

from other viewpoints...

Education lawsuit based on flawed case

June 7, 2012 - Wichita - The attorneys representing Kansas school districts suing taxpayers for additional funding in Gannon v. State of Kansas are trying to prove that the State is not making suitable provision for K-12 funding. Their definition of "suitable" is based on a formula that the legislature implemented after the Kansas Supreme Court ordered nearly a billion dollar increase in the 2005 Montoy decision. But the Montoy decision was based on a seriously flawed study.

"Basing suitability on the Montoy decision or any variation thereof throws efficient use of taxpayer money out the window. The 2001 Augenblick & Myers (A&M) study was supposed to take efficiency into account but they admitted that they deviated from their own methodology and by doing so, gave the court inflated numbers," said Kansas Policy Institute president Dave Trabert.

The Institute published a legal analysis of Montoy in 2009 that was written by Caleb Stegall, now Gov. Brownback's general counsel. Stegall wrote a critique of the previous efforts to determine suitability with a nod to cost-effectiveness that still holds today, "So while the Legislative Post Audit (LPA) study - and the A&M study for that matter - attempted to provide informed estimates of the price of certain policy decisions, in the end, LPA rightly recognized that only the Legislature is capable of making such decisions. As such, the best that any cost study can do is inform the Legislature as to the range of possible costs associated with different policy decision, and not dictate the exact price tag associated with a funding system that passes constitutional muster. This fact simply brings critical clarity to the contradictions at the heart of the school finance debacle in Kansas."

Trabert continued, "The subsequent Legislative Post Audit study was designed to essentially replicate the A&M study. LPA very deliberately reported that they were not asked to determine what it would cost if schools were organized and operated in a cost-effective manner."

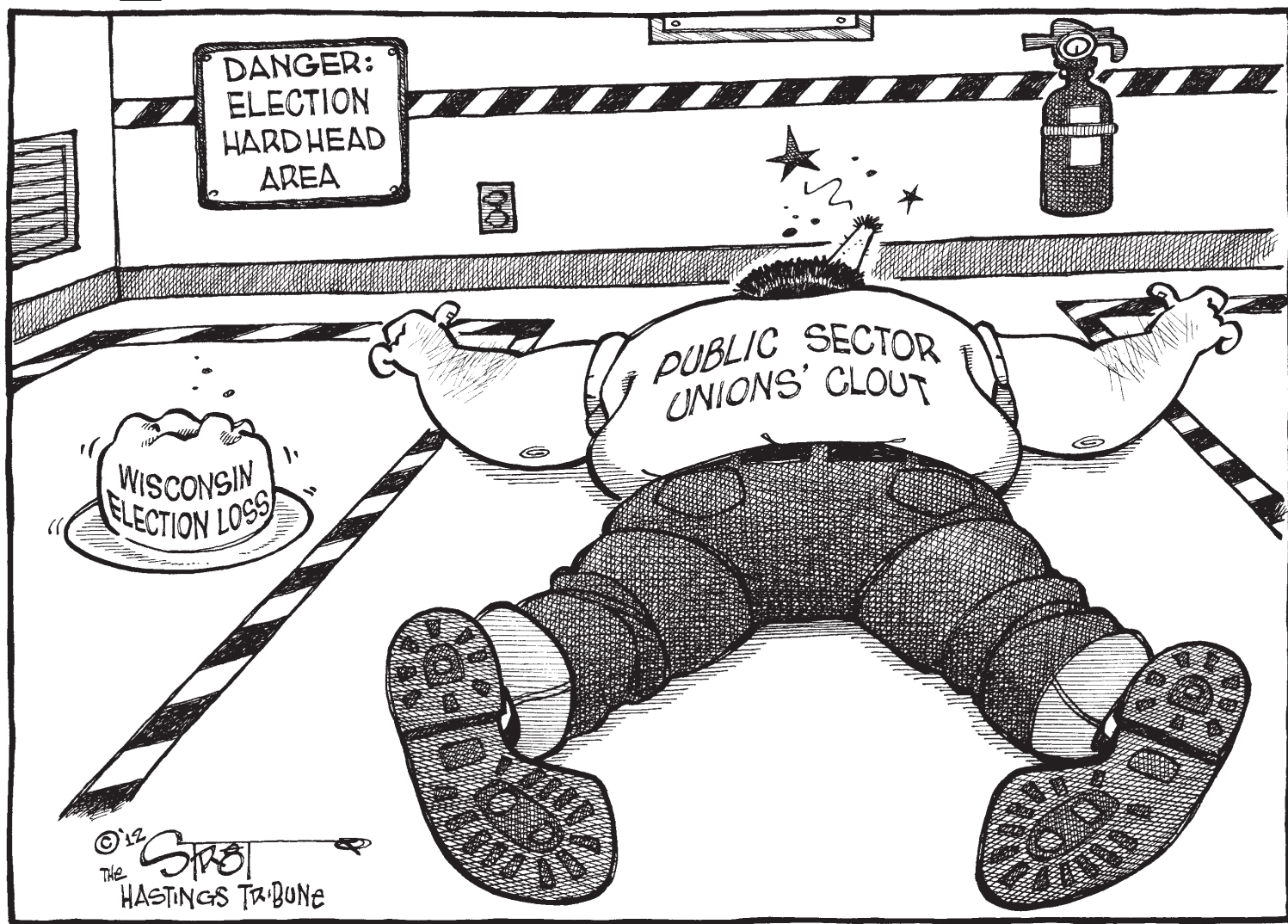
The post audit made this very clear on page two of their report. "In other words, it's important to remember that these cost studies are intended to help the Legislature decide appropriate funding levels for K-12 public education. They aren't intended to dictate any specific funding level, and shouldn't be viewed that way.

The 2010 Commission waited three years to have LPA begin to look at efficient operations of schools. They released a study in July 2009 that cited eighty recommendations for schools to save money without impacting outcomes.

Trabert continued, "All along the way, the Legislature has attempted to receive information on the efficient use of taxpayer money in public education but their efforts have been thwarted. They passed legislation that encouraged districts to direct 65 percent of funding into Instructional costs in another attempt to ensure that taxpayer money was put to the best use but districts ignored them. Instruction spending accounted for 53.6 percent of total spending in 2005; total spending was \$1.3 billion higher in 2011 but Instruction spending was only 54.3 percent of the total. Upon discovering that districts had used another \$400 million in state and local tax dollars to increase cash reserves since 2005, legislation was passed to make a lot of that money easily accessible but very little of the money has been used."

Trabert concluded by saying, "Legislators have shown multiple good-faith efforts to make provision for suitable finance of public education and we believe they have fulfilled their constitutional obligation to do so. 'Suitability' may not be a clearly-defined term but it certainly hasn't been established by any study to date."

-The Kansas Policy Institute



D-Day is an event worth remembering

It snuck up on me this year, but I've been busy. Wednesday was June 6, the 68th anniversary of we have come to know as D-Day.

In the early hours of June 6, 1944, the first wave of British, Canadian and American soldiers struggled off the landing craft and onto the beaches in Normandy, France. The strategic objective was simple. Establish a beachhead in Nazi-occupied France so more men and war materiel could be transferred from England. The tactical situation was anything but simple.

The Allies had planned for five landing sites along the coast of northern France. There they faced Hitler's vaunted Atlantic Wall, an interlocking web of defenses from Norway to Spain, meant to throw any invader back into the sea. Behind that were 59 German Army divisions.

It would turn out to be one of the most decisive days in history. Even though many units fell short of their D-Day objectives, the Allies had broken through the shore defenses and begun moving inland. The great march to Berlin had just begun.

As you might have guessed, I'm a bit of



kevin bottrell

• simple tricks and nonsense

a history buff, especially when it comes to World War II. I read everything I can get on the subject, from biographies of Dwight D. Eisenhower to the writings of Gen. Omar Bradley. I'm not sure what fascinates me about the subject, after all it took place nearly 40 years before I was born, but it does.

I had learned a little about the invasion of Normandy in school, along with some cursory information about World War II. I'd seen the excellent film, "Saving Private Ryan," which gave me a sense of how horrifying it would have been to experience that kind of fighting. But it wasn't until I read "D-Day" by Stephen Ambrose that I really got a sense of the sheer scale of the operation. On the first day alone the Allies landed 156,000 troops, that's three times

the size of Salina, and all of them were men, mostly between 18 and 22. Including Navy, Air Corps, supply, medical and headquarters personnel, the Allies fielded 1.332 million people in the invasion, while the German defenders numbered 380,000. Those are staggering numbers by today's military standards.

Of course, with all those numbers, we often forget the human face of these events. From Gen. Theodore Roosevelt Jr., who at 56, was the oldest man in the invasion and one of the first off the landing craft; to Richard Todd, a British Paratrooper who helped take a vital bridge in the hours before the landings and later played his commanding officer in the movie "The Longest Day."

I've had the honor to interview a number of World War II veterans over the years. The experience is always fascinating and rewarding. Unfortunately, there are fewer people who can tell us these stories each year.

I'd like to invite any veteran of military service, be it in World War II or later, to come by the Goodland Star-News and share their stories.

Never know who you'll meet on the train

Riding home from Chicago the other night, we enjoyed dinner in the diner as we rolled along through the corn fields of Illinois and Iowa.

One of the quaint customs of dining on the train is that unless you have a party of four, they seat you with others to fill up the car. We wound up across from a couple from California, both born in Vietnam.

Across the isle were four friends, all chattering away in Vietnamese. Turns out, they were all members of the Class of 1978 at Da Nang High School, together on a cross-country reunion. They'd flown east and been to New York and Washington; now they were taking the train across the country, soaking up the sights of the heartland.

At their high school, they said, each grade had about 800 students and classes averaged 40 students. They were expected to have a major which they would pursue in college.

Three of them had left Vietnam at various times; three of them had flown over for this trip. And they were having quite a time.

Over dinner I asked Ann how long she'd been in this country. She said she'd come over in 1986 and had gone to college here in electrical engineering. Now she and her husband are software engineers for Cisco Systems.

How did she get here?
"You've heard of boat people?" she asked.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

"That's me."

She said she'd been quite lucky. Some boat people didn't make it. Some disappeared at sea. Some spent weeks on overcrowded boats and were lucky to be fished out in time.

She and her sister left Vietnam with the boat's owner, who took only his family, plus her and her older sister.

"Sixteen people, that's all we had," she recalled. "Three days later we were in Thailand. We went to a refugee camp. I was very lucky."

The camp was on the beach she said, and that was nice, but the beds were right up against each other. Some of the others had been there for months; some told terrible stories of their escape.

Officials told her that, since she did not know anyone in the U.S. to sponsor her, it could be years before she'd be allowed to immigrate. They told her she would need to go to a new camp in the Philippines, learn English and American culture, and make herself ready.

"I had to sign a paper," she said. "I signed."

The new camp was much nicer, she said, even if it wasn't on the beach. Each family had a house, only five or six people together.

Then, after a few months, the news spread that President Carter had relaxed the quote restrictions on Vietnamese immigrants. They'd be able to go to the U.S.

She and her sister located a distant aunt in Tulsa who would sponsor them. They flew to Oklahoma. In the summer when they arrived, it was hot, but in the winter, the cold was too much. A friend told them about California, and a few weeks later, they were on a Greyhound bus bound for the Golden State.

There they went to community college, then the University of California at Davis. She met her husband and got into computers. She still thinks she has been very lucky, even if Vietnam has changed some.

We talked a little about what we'd seen in our one trip to Vietnam and the differences we saw even today between north and south. And the stories our southern friends had told of how their families had been persecuted after the war.

"You heard true stories," she said. "You heard true stories."

Today, she and her sisters, all except the youngest, live in the U.S. Their parents and the younger girls stayed in Vietnam.

No one said anything about going back.

Make sure farm fun stays safe

The dream of many young farm boys and girls is to ride with their fathers on a tractor. For a youngster, the mammoth tractor epitomizes raw power, responsibility and coming of age.

Nothing is more exciting to youngsters than the belch of diesel smoke, the roar of engines and rubber wheels rolling on powerful tractors, combines or silage cutters. They draw children like a moth to a flame and, like fire, can be dangerous. Such equipment can cut, crush or trap children. It holds potential harm for the ones we want to protect the most - our children.

Now that children are home from school, the chance of farm accidents is greater. During the summer months, never invite your children to ride in the tractor with you. Stress that your youngsters stay away from machinery. Never let them play or hide under or around machinery like tractors.

Farms offer children a unique environment to live, play, work and grow up. As a child, I can remember tossing a lasso around the grain auger and climbing into the grain bin of our



Insight this week

• john schlageck

combine. At the age of five, this giant silver machine symbolized the far away Rocky Mountains and I was scaling their peaks like my legendary (Mountain Man) hero, Jim Bridger.

Education and awareness are the key ingredients to help make the farm a safer place for children to play, according to Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director. Brushing up on some of the potential hazards can also make it safer for parents.

Describe to children how horses can be fun to ride, Higgins says. Talk about how lambs and baby calves can be pleasurable to pet or feed. Remind them that while animals are fun to be around they can also bite, kick and trample.

"Discuss with your youngsters the signs that show an animal may be dangerous," the safety director says. "Some of them include pawing the ground, snorting, raised hair and ears laid back."

Animals - even friendly ones - can be unpredictable. Have your children stay away from large ones. Emphasize they stay away from animals with newborn or young. Tell them to remain calm, speak quietly and move slowly when around animals.

While barns, grain handling facilities and big buildings can be fun to play in, falls can occur or children may be exposed to harmful substances like chemicals and electricity, Higgins says.

Remember, it is important that youngsters have a safe place to play. Ask them to identify safe play areas. Talk about areas away from farm machinery, animals, manure pits, silos, etc. Carefully define safe boundaries. Let them know where they can and cannot play.

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