



Other Viewpoints

Education hurt for years to come

The Kansas Board of Regents has plenty of reason to be disappointed and even angry at Kansas lawmakers who approved budget cuts exceeding 5 percent for the universities under the Regents' purview.

The cuts will, as members assert, hurt the education of thousands of present and future students, contribute to the exodus of some of the system's most qualified faculty and undermine the long-term prosperity that legislators say is crucial for Kansas.

We share board members' view that the cuts are "irresponsible" and "mind-boggling." Unfortunately, the situation will probably get worse before it gets better. To offset millions of dollars of funding cuts, most of the universities have recommended tuition increases. Kansas State University, for instance, has recommended a seven-percent increase, a figure that will add more than \$200 a semester to the average instate student's expenses.

One immediate, albeit remote, hope for advocates of higher education is that Gov. Sam Brownback could undo with a veto at least some of the damage the Legislature has done. Despite the governor's requests during the session to hold higher education harmless from spending cuts, however, a veto would conflict with other of his priorities, particularly continued income tax cuts.

Conservative legislative leaders, at their shortsighted worst, turned a deaf ear to pleas for even maintaining the status quo to enable universities, community colleges and technical colleges to cope with the growing demands of students and the marketplace. Indeed, House Speaker Ray Merrick and House Appropriations Committee Chairman Marc Rhoades during the session supported even deeper cuts to higher education.

The only other place for higher education to turn is to the public – Kansans in all walks of life and in all corners of the state. Do they realize, or care, that the long lines, the closed classes and program cuts at universities are the direct result of legislative funding cuts? Everyday Kansans can be powerful allies. Legislators who simply don't understand higher education issues, who are biased against universities or who tune out educators would think twice before tuning out their own constituents.

Do Kansans understand that when legislators cut higher ed funding, it isn't the universities that suffer? Yes, K-State, KU and the other universities are proud institutions, but mostly they're vehicles through which students acquire the tools they need to succeed, and they're clearinghouses of ideas that foster economic growth.

When vital funding is cut, it's the students who suffer by missing out on opportunities. It's Kansas communities that suffer when they struggle to create jobs. And it's the entire state, which won't be as prosperous as it could be, that will suffer.

That's a good, honest message, and it's time universities shared it.

– The Manhattan Mercury, via the Associated Press

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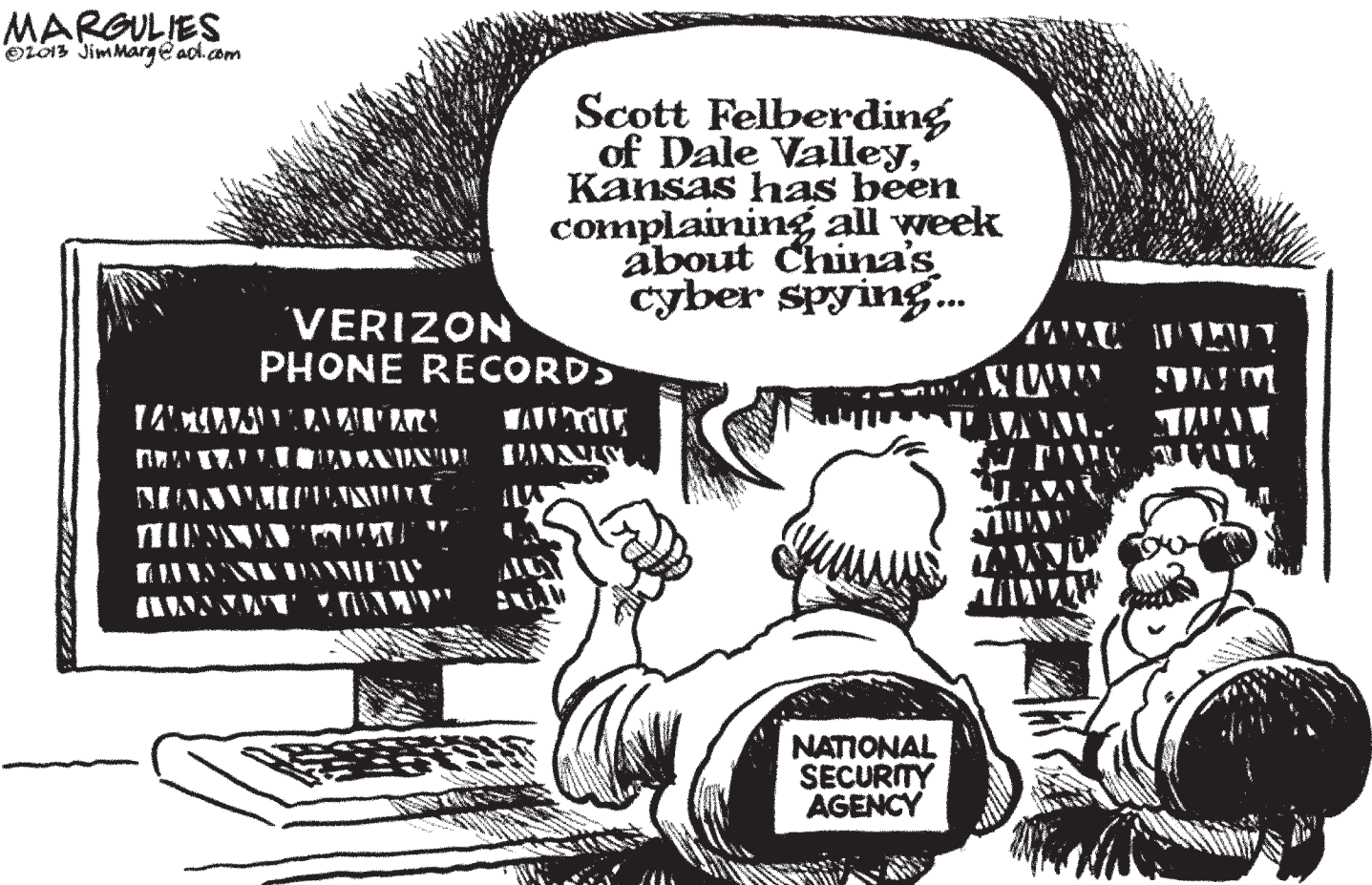
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MARGULIES
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Tax 'reductions' haven't paid as promised

I hope our school board doesn't end the year bitterly disappointed and short on money.

So far our governor and his conservative cohorts have failed to follow through on promises about the "emergency sales tax" issue. They successfully shoved income tax reductions through with promises that they would revitalize our economy and bring in more revenue.

Whups! It ain't happened!

They had to scurry to find sources to pay the bills. Instead of an overall reduction in taxes, they have found other sources to generate new revenue.

The state reneged on a promise made in the '90s to replace out-district tuition with state aid to the community colleges. Families living in Thomas County pay property tax to pick up the difference between tuition, state aid and grants.

Out-of-state students don't generate any state aid. Local property taxpayers pick up the shortfall if state aid, tuition, scholarships and grants don't cover the full cost of programs. We just witnessed a tremendous jump in property taxes to pay for our college. It would be more economical for most of us if the college was across the border in another county.

I'm not advocating moving the college. I'm well aware of the cultural benefits and opportunity for our graduates to get advanced education. I was disappointed when the college board and administration decided to end the Thomas County tuition scholarship. Property taxpayers here are paying more to edu-



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

cate their children than out-of-county parents. Direct community economic benefits are not equally shared by the majority of the county's residents.

Brownback and his cohorts didn't reduce the tax bite, they just moved from the progressive income tax to regressive sales and property taxes. If you want your local services and schools paid for, you'll have to raise property taxes. You don't think you're paying enough property taxes now?

Sales (or consumption) and property taxes hit the lower income people, the disabled and fixed-income elderly much harder than the wealthy. Sales and property taxes take a much higher percent of the lower income individuals than it does the wealthy. Basic needs – food, shelter and health care – don't change with wealth.

Laborers and middle-level salaried people spend most of their income on basic needs. We find tremendous disparity in tax evaluations of personal property, business property, investment property and cash in the bank. I think statistics will show that sales and property tax

hit the majority of the nation's residents much harder than income tax.

Social Security taxes are extremely regressive, due to the cap on income subject to the levy. Fix those inequities, and the rate could be reduced and the system would be sustainable.

Using Social Security trust funds to stave off increasing income taxes in the past has not resulted in less taxes for the majority of folks. The "poor" folks kept right on paying Social Security taxes and the "rich folks" didn't get an increase in income taxes. That's kind of like Brownback's reduction of income tax levies. The "poor" folks are going to pay a higher percent of the cost of state government and the "rich" folks will reap the benefits.

The governor's major selling point for reduced income tax was to entice new industries and outside investors to move to Kansas. Sales tax and property tax will have to fund the infrastructure, schools, and health care facilities to support the increased labor force. Will the new corporations and investors move to Kansas? Will the top executives and managers live year around in the our communities? Some will, but most won't.

Where will those investors and top level executives buy basic personal necessities? Most likely not in Colby, or even Thomas County.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semiretired 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.

Investigating? Then do it right

Other Opinions

• Lee Hamilton
Center on Congress

To advance the national interest, Congress must investigate with an open mind, a bipartisan attitude, and fair-minded professionalism. The bedrock of a good investigation is focusing on the facts; that's the key to finding solutions for the future.

By my count, 11 separate Washington investigations are looking into the three big issues besetting the Obama administration right now: Benghazi, Internal Revenue Service targeting of Tea Party groups, and the Justice Department's pursuit of national security leaks to Associated Press reporters. That's a lot of scrutinizing by any measure.

Don't get me wrong. Each case raises important questions, and the investigations offer Americans the chance to find out what went wrong and to fix the problem. But that will only happen if the investigators – on Capitol Hill and within the executive branch – do it right.

I've done my share of digging into complex matters – as co-chair of the Iran-Contra Special Committee, of the 9/11 Commission and the Iraq Study Group – and what I know is this: an investigation ought to be forward-looking and constructive, focused on a key question that is important to the country and to the American people.

What does it take to keep our U.S. missions secure? That's what the Benghazi inquiry is really about. How do we make sure the IRS remains rigorously non-partisan and competently managed? In the AP case, how should the government balance respect for freedom of the media against the need to safeguard national security? These are matters of national interest, and the investigations give us a chance to pursue each of them.

But retaining a laser-like focus on what re-

ally counts is difficult in Washington. Any inquiry is bound to arouse people and groups who have something at stake in it, and they will fight long and hard to make sure their point of view prevails. Politicians look for partisan advantage. The federal bureaucracy protects its turf, and agencies do everything they can to spin testimony or cast blame elsewhere. Lobbyists protect the interests they represent. The White House always wants to shield the president, and can be counted on to drag its heels if an investigation heads in a direction it doesn't like.

Then, too, the press, politicians, even members of investigating committees will get off track. Was there a cover-up? Who's to blame for mistakes? Was there criminal wrongdoing? These are legitimate and serious questions. But they are less important to the long-term well-being of the country than trying to discover what went wrong and determining how to fix it; in the case of criminality, that's an issue for prosecutors to pursue, not Congress.

To ensure that legislative investigators stay on track, their overall approach is crucial. Most important, they need to come in with an open mind and focus on the facts – on what actually happened. It's amazing how much time gets spent arguing over what took place. Determining this is the bedrock of a good in-

vestigation, because once you get an understanding of events and how they came about, it becomes much easier to discern and agree upon solutions for the future.

An investigation's overall approach also matters because simply launching one does not give you the credibility you need to fix things. That credibility only comes through seriousness of purpose, a bipartisan attitude, fair-minded professionalism, your relationship with the media and the quality of the staff. A partisan staff generates partisan results, and doesn't serve the investigation well. Similarly, if you adopt a posture of secrecy or appear to have a hidden agenda, you'll feed the innate skepticism that meets any investigation; communicating openly to all parties is crucial.

A thorough and professional investigation will also be careful in selecting the witnesses it calls and in how it treats them. Volunteer witnesses will spring forward by the scores – so it's crucial to find a broad range of witnesses who have stature within their fields, rigorously analyze the facts, are free of partisan entanglements, and strive to present the national interest. If you stack your witness list, you've undermined your ability to be taken seriously.

All of this makes conducting an investigation a minefield. But if the purpose is clear – getting to the bottom of what happened and coming up with approaches to fix the institutional shortcomings that come to light – and the methods are open, fair, bi-partisan, and trustworthy, the benefits to the American people can last for years.

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

