

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Feet are to the fire

From the Lawrence Journal-World

Although many Kansas legislators probably were hoping the Division of Post Audit would come up with a smaller figure when determining how much money the state needs to raise for public schools, lawmakers seemed to be taking Monday's report in stride.

In fact, Monday's response was refreshing compared to the angry rhetoric of last spring when the Kansas Supreme Court ruled that legislators weren't fulfilling their constitutional duty to adequately fund public schools. Legislators on Monday weren't railing against the court or threatening to ignore the figures in the audit. They seemed to understand the need to boost education funding and were focused on how that could be accomplished.

As noted, the figures in the report were higher than some had hoped for. By the two measures the legislators requested, the auditors concluded the state would have to spend between \$316 million and \$399 million more a year to provide a suitable education for Kansas children. Legislative officials have said the figures will be hard to ignore, but they almost certainly will be debated.

...House Majority Leader Derek Schmidt also said Monday that the Legislature should consider a multiyear approach. The main dissent on that strategy came from Alan Rupe, an attorney representing the plaintiffs in the school finance lawsuit. After waiting for so long for additional funding, Rupe said, his clients "are insulted" by talk of anything less than a one-year solution.

Their impatience is understandable, but Rupe and his clients may have to change their attitude. The Kansas Supreme Court clearly is holding the Legislature's feet to the fire on this issue. The justices aren't likely to accept a 10-year phase-in and they certainly aren't going to allow the Legislature to bail out in the middle of a multiyear plan. But an aggressive, relatively short term plan that balances school funding needs against the states budget challenges could be reasonable. ...

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

Where to write, call

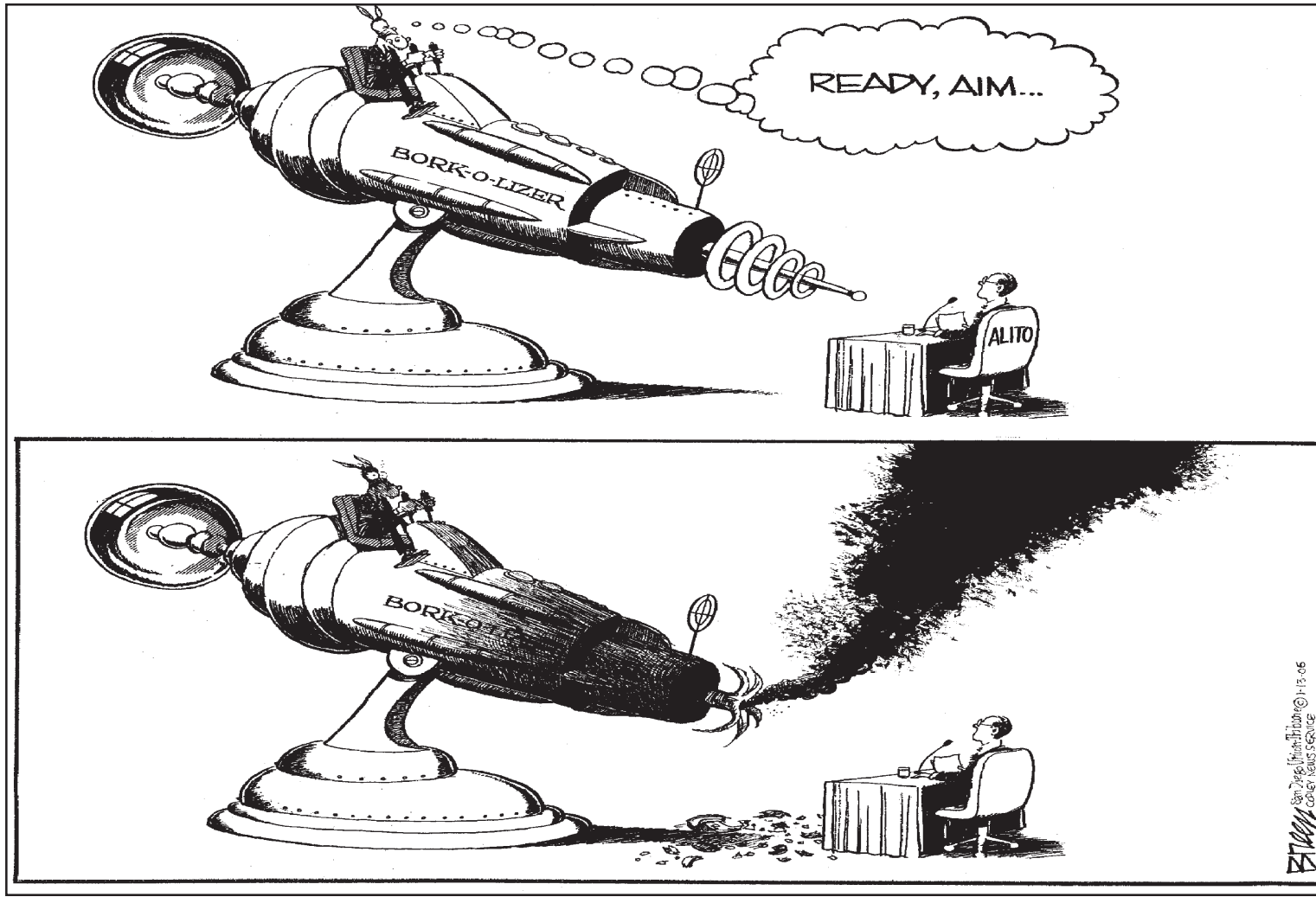
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Striking a balance

I still get sticker shock each time I drive up to the pump. I know by now, after nearly five years of higher gas prices and everything else in general, I should be used to it by now. But I'm not.

And I still can't bring myself to accept it because I can't. I keep hoping things will change, that the American public will wise up, decide we're not going to take it anymore.

Naive? Stupid? An incurable Pollyanna attitude?

I don't know.

The dependence on foreign oil has a stranglehold on this country.

As a member of the media, I can't help but wonder why the majority of outlets only talk about oil as it applies to fuel.

I know not all of it is refined for gasoline or heating fuel. It has far more uses from plastics to medication, but the bottom line is, it's needed and nothing in the near future is going to quench that need.

Domestically, oil and gas production is up, on private and public land, and over the past five years, the number of mineral leases on public lands has increased.

Now, I haven't exactly been in favor of that kind of thing.

Just mention "Arctic National Wildlife Refuge" or "Hovenweep" with "drilling" in the same sentence and watch me turn red.

I know some would ask why should I care about places so far away? They're not in my backyard, so what's the big deal?

My problem has been it's public land — land meant to be enjoyed for what it is, not as a potential commercial enterprise.

However, as I, like every other American has had to face higher prices at the pumps, I'm being



Tisha Cox

● Off The Beaten Path

forced to accept an idea I would not normally even entertain.

I'm beginning to accept the idea if we have it, we might as well use it, but only as long as the government enforces the regulations it has in place to protect the environment.

And domestic supplies be explored and developed as a means by buy time that can be used to develop alternative energy sources to eventually wean off dependency on foreign oil.

Forces in Washington seem to think the only benefit of federally-held lands is what's beneath them.

That's not true. Hundreds of millions are spent on other endeavors on public land — grazing, recreation, logging and more.

But even I can't deny the economic value of resource development on public land.

The government does share profits with the states. In 1999, the government made \$5 billion oil, gas, and geothermal energy produced off federal leases. The government received \$565 million in royalties.

They also do revenue sharing with the states, and in 1999, more than \$390 million was paid to the states.

Kansas' share in 2000 was \$1,232,893. While not at the top of the list, it's more respectable than

some. And it's a tiny drop in the bucket compared to the \$319,648,502 the same year. (http://www.mrm.mms.gov/Stats/pdfdocs/Dist_Off_On.PDF)

Plus there are only certain places where exploration, drilling and mining can take place.

"Lands that are nearly always restricted from leasing and drilling regardless of administration policies or local land use plans — national parks, wilderness, national monuments, forest service recreation areas, military reservation, national fish and wildlife refuges and national recreation areas." (<http://www.ewg.org>)

Call me an environmentalist if you want.

Having grown up in an agricultural area, having experience in the gas field industry and nearly going into the agricultural sector for a career, and living in places where land has completely different uses than a rural area has given me a unique perspective when it comes to land use and what is acceptable.

Land has value for different reasons but the bottom line is it all has value to someone.

That, I think, is the bottom line. We need to do what we can in this country to try to put the brakes on our demand for oil while using what we have to do just that.

What's beneath the ground is just as valuable as what is on it and above it. The Midwest and West have plenty of sun, wind and water — all resources that can provide more than enough energy, all from what we already have.

That is something that is more than worthy of respect.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcox@nwkansan.com.

Representing you in Topeka

From Rep. Jim Morrison

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Please communicate e-mail to my personal email address just supplied. If you use the Legislative published address ending in house.state.ks.us I am likely to NOT receive your communication. It is forwarded to me in a way that I do not know the sender's e-mail unless it is in the body of the email itself.

Also, about 90 percent of my e-mail communications is pure junk and I get most of that from people using the wrong address. Makes it hard to spot the real from the junk mail. I read and respond to my e-mail unless what you send is purely for informative purposes and part of a larger email group you sent the same message to. If you do not receive at least an acknowledgement response from me I likely have NOT received or at least read the e-mail you sent.

It is very important to me to hear from the district regarding issues we are debating. My vote is directly related to what I believe the constituents of my 121st district want me to do. I make many votes that I personally do not agree with but will make on behalf of you who elected me to represent your voice here in Topeka. I am a Representative and your voice in Topeka not someone who has an "agenda" or will vote what I want regardless of the district's wishes. Thus



Jim Morrison

● Capitol Review

your communications are vital to me. I have daily radio and considerable voice contact via phone with people in the four counties I represent but I can always use more.

This session will likely see considerable and heated debate on education, eminent domain, health care, tax policy and agriculture. Two opposing eminent domain bills have been requested. One clearly allows eminent domain for economic development purposes the other makes eminent domain only for roads, parks etc. Expansion of scope for health providers is a big and heated issue. Legislation increasing taxes and the other end the "taxpayer's bill of rights" holding Government spending increases to no more than cost of living are being prepared for discussion. School choice (vouchers), consolidation, elimination of low enrollment weighting and other discussions that place our schools in an unfavorable situation are cued up. Increasing severance taxes and taxes on inventory is being discussed along with increasing taxes on agriculture that historically has been protected.

I need your thoughts please.

I expect more partisan activity this election year regarding all issues. I'm already seeing it following the Governors State of the State address. I will not criticize her message but will work with her to obtain assistance on issues so very important to us in the 121st district. "Politicking", should not be a part of this session and to the best of my ability I will not be persuaded by those pressures.

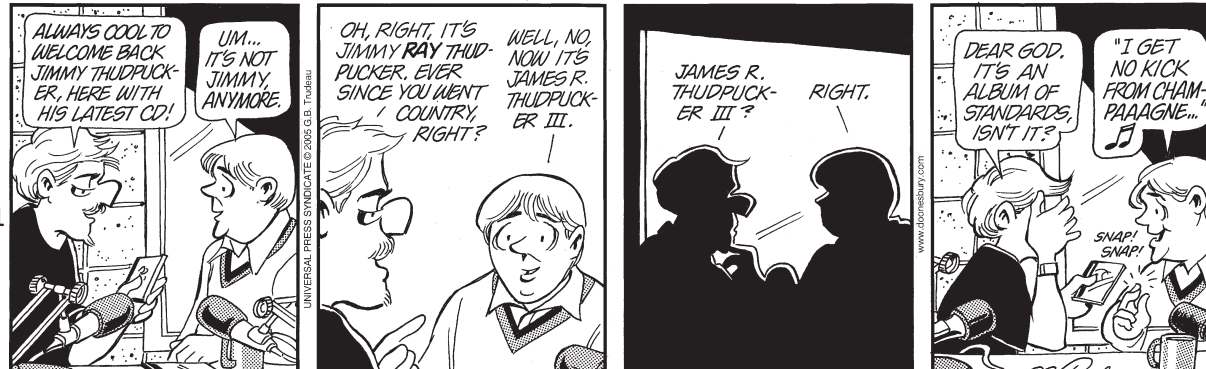
This year my Health Committee will be making history in the way we conduct our meetings completely in full view and interactivity with the public via the internet. This is the anticipated normal operation in all the committees when the remodeling of our State Capitol is able to allow the technology. I expect all committees to be fully electronic in three years. You will be able to testify from your home to my committee this year and interact with members of my committee. This really is a big deal being watched by the major news networks, C-Span and most other state legislatures. Kansas is far ahead in this open government and elected legislators accountability trial.

One last item. I have room for four pages March 7 and two for April 27. If interested please call or e-mail or write me.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to serve as your representative in Topeka. I will continue to work hard to help you to the best of my ability. Thanks also for your prayers, kind cards and great support.

Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau



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