

Taxpayers shouldn't be sued for taxpayer money

A good idea: change the law so one government unit can't spend taxpayers' money to sue another government entity for money.

And make darned sure that no subdivision of the state can sue the state for money, financing that whole thing with state tax money.

That's what a Wichita-area legislator, Sen. Dick Kelsey of Goddard, proposed last week as Kansas faced another round of school lawsuits financed by tax dollars on both sides. Kelsey happens to be running for Congress, but that does not mean he can't have a good idea.

What it comes down to is you, the taxpayers, paying to sue you, the taxpayer, to force you to cough up more money for schools.

So let's start by asking, do you want to pay for any of this?

No?

We didn't think so.

So maybe Sen. Kelsey is on to something here.

Four years ago, in a brazen power grab, the Kansas Supreme Court heard the original "Montoy" school case and ordered the Legislature to come up with nearly a billion dollars more for schools. Never mind that the Legislature, not the courts, is supposed to decide such things as spending levels and tax rates under the constitutional division of powers.

Worse yet, the Legislature caved in and agreed to find the money. But that was then. Now, the state is nearly broke, tax collections run under estimates nearly every month, and the Legislature and governor have spent the better part of two years cutting the budget for all programs.

Should schools be exempt?

The group called "Schools for Fair Funding," led by a group of sharp lawyers who always make money on these cases, says they should. They've asked the Supreme Court to reopen the Montoy case and find that the Legislature needs to dig up that billion.

Many of those who will spend this money, school boards and school administrators, say they need it, or children's educations will suffer. Teachers certainly want to see the money come through.

We know schools have needs, but at what price to the rest of the state? Cut colleges and highways even more? Raise taxes with thousands unemployed? Those are tough choices, questions that only the elected Legislature and governor should answer.

But above all else, how is it fair to use taxpayers' money to pay for a suit against the state?

We hope Sen. Kelsey's measure becomes law. We think he's right.

His measure will not protect the state from being sued. Anyone with an interest could file a similar suit, using money donated by school board members, administrators or the teachers' union, say, but it would save the rest of us from paying to sue ourselves.

Let's hope this passes.

— Steve Haynes



It's time to pay our debt

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A few months ago, our good friend, Wayne, was getting new front room furniture. We thought his old set looked pretty good and went with our family room's cowboys and Indians theme.

A deal was struck and we agreed to help sheetrock, texture and paint a spare bedroom at Wayne's house in exchange for the furniture.

Wayne was in no hurry to have the room done, but now, the time has come to settle accounts.

Jim will take care of the heavy stuff and I'll move in for paint duties.

All in all, I think it was a good barter for all parties.

— ob —

Anyone who knows me, knows I am a creationist. I believe in a young earth and I believe the Bible account of creation in six days.

But, with that being said, IF I were an evolutionist I would have to agree with the nominees for this year's Darwin Awards.

Every year the least "evolved" among us are recognized with these awards. There is a list of the top ten and one of

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



Remember, they walk among us; they drive vehicles; they vote; and frequently have children.

— ob —

Some of my best recipes come from my sister-in-law, Linda. Her buttermilk syrup is to die for.

I wanted to make a batch of her homemade mustard over the weekend but when I looked at the recipe, it didn't designate whether to use white or cider vinegar.

When I called to find out she wasn't home but my brother, Jim, said he would ask her.

Later, I got an e-mail from Jim that said, "Linda said she uses white vinegar."

It's a good deal I don't check my e-mail every day, because immediately following my brother's message was an e-mail from Linda that said she had actually mumbled something like, "I don't think it matters."

She added that he normally doesn't listen to her but, now, he's hearing things she doesn't say.

Bottom line, she still doesn't think it matters but, she always uses cider vinegar.

the nominees was the guy who tried to siphon gas from a motor home parked on a street in Seattle. When the police arrived at the scene they found a very sick man curled up next to the motor home.

Upon questioning, the man admitted to trying to steal gasoline, but he had plunged his siphon hose into the motor home's sewage tank by mistake. The owner of the motor home declined to press charges saying it was the best laugh he'd ever had.

This year's winner is the guy who tried to mug someone in Long Beach, Calif. When his .38 caliber revolver failed to fire at his intended victim, the would-be robber peered down the barrel of the gun and tried the trigger again. This time it worked. The award was given posthumously.

Consider the big picture

Insight

John Schlageck

If today's crop of young farmers and ranchers plan to play a part in the future of agriculture, they must position themselves where this industry will be — not where it is.

It is especially important for those in agriculture to focus on the future rather than the past. Sometimes, farmers and ranchers tend to look wistfully to yesterday and that's not reality.

Those in the industry must look at their industry and say, "This is what agriculture will look like."

There are four key considerations young farm and ranch couples must take to heart and mind if they are to reach their full potential in the agricultural industry. These include: be willing to change; be part of something bigger than yourself; accept the future; and give up your own independence.

Addressing change is something young farmers and ranchers are familiar with. They have no trouble recognizing change — it's doing something about it that is so difficult.

Everyone tends to give change a chance but when difficulty pops up all of us tend to revert back to our old ways of doing things.

To change we must develop a new process of thinking and implementing change.

Secondly, we as humans, especially young farmers and ranchers must strive toward something greater than self-actualization to fulfill our own unique

potential. This means providing ourselves with something bigger than we are. To accomplish anything of greatness, we must work with others.

Agriculture is not just about the local community, the family or the farm and ranch operation.

It is not just about growing corn, wheat or raising livestock. Producers must see themselves as part of the food industry which remains the most critical industry in the world.

As far as accepting the future, some people will continue to dig in their heels and think, "That may be what the future is like, but I want no part of it."

What alternative is there? We can't recreate the world in the image we want. Instead, we must identify the world as it's going to be. In agriculture we must focus on the consumers of our products and not make this an issue about what we're doing on the family farm. It's not about us, it's about the customers we serve.

If farmers and ranchers are just trying to survive, they will fail. If agricultural producers strive to serve, they will succeed.

The fourth block on which to build a future in agriculture includes giving up

independence. Americans revere their independence. The United States was born out of independence.

However, unless farmers and ranchers move to interdependence they will not survive.

In today's world no one is an island. We all must work together.

We can't be focused on a single issue. We must look at the bigger picture and understand that we're all in this together. We're in the food industry and it's bigger than any of us.

Those who remain independent continue to work on the principal of rewards and punishments. That's the same system animals toil under and if humans continue down that path, they are destined to fail.

A farmer and rancher cannot remain independent and farm in the future. Producers must be willing to give themselves to something bigger for a common purpose and impact the world with the help of others.

While these four building blocks may sound simple, implementing them is extremely difficult. Many will fail and start over. Some will not make it. For others it will remain a life-long commitment. The important thing is to begin.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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Healthcare costs must be reduced for true reform

Dear Editor,
Since the beginning of the health care reform debate, I have argued that, to achieve true reform, health care costs must be reduced. The failure of legislation now pending in Congress to reduce costs means that these reform proposals would fail.

There is overwhelming, credible evidence of the bills' failure to reduce health care costs. Why does this fact continue to be ignored by President Obama and Democratic leaders in Congress? Two recent reports are particularly important to consider.

First, the chief actuary for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the agency that administers Medicare, reports that the Senate health care plan would increase national health spending by \$222 billion over the next 10 years. In addition, CMS could not substantiate Democrats' claim that the Senate bill would reduce costs by cutting waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare.

Another study, this one completed by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, found that premiums in the individual insurance market would increase up to \$2,100 per year for families under



the Senate bill.

To ignore these and other studies is irresponsible. President Obama promised to cut Americans' health insurance premiums. Yet, multiple analyses show that health costs would continue to rise under the current plans and that any deficit reduction claims are achieved only through budget gimmicks.

President Obama, Speaker Pelosi and Majority Leader Reid must not ignore the evidence. Doing so will have drastic consequences for families and small businesses in Kansas, as well as the financial future of our country.

Very truly yours,
Jerry Moran

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