

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Schools are not the only need

It looks like there will be a lot more money for Kansas schools next year, though not as much as some people wanted.

It also looks like the state will be pretty much broke by the time \$??? million-a-year increase phases in three years from now — assuming the Legislature keeps its promises and sticks to the schedule.

That's not something the Kansas Legislature is known for in these things, sometimes with good reason.

No one has a crystal ball good enough to see what the state's income will be three years from now. The country could be in the midst of a wild boom inspired by Bush tax cuts — or another recession inspired by his wild spending — by that time.

It's really anyone's guess.

What will be no surprise is that many state programs shoved aside in the hysteria over the school finance "crisis" will be starving for cash. That includes highway, higher education and general services of all kinds.

In a state where spending in real dollars has more than quadrupled in 40 years, that may not be all bad, but there should be some balance.

Maybe the constitutional process will kick back in and the Legislature will have to do its job of allocating the resources as it believes voters want.

That has not happened the last couple of years. Under the gun of a Supreme Court order, the legislators have been trying to hit an artificial target for school spending while robbing every other fund.

If you do not believe this, send a child to college or drive some of our increasingly bumpy roads.

The facts are these:

Schools in this state do an admirable job with the money they have. There is no crisis in school funding, except the one created by a lawsuit filed by certain schools which felt they lost out in the legislative process.

Other programs are important to the people of this state, especially roads and universities.

The Legislature is supposed to decide how much we are taxed and where the money goes. The courts are not.

Yet increasingly in the last decade, across the country, aggrieved school districts have turned to the courts to get more money. And, as in Kansas, courts have been only too happy to seize power and move the money around.

Fifty years ago, it would not have happened.

Lack of backbone in our legislatures may be one reason our taxes are so high today. It certainly is one reason tuition is so high.

No one wants our schools to suffer, but they are not the only state program.

It's time to get back to reality. Sadly, that's not likely to happen.

Some school districts will be unhappy with the results of this year's battle, and guess what?

They'll sue. — *Steve Haynes*

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@nwkans.com or pdecker@nwkans.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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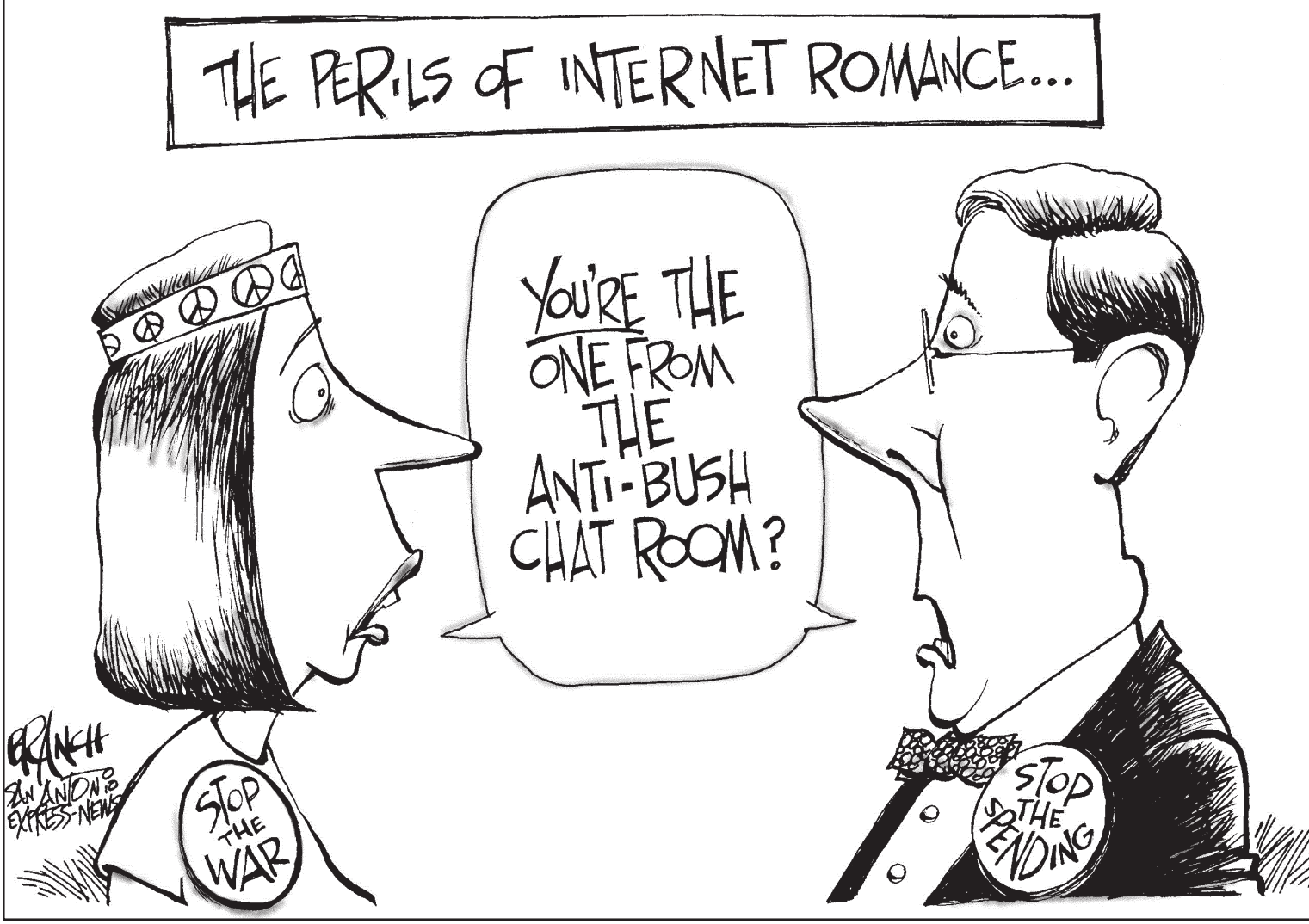
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155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

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company



Staying on guard while online

As a child, my parents had all sorts of rules for me to follow. One of those rules was "never talk to strangers and don't get into a car with someone you don't know."

As a parent, I gave my children the same kind of talks, but the Internet was still young and we didn't have a computer at home. In fact, the first computer we had was a Macintosh Plus and no Internet access.

By the time we subscribed with an Internet provider, our daughter was already on her own and the boys were young teenagers.

From personal experience, one of our sons had no interest in chat rooms while the other son was constantly instant messaging people he didn't know and we were always on our guard.

Which brings me to why I am writing about the Internet and children. It's hard to understand why one child will recoil from chat rooms and yet another in the same household will be drawn to them.

Suffice to say, we had our hands full watching out for both of them.

The information age has been a good thing, but with all new and improved technology, there are drawbacks.

So what's the answer?

Now that school is out and many of our children will have a lot of free time on their hands, I did some research and came up with a few tips to help parents.

For starters, any parent who thinks their child's safety is no longer at risk once they are home for the night can open their eyes.

Now more than ever, children are vulnerable to predators and can be lured into situations they



Patty Decker

- Deep Thoughts

are not prepared to handle.

Even though I thought my children were mature for their ages, I realized they could still be naive about the Internet and strangers. As parents, we did our best to monitor computer time and make "surprise" visits into the computer room — just to keep an eye on what was up.

Among the many suggestions by experts, one of the best is to simply talk with our children about swimming the net in shark-invested waters.

There are a lot of weirdos out there and our children need to be informed.

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children had some ideas on how to avoid children ending up as victims of an Internet predator.

Here are some of those ideas:

- Do not share personal information. This includes full name, address, e-mail address, phone number and family situation. Pedophiles and other Internet predators can use something like a fight with a parent to lure a child away from home.
- Do not trust anyone on the Internet. Many

children know it's easy to lie to gain access to sites that their age prohibits them from. It's just as easy for predators to lie about who they are as well. Someone saying they are also 16 and they, too, don't like their home life could be a 50-year-old trying to lure a young girl to his home.

- Know you do have protection on the Internet. Much like harassment is illegal in actual reality, so, too, is it illegal in virtual reality. Internet service providers (such as nwkans.com, which offers service via the *Colby Free Press* office — but there are other services in town as well) have rules pertaining to online behavior. Anyone who threatens a child or adult online should first be reported to the police and then to your Internet service provider. At the Free Press, call Evan Barnum 462-3963 or Tom Betz 899-2338 in Goodland.
- Persistent threats should be met with as much concern as persistent verbal threats would be.
- Do not look to online "friends" as sources of support. Since the actual identification of online friends can be impossible to verify, going to them with problems should never even be considered. Advice granted by such acquaintances could be littered with ulterior motives, such as setting up a rendezvous with a child so they can be kidnapped or sexually assaulted. Parents should let their children know that they can talk to them about anything and that there are counselors — be it through the school or church — and other professionals who can help.

Patty Decker is editor of the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

Thanks for the Soaring Singers

Parents of the Colby Grade School Soaring Singers

Congratulations to the Colby Grade School Soaring Singers, their director Jennifer Koel and accompanist Donna Inloes on a fantastic spring concert! The songs were fun and the children did

an excellent job singing as they harmonized their various parts of the songs together. As the audience we certainly could see and feel their excitement and love of music.

A big thanks to Jennifer Koel for inspiring our

young singers a spending a lot of early mornings with them throughout the year!

The Colby Grade School Music Department is fortunate to have such a dedicated teacher.

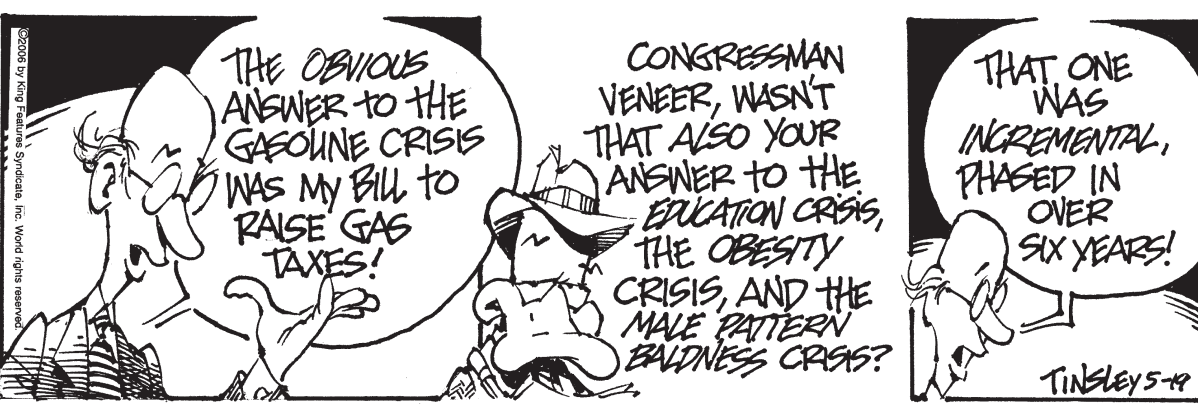
Looking forward to next year's concert!

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

