commentary

from other pens...

State of the Union is a state of war

By Lawrence L. Knutson

it had failed in that purpose.

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — President Bush delivers his State of the Union speech Tuesday night armed with a degree of national unity conferred on no wartime chief executive since Pearl Harbor 60 years ago.

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon lend Bush's prosecution of the war a degree of popular support denied to Harry Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower in Korea and Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon in Vietnam.

Bush's father, President George H. W. Bush, faced division and dissent at the beginning of his effort to stop Iraqi aggression in the Persian Gulf. Unlike Johnson in the 1960s, Bush will walk down the center aisle of the House chamber free of the pressure LBJ faced as casualties

mounted in Southeast Asia and the protest chants echoed in the streets. In 1966, Johnson offered one of the most eloquent passages by any president on the nature of war itself.

"War is always the same," he said. "It is young men dying in the fullness of their promise. It is trying to kill a man you do not even know well enough to hate. Therefore, to know war is to know there is still madness in the world."

But Johnson also used that speech to try to convince Congress the nation could pay for both his war and his ambitious domestic programs. America is strong enough "to pursue our goals in the rest of the world while building the Great Society here at home," he declared.

By the next year Johnson was facing up to a dilemma.

"... The question is whether we have the staying power to fight a very costly war, when the objective is limited and the danger to us is seemingly remote," he said on Jan. 10, 1967.

Contrast that with Franklin D. Roosevelt's address on Jan. 6, 1942, a month after the Pearl Harbor attack, when he described the Japanese and Nazi enemies as hurtling along a "bloodstained course of conquest." Pearl Harbor, described earlier by FDR as a "day of infamy," was a blunt instrument, intended to stun and terrify America, Roosevelt said

Truman faced a more daunting challenge on Jan. 8, 1951, as he sought backing for a "police action" to repel the communist invasion of South Korea and thwart "the threat of world conquest by Soviet Russia."

Korea, he said, was a symbol that "stands for right and justice in the world against oppression and slavery. The free world must always stand for these principles and we will stand with the free world,"Truman said.

Growing opposition to the Korean War was one reason Truman passed up the opportunity to seek re-election in 1952. Fierce opposition to the war in Vietnam was one reason Johnson ruled himself out in 1968.

The consequences of Johnson's experience in Vietnam were fresh in many minds on Jan. 29, 1991 when George H. W. Bush walked into the House chamber and said the nation had reached "a defining moment."

Congress had narrowly approved U.S. involvement in a coalition to defeat Iraq and reverse the invasion of Kuwait. The air war had just begun. There was skepticism about the wisdom of the president's course. Bush accused Iraq of the "ruthless, systematic rape of a peaceful

neighbor." Then he moved the regional conflict onto a larger world stage altered by signs of cracks in the Soviet Union's iron facade. The current president can report the nation is "on course," having rolled

up the Taliban and put terrorism on the defensive around the world.

The 43rd president also must lay the foundation for a lengthy contest with an elusive foe. In answering the question of how long such a war might take, Bush might remember Roosevelt's words six decades ago:

"Many people ask, 'When will this war end?' There is only one answer. It will end as soon as we make it end, by our combined efforts, our combined strength, our combined determination to fight through and work through until the end

EDITOR'S NOTE — Lawrence L. Knutson has covered the White House, Congress and Washington's history for 34 years.

TOPEKA CAPITAL-JOURNAL IT'S FOOLPROOF, BY THE TIME GOVERNOR... THEY DECIDE TO KANSAS COLLECTS REVENUE QUIT SMOKING THEY'LL BE FROM EXPANDED GAMBLING THAT PAYS OFF IN ADDICTED TO CIGARETTES! SLOT MACHINES! CAMEL

John Kerry: The first challenger

WASHINGTON — John Kerry just began his 2004 campaign for the White House the way an earlier Massachusetts senator, John Kennedy, started his landmark 1960 run. He is offering himself as a challenger, not just to an incumbent president, but to an established national mindset.

Kennedy's issue was Algeria. He said the United States had been shackled by Cold War alliances into backing France against its rebellious North African colony. America, the young Massachusetts senator boldly declared, should be championing the cause of independence for emerging nations such as Algeria.

Kerry's issue also relates to the Arab world. He said this week the United States must unshackle itself from dependence on foreign petroleum. He blamed the Bush administration's cozy alliance with the oil industry for keeping America hostage to terrorism and endless war.

"Old thinking passed through the doors of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue far more often and more easily than new thinking. Exxon, Mobil, Enron and Chevron enjoyed an access bonanza at the expense of consumers.'

While other Democrats take easy shots at the Bush-Enron connection, Kerry is pushing a solution to the real problem: the Bush-oil connection.

He said the United States should be championing new sources of energy — wind, sun, geothermal, biomass (plant, animal and industrial waste) — that would free us from dependence on such areas as the Persian Gulf.

"No foreign government can embargo them. No terrorist can seize control of them. No cartel can play games with them. No American soldier will have to risk his or her life to protect it."

Kerry's bold challenge clearly separates him not quibbling over budget and tax priorities. At 58, fundamental value: independence.



he is presenting a bold challenge to President Bush's global strategy.

Why has the United States, a country so rich in innovative skill, allowed itself to become completely dependent for its economic stability on a part of the world that is terminally unstable?

The numbers Kerry presents are stark and irrefutable. We have 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, yet we use 25 percent. This accounts for why Saudi Arabia, a country that holds 46 percent of the world's oil reserves, has become essential to us.

strategist James Carville said, are won on "big ideas." John Kennedy won in 1960 with a pledge to "get this country moving again."

Presidential campaigns, as Bill Clinton's No. 1

Jimmy Carter won in 1976 with a pledge to create "a government as good as the American

Clinton won in 1992 with the slogan "It's the economy, Stupid!" and the pledge to "put people

These are the only Democratic candidates to take back the White House since 1932, so it's a good bet the party nominee in 2004 will need to locate and exploit an equally grand proposal. To excite voters, he will need a big idea of why he would be a better him president. national leader than the estimable George W. Bush.

Therein lies Kerry's core advantage. Instead of What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and nickel-and-diming the budget and carping about from the pack of 2004 contenders. Unlike Tom too-heavy tax cuts, he is saying that this country is ally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Daschle, Dick Gephardt and John Edwards, he is not getting the leadership it needs to ensure its most Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and

"Energy security is American security. If we enact the entire Bush energy plan, we will find ourselves 20 years from now more dependent on foreign oil than we are today."

It's a grand statement of policy — a big gamble politically.

"Jobs, jobs, jobs." Those were the stakes, former secretary of state James A. Baker III declared, of the 1991-92 Persian Gulf War. We fought Saddam Hussein to keep him from the oil of Kuwait and perhaps, of Saudi Arabia as well.

At what point will Americans decide we have fought enough wars in that region? Define the real fight is not about terrorism or Islam but about our country's thirst for endless barrels of cheap oil? Open our eyes to the fact we cannot trust oil guys like the Bushes and Cheneys to begin weaning us from this thirst?

Young Jack Kennedy took a similar gamble in 1957 when he asked us to look behind the confines of early Cold War thinking and recognize the nationalist aspirations of countries like Algeria. He called on his country to get beyond the cozy deals with France and Britain and focus on the freedomseeking people in their colonies. He asked us to stop fighting the old colonial wars and start championing the rebel side.

"How do you ask a man to be the last to die for a

That's what a young John Kerry asked the country when he returned a combat hero from Vietnam. It's the question that eventually made him a senator

Perhaps it's the very question today that will make Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You

"Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nation-MSNBC cable channels.

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Prospect of school aid cuts push tax increase

TOPEKA—Reluctance to cut education spending is pushing the Legislature toward raising taxes.

Two weeks ago, when the 2002 session convened, opposition to tax increases appeared all but insurmountable. When Gov. Bill Graves outlined his package of tax increases, his proposal for a 65cent-a-pack rise in the cigarette tax elicited few audible gasps.

Republicans seemed ready to ram a budget plan through the Senate Ways and Means Committee drafted by Chairman Steve Morris and Senate President Dave Kerr. It avoids a tax increase by tapping into rainy day funds and cutting spending.

But Kerr, R-Hutchinson, and Morris, R-Hugoton, now support a bill for increasing tobacco and alcohol taxes to raise \$87 million during the state's budget year that begins July 1. It's not the \$228 million Graves wants, but it shows more willingness to consider a tax increase than was evident two weeks ago.

And the Ways and Means Committee abandoned a key portion of the Kerr-Morris plan — an immediate cut in aid to public schools of \$39 per student, to \$3,831, to save the state \$23.7 million.

"As much as they'd like to say that tax increases are bad politics, cutting critical programs that people have come to depend on is pretty bad politics as well," Graves said.

The state faces a \$426 million gap between expected revenues and spending commitments for fiscal 2003. Much of the problem stems from higher-than-expected costs for social services and 1999 laws requiring the state to set aside extra money for higher education and highway construc-

In any budget discussion, funding education is a big issue. Of the \$4.5 billion legislators appropriated for fiscal 2002, about half goes to public

With the budget gap as large as it is, it would be difficult for legislators who want to avoid a tax increase to avoid cutting aid to public schools.

Kerr and Morris gave public schools favored status in their budget plan. Their proposed cut in state aid per pupil was just 1 percent, compared to 1.2 percent for higher education and 2 percent for

most state agencies.

john hanna

ap news analysis

saw last year's \$50-per-student increase as inadequate, and talk of a cut this year led superintendents to contemplate reductions in staffs and pro-

Even opponents of a tax increase concede the difficulties involved in cutting spending.

"It's very easy to say, 'Let's make that cut," said Rep. Melvin Neufeld, R-Ingalls, a member of the House Appropriations Committee. "Then you have to sit there and face the person you made the cut on."

Indeed, Morris paired his proposed cut in state aid with a plan to make it easier for school districts to use their contingency funds or borrow against future property tax collections.

But 88 of the 304 school districts don't have contingency funds, and many that do have little money in theirs.

And many legislators don't consider borrowing much of a solution, because state law requires the debt to be repaid the next school year with an additional property tax. Districts have relied more on property taxes in recent years to finance their op-

A few legislators, including Neufeld, saw Morris' proposal as pure strategy, meant to push colleagues toward accepting a tax increase.

'You'll see a lot of bad ideas thrown up this year," Neufeld said. "It's part of the process."

Opposition to raising taxes remains, of course. Conservative Republicans still maintain the state shouldn't take more money out of Kansans' pockets during an economic slump. "If my personal budget is short, you don't go to

my neighbor and demand the \$100 your personal budget is short," said Rep. Brenda Landwehr, R-Wichita. Yet there are signs that opposition is softening,

even in the House.

Speaker Kent Glasscock, R-Manhattan, not only But school officials still weren't pleased. Most supports Grayes' proposal for the 65-cent increase

in the cigarette tax but joined Graves at a news conference Thursday.

"I've been very surprised in the House how open

members are to looking at additional revenue sources," Glasscock told reporters. And Kerr took pains last week to describe the budget he drafted with Morris as an option to get

the Senate's debate started. "I'm just pleased we're making a little progress on sorting this out this early in the session," Kern

The progress is toward a tax increase, and that progress occurred last week because legislators

would not cut aid to public schools. EDITOR'S NOTE: Associated Press Correspon-

dent John Hanna has covered state government and politics since 1987.

berry's world

