

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

The cost of special education

From the Parsons Sun

There are few things more heartbreaking than to see a developmentally disabled child sitting on the outside looking in. Whether the handicap is mental, physical or both, none of them are disabled because they chose to be. None of them want to be made fun of, shunned or find themselves friendless.

And as with other children, they take delight in learning new things and conquering new skills.

Nearly 30 years ago Congress passed a mandate that schools provide special education programs to help disabled children learn to the best of their abilities. Since that time these children have been able to attain previously unrecognized levels of accomplishment.

The downside is that special education is expensive. In recognizing that, Congress agreed to fund 40 percent of the cost above that of a traditional education. That was nearly 30 years ago. To date, Congress still only picks up the tab for about 18 percent of the cost.

Sen. Pat Roberts is calling on Congress to live up to its promise and provide full funding for this "granddaddy of all unfunded mandates," freeing up local money for districts to spend on local priorities. Bless him.

Mainstreaming special needs students into society can help them lead remarkably productive lives. In fact, that's the whole reason behind the congressional mandate in the first place.

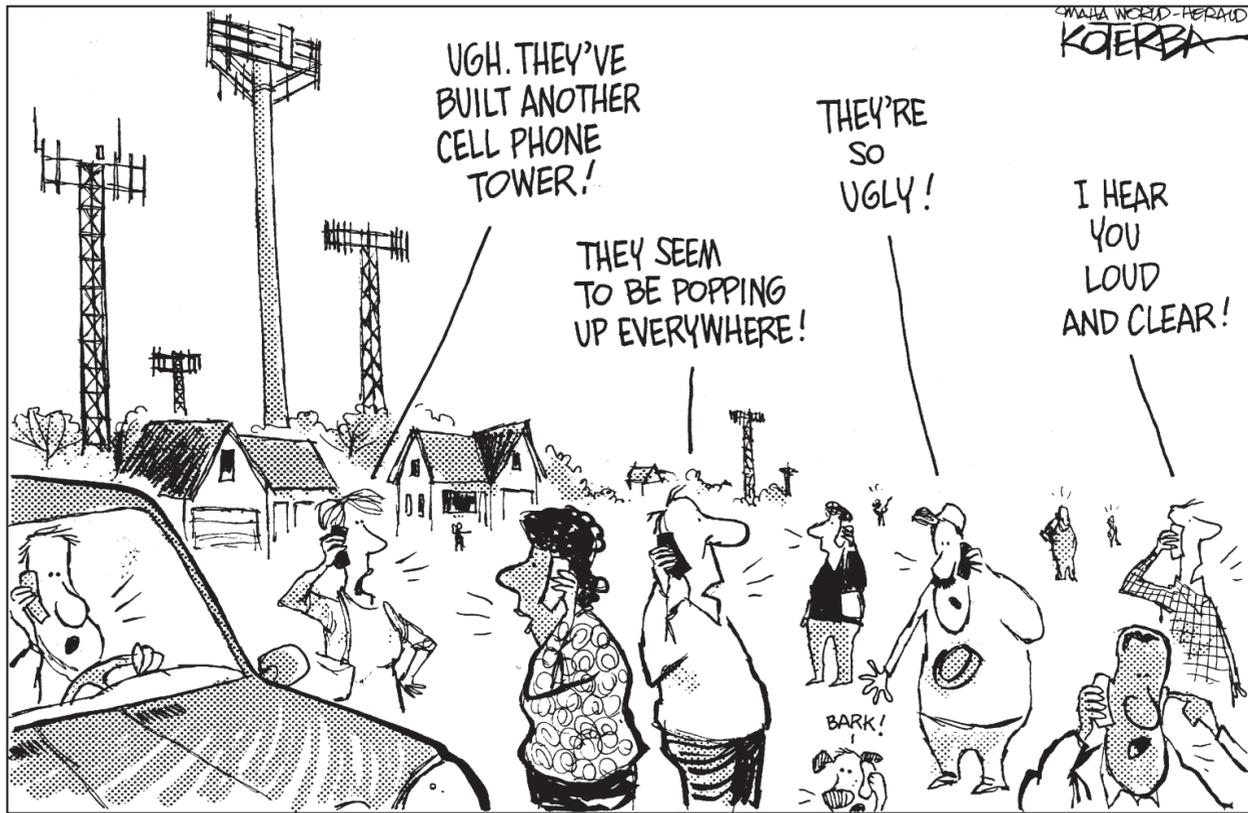
Additionally, mainstreamed students later perform far above the level they would have otherwise. In fact, most are able to become productive citizens on some level, living more independently and contributing to the economy in a healthy manner.

Roberts is backing a bi-partisan bill that will increase federal funding by more than \$2 billion each year for five years, at which time Congress should be able to meet the obligation of its own mandate. Congressional members with moral principles will join him with their support.

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 jvanostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.

Where to write, call

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us



A voice of reason



John Van Nostrand

Line in the Dust

Next week, agriculture advocate Trent Loos is scheduled to speak at the Colby Community College agriculture department open house.

I can't think of a better person to have at such an event.

Loos has established himself as a spokesperson for agriculture through his daily radio show and a column in the High Plains Journal.

I met Loos two years ago in Iowa. He spoke at what is called Ag Day in Greenfield. The event is a collaboration of the chamber of commerce and various ag-related organizations to promote the importance of agriculture in small-town America.

The day Loos spoke was intriguing. First of all, he didn't know how long he could stay because of weather. It began to snow heavily in the morning, he was scheduled to speak in the afternoon, but he wanted to get to his Nebraska home safely that night.

Loos, the good man he is, stayed long enough to speak. I'm glad he did because there was more to worry about than the snow.

A few years ago there was a push in Iowa by certain people and groups to strictly limit the operation and growth of livestock production in Iowa. People were complaining of the stench and environmental threats related to the increase of hog confinements. Iowa leads the nation in hog production, about one out of every four hogs in the nation is in Iowa.

A statewide group that does not like large-scale farming had representatives show up everywhere to say no to big hog farms. The group thought the corporations were squashing the small, family farms. There was not anyone from that group at

Ag Day.

At the same time, naive people wanted to build big fancy houses in the country but didn't like the farmer neighbor so they would sue to make him quit farming, even though, some times, the farmer was there first.

And one of the Kennedys, I can't remember which one, was touring the state implying corporate hog farms are similar to Osama bin Laden. Some Iowa counties, including the one I was living in, had approved a moratorium on new construction of large-number livestock facilities.

Like the snow shovels that were out in force that day, Loos' words were the best tool to get to the bottom of things. Loos said rural America is under attack. Loos explained how there has been a push to eliminate the American farm. Some ways were more complex than others.

Although an Illinois dairy farmer won many nuisance cases against his complaining neighbors, he had to file bankruptcy because of the mounting attorney fees.

Loos commented on how many Disney animal-character movies had the animal win in the end, implying animal rights are priority. A big

growth in the insurance industry is for pet care policies. Loos was wondering if we are putting animals higher on the scale than people.

Loos wants rural people, especially those in farming, to fight back.

During his tour of the country, Loos said he once saw a high school FFA chapter hold a hamburger fundraiser event beside an animal-rights protest. The FFA chapter made some bucks and friends that day, considering there were people right beside them opposed to what they represent.

Animal rights are picking their battles. Loos said there has never been a push by animal rights activists to end driving because of the tens of thousands of deaths of animals by vehicles.

Probably my favorite thing Loos said was specifically in regard to large-scale, corporate farming.

People opposed to large scale corporate farming want America to purchase its food from the typical family farm. I don't have a problem with that. But there is so much more produced by large-scale, corporations from the clothes we wear to the furniture we sit on. So why shouldn't those people want everything we use from small-scale, independent producers?

I haven't heard those protesters demand people buy tailor-made clothes and handmade furniture. So why put all the energy into food?

I applaud Colby Community College for having Trent Loos. He is the voice of rural America.

Van Nostrand is publisher of the Free Press.

Plenty on the table for legislators



Jim Morrison

Capitol Review

Age of Marital Consent

The age that someone may marry in Kansas is 12 for girls and 14 for boys. Granted, marriage for children that young requires judicial or parental consent, but technically a pre-teen girl and an adolescent boy could marry in Kansas. House Bill 2541 would bring Kansas in line with 40 other states by raising the minimum age of marriage to 16 and require parental or judicial consent for those 17 or 18 desiring to marry. The House Federal and State Affairs committee has referred the bill to the full House and recommended its passage.

M & E

The Machinery and Equipment tax exemption has moved out of committee and is being scheduled for debate. Concerns from local units of government were eased with the addition of the "Siegfried Slider" amendment, authored by Rep. Arlen Siegfried (R-Olathe), allowing for a sliding scale of reimbursement to local taxing authorities who may lose revenue under this exemption. Action on the bill is expected this week.

Sales Tax Holiday

If House Bill 2601 is passed, the "back to school sale" advertised by many retailers would mean even more in Kansas. Introduced by Representative Virgil Peck (R-Tyro), the bill would provide a sales tax holiday for back to school shoppers. The length and the date of the proposed holiday are still being debated but would likely be in late July or early August and include a Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Nuclear Plant Security

Security at Wolf Creek Nuclear Power Plant is tight. Armed guards, vehicle barriers and ra-

zor wire are only a few of the precautions being taken to protect us against a possible attack on the facility.

However, officials at the facility believe greater authority is necessary for their guards in the post Sept. 11 world. House Bill 2703 allows armed guards at Wolf Creek to carry larger caliber automatic weapons and grants them needed legal protection if they are ever forced to use them. Current law places Wolf Creek under the same classification as other property in Kansas and therefore does not allow lethal force to protect that property.

Lethal force is only allowed if their own life is in danger. This bill would narrowly define the instances in which lethal force could be used by the guards, but will also ensure that a greater loss of life is avoided by preventing an attack on the reactor.

Paying Veterans on Veterans Day

House Federal and State Affairs committee this week heard testimony from a young man who thinks that it's wrong his father, a veteran, has to work on Veterans Day. Tanner Burenheide, 12, thinks that Veterans not only deserve the day off, but would like to see them get paid for it as well.

On its face, House Bill 2728 is a great idea and another way for us to show our support for those who have given so much for our country. However, after hearing Tanner's testimony and that of other proponents, the committee began to bring up everyday scenarios to determine the impact such a bill would have. Members of the committee were encouraged by the action of such a young man and his desire to not only recognize veterans but to pursue this recognition all the way to the State legislature.

Kansas Supreme Court Nominations Consideration has been given to changing the way Kansas Supreme Court Justices and Kansas Appellate Court Justices are selected in Kansas.

Currently, and for the last 50 years, these justices have been chosen using the merit selection method which utilizes a nine-member panel composed of five lawyers and four non-lawyer members who submit a list of nominees to the Governor for a final selection.

Opponents argued that this method removed the power of selection of one-third of our government from the electorate. Supporters urged the members of the Judiciary Committee not to fix a system that isn't broken.

Additional Information

If you would like additional information or to offer your opinions or suggestions regarding these issues or any others that may be coming before the Kansas House, I want to hear from you. Please contact my office by phone at (785) 296-7676, by mail at 300 SW 10th St., State Capitol Building, Room 143-N, Topeka, KS 66612 or by e-mail at jmorriso@ink.org during the session.

COLBY FREE PRESS
155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

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