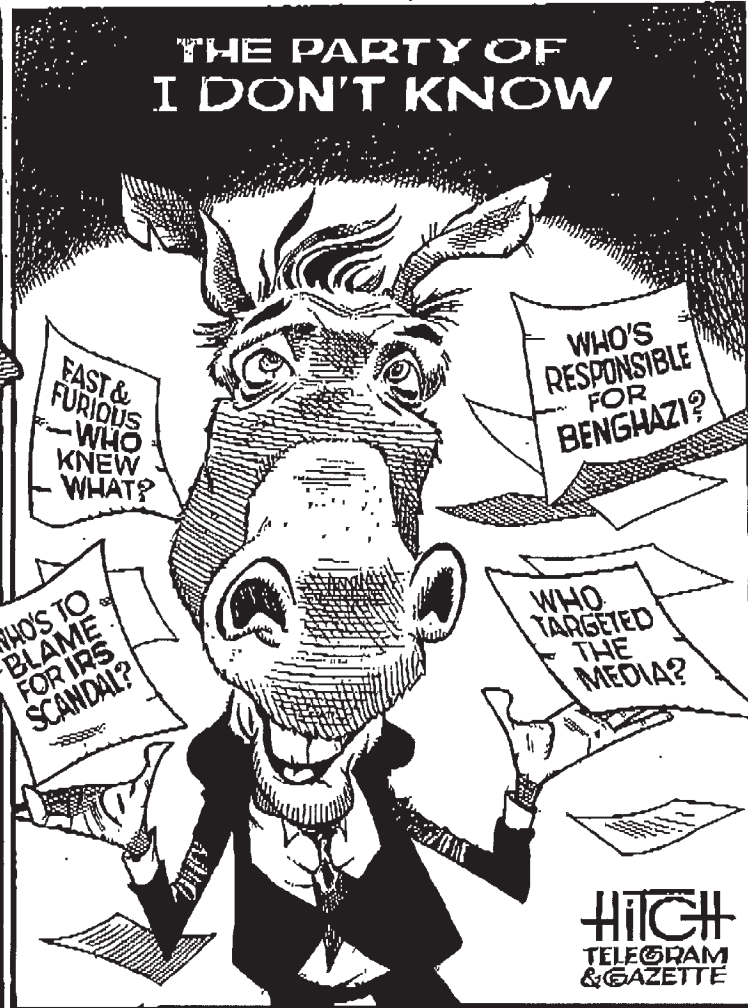
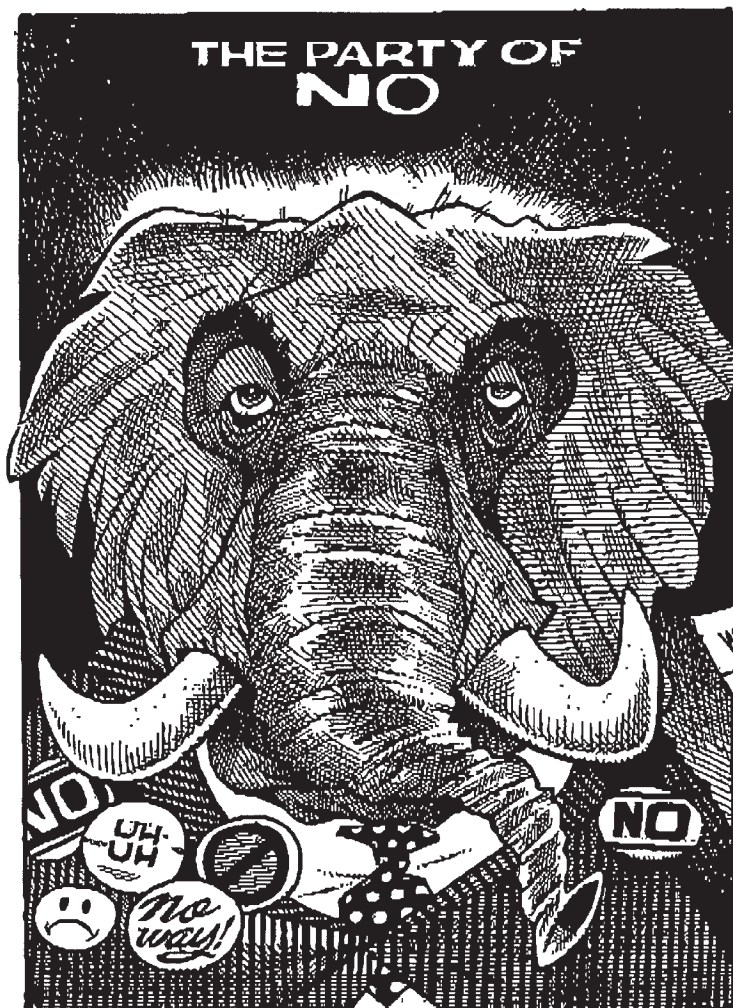
There is also a lot of confusion about how the regional centers would operate. And there is some concern that the state is moving away from a community-based model of mental-health services to a more regionalized approach.

The reform seems like an ad hoc, political response to Newtown, not something that was carefully studied and recommended by local mental-health professionals. In fact, administration officials had indicated before Newtown that Brownback was preparing to cut state mental-health programs.

Still, local mental-health leaders say they will try to make the initiative work.

"We are going to do our damndest to do a little bit more with no more money," Cook said.

But is that a good recipe for reform?
— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



Whatever your politics, thank soldiers

I'm typing this article on Memorial Day, a day when we pay our respects to the U.S. soldiers who gave their lives while serving our country.

For progressives like me, it should serve as a reminder that no matter what our stance on past and present U.S. wars, we owe our soldiers a debt of gratitude for their sacrifices. To not honor those sacrifices — soldiers who died in combat or were permanently disabled or mentally scarred for life — is not so much anti-American as it is anti-empathy.

No, I don't mean progressives should suddenly become full-throated supporters of American infallibility or dedicated converts to the trappings of military idolatry. For example, the disturbing number of sexual assaults against women in the military is a hideous trend that deserves criticism and public scrutiny.

But this shouldn't stop progressives from acknowledging and appreciating the millions of soldiers — past and present — who have served honorably over the years. We owe them that and much more.

When I give money to veteran's organizations, I'm always struck by how some soldiers — some of whom are permanently disabled and spending lonely hours in a hospital bed — are so grateful for the small contributions they have received from supporters. When I receive letters from these organizations asking for money, they regularly feature a soldier expressing his gratitude to the organization for the work it does on his or her behalf.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

It's enough to make a person get off the hedonistic treadmill for a couple of days to find his or her long-lost humility. Hearing stories about soldiers who lost a leg or an eye illuminates the price of war and the need to take care of our soldiers when they return home.

Negative attitudes about war should never be transformed into negative attitudes about U.S. troops. All soldiers, from World War II to veterans of more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, deserve respect, even if you disagree with some of the actions they have been ordered to undertake by the government.

There is nothing contradictory about supporting the troops and opposing certain U.S. wars, no matter what the "love it or leave it" folks say to the contrary. What is unsettling about people, who, like former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, say Americans should never apologize for their country, is the base arrogance and irrationality that undergirds this belief.

This would be like if a couple said they would never apologize for their child because if they did, they would be anti-parent. While all parents love their children, most couples understand that sometimes you have to cor-

rect your child for his or her own good. This doesn't mean you don't love them; it means you love them enough to acknowledge when they have veered off the right track. The same should be true for America.

While being both a critic of U.S. foreign policy and a patriotic American can be tricky, especially when the word patriotism has become inextricably linked with the idea of American exceptionalism, we progressives do ourselves no favors when we fail to acknowledge the good America does in the world. Knee-jerk opposition to U.S. foreign policy is no less dangerous than those who espouse an unflinching belief in American infallibility. And when these views become ossified in our political culture, it badly degrades public discourse.

Personally, I have been guilty of the former at times and only with time have I become more comfortable expressing my genuine admiration for the noble aspects of our country. So here's to hoping that everybody — including progressives — took time to pay homage to those who paid the ultimate sacrifice on Memorial Day.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision, or find him at twitter.com/heintz23.

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Negotiations will be good for Kansas

This session, we have tackled big issues. We are in the middle of tax and budget negotiations that will change the direction of the state for the better. The two-year budget is the first of its kind in Kansas.

Traditionally, the legislature passes a new budget from year to year, allowing for no certainty or sound financial footing for agencies and organizations to stand on when it comes to setting up their own budgets. By giving them a two-year commitment in finances, agencies will be able to better project their spending, and find efficiencies to make their money go farther in providing the services many Kansans depend on.

The tax bill currently in negotiation with the House has induced some major ideological debate. The question is whether to tax consumption or earnings. I am under the belief that taxing earnings will squelch business and hinder economic growth whereas taxing consumption won't stand in the way of jobs.

The Senate proposes keeping sales tax at 6.3 percent but lowering tax on groceries to 4.95 percent, all while lowering the income tax over the next 5 years on the path to 0 percent. I want to keep your hard-earned dollars in your pocket.

Three years ago, I supported a 1-cent sales tax with the commitment to sunset .6 of a cent July 1, 2014. I still support that, but also must make sure that I support the best long-term plan for my district and also the best for Kansans.

A few of the bills that were signed into law this year reflect that belief. I was proud to vote for a piece of legislation known as "Paycheck Protection." The new law ensures that union members will not be forced to make payments



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

to their union's political action committee, which may support candidates they don't. While every employee has the right to join a union if they wish, many unions use membership fees to support candidates or legislation that not all of their members are for. This is wrong; a worker should not lose part of their paycheck to campaigns they don't support.

We also passed legislation that allows Kansas veterans to get their Kansas driver's license with "VETERAN" printed on it. This should be helpful in obtaining discounts offered by various stores — especially for those veterans who did not retire and do not want to carry a copy of their discharge papers with them. It is also an appropriate way for the state to recognize their service.

I proudly voted for the passage of a new law protecting the Second Amendment rights of Kansans which will be soon take effect. The provision states that no firearm manufactured, sold, and owned in the State of Kansas may be confiscated by the federal government. This is an effort by Kansas to defend itself against federal overreach and to ensure its sovereignty as a state.

Finally, many Kansans believe that their hard-earned tax dollars should not be used to directly or indirectly fund abortions. That's why I voted for the passage of House Bill

2253. This law protects the lives of hundreds of unborn children by stripping away public funding from facilities that provide non-emergency abortions.

The legislation prohibits any school district or education service provider from offering abortion services. The measure also protects schools from abortion providers from sponsoring any course material for classroom use.

This bill affirms what the majority of Kansans believe, that life begins at conception and all state law needs to be interpreted to protect the rights, privileges and immunities of the unborn child.

Thank you so much for allowing me to serve you this session. I look forward to hearing from you all with questions or concerns. I will keep you up to date with developments in the tax and budget plans. If there is ever anything I can do to better serve you, please feel free to contact me.

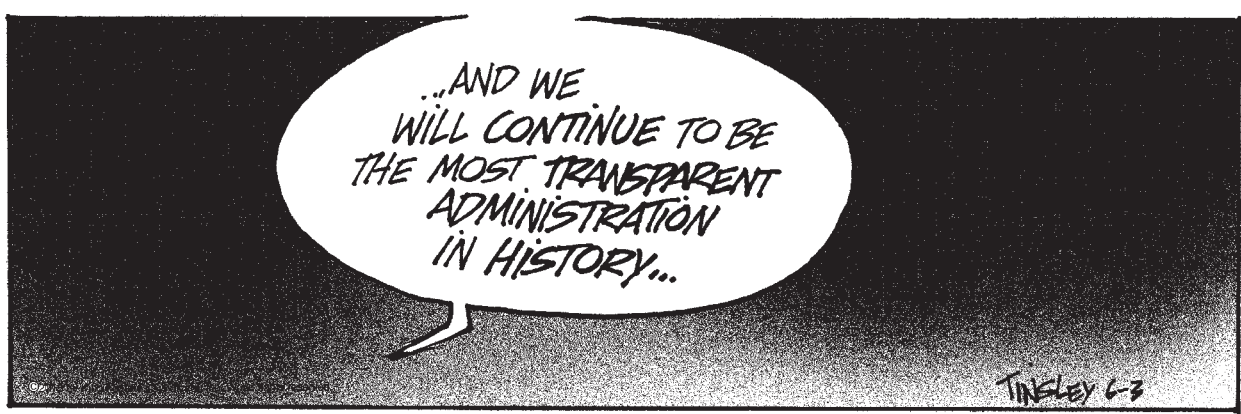
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