

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Another burden

From The Manhattan Mercury
Kansans, particularly Kansans paying to put children through Kansas State University or other Board of Regents institutions, have reason to gasp.

Recently, Kansas State asked the Regents for permission to raise tuition by 12.8 percent. The University of Kansas has an even larger increase in mind — 13.7 percent — and other Regents universities also want to raise tuition.

But what ought to give Kansans pause isn't just the 12.8 percent KSU proposes. Rather, it's that the proposal comes on top of a 10.9-percent hike last year, a 17.1-percent increase in 2004, a 20.3-percent increase in 2003 and a 25.1-percent jump in 2002. Even before the recent request, tuition at KSU had all but doubled, from \$2,333 to \$4,560, since 2002.

No less important than the increases are the causes. Inflation, facility maintenance and upgrades, faculty and staff and technology are among factors. Another factor in the tuition increases is stagnant state aid. In fact, state aid, which provided almost half (48 percent) of university funding in 1991, now constitutes barely one-third (29 percent).

Some legislative leaders seem inclined to portray the courts, which ordered vast increases in funding for public schools, as the culprit. It isn't so. The courts stepped in because the Legislature refused to perform its constitutional duty to adequately fund public schools.

The Legislature is doing its duty now only because it is being forced to. Worse, it is doing so in part by short-changing higher education, along with other state programs and services. To provide responsible funding levels would require additional revenue, either from a mix of tax increases, which too few legislators will consider, or from other sources.

As a result, legislators are adding to the burdens of many new graduates and their families. Lawmakers also are ignoring the vast contributions that Kansas State and other institutions of higher education make to their communities and to the entire state.

Perhaps the situation isn't yet as dire as it could be. Perhaps not enough stellar faculty members have yet left for greener pastures; perhaps not enough jobs have yet been lost for lack of state vision, or perhaps not enough prospective but financially struggling students have yet surrendered the opportunities higher education presents.

Hopefully, that day will not come. Hopefully, lawmakers will realize that it's unrealistic and ill serves the state and its citizens to expect universities to rely ever more heavily on tuition increases.

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

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Remember our nation

Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts



The Memorial Day weekend has arrived. For many of us it means a three-day weekend. For children across the country, it's the opening of municipal pools. Colby's pool opening has been postponed a few days to fix some safety hazards.

The weekend also means the beginning of summer and family vacations (even though the official start of summer isn't until June 21).

There are also a few other things that should pop into our minds, along with vacations, the three-day weekend, baseball, hot dogs, etc., when we think of Memorial Day.

I believe most of us know what Memorial Day stands for and sometimes it's a good thing to review how we, as Americans, got where we are today.

According to some information from NATO's official Web site, the following story helped remind me about gratitude.

The article read:

Colonel Jeff Douglass, U.S. Marine Corp, was waiting for a flight from Sarajevo to Vienna. He found himself in a conversation with a gentleman named Peter who was departing Sarajevo after gathering research for a book he was writing.

Peter pointed to the United States passport, and said: "Do you know what that is worth?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Douglass replied.

"Of course," Peter said, "forgive me, I forgot. You Americans do not realize the blessings you have. So many in this world envy you...and you do not know what you have. You see, freedom is what these people cherish. It is such a dream for many. Here, as is the case in many countries, families are willing to send their young away to freedom, in spite of the pain. You Americans are a lighthouse beacon for freedom, and I wonder if you realize this."

Had it been me waiting for the flight, I probably would have responded in a similar manner.

My gratitude also extends to the people who have died for this country. Life is so precious.

When I stop and think about the soldiers and others who dare to put themselves into harm's way — I am grateful.

Where we would be if none of us were to step forward and carry on the responsibility of protecting freedom?

We only have one life — and I must admit I am afraid to die. But then I think about all those people who probably felt the same fears and are gone. Surely, I can spend a few moments to remember them.

In addition to my own personal thoughts, one idea from a government official was on Monday, Memorial Day, we stop for one minute to reflect on the sacrifices made in the name of freedom. Another idea was for each of us to consider what we can do for our town and for other families around the world. Each of us has been touched by someone who served in a war or maybe it was a relative who perished in one of the many conflicts this country has been involved in. It may not have been in this generation or the one before, it might have been years and years ago affecting our great-great grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins.

The United States has seen so many wars and lost so many people — someone who may have had a spouse and children — or maybe a young, single man whose mother and father will never fully recover from their loss.

So many men and women died in the American Revolution, War of 1812, Mexican-American War, Civil War, Spanish-American War,

World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, USS Liberty Incident, Grenada, Gander Air Disaster, USS Stark Incident, Panama, Desert Storm, Somalia, and Operation Iraqi Freedom and Afghanistan.

But we shouldn't stop there. Terrorism also has taken its toll on American lives and those involved in Sept. 11th, USS Cole Incident, U.S. Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, Khobar Tower, Oklahoma City bombing, Pan Am Flight 103, Beirut Bombings and El Salvador should not be forgotten either.

This Memorial Day, I want to think about four words — sacrifice, freedom, remembrance and hope.

And one last thought — a poem written by John T. Bird.

It's short, but says a lot. The poem is "Last Monday in May."

*We pause to remember those who died
With so much courage, so much pride*

They'll never come back, yet memories endure

*To remind us of freedom: fragile, pure
We're worthy of their sacrifice if we pause each day*

Not just on the last Monday in May

Memorial Day is about remembering the men and women who have served this nation so unselfishly and gave the most precious gift of all — their lives. Memorial Day is the time for all of us as Americans to recall and recommit ourselves to be responsible for service to our community — which could mean Colby and Thomas County, our state, the nation or the world.

God Bless America.

Decker is editor of the *Free Press*. Her column appears on Fridays.

Some hits and misses

It goes without saying that the most important issue before the 2006 Kansas Legislature was financing K-12 Education.

There were several education plans offered and voted on, but none were a real "win-win" for rural schools. The approved plan (SB 549) increases base state aid per pupil totaling over 100 million over the next three years. It also increases the at-risk weighting over 150 million over the same time period. It offers some additional funding for schools with a large percentage of students qualifying for free meals under the federal lunch program, and at-risk programs for those students scoring below proficient in math or reading. It also provides over 80 million of new money to fund special education.

I did not vote for any plan that relied on LOB funding. It is a given fact that urban schools benefit much more from LOB increases as compared to our rural schools. With this in mind, you can imagine the intensity of the debate over school funding. Very wealthy school districts need only 5 to 7 mills to fund the new 31 percent maximum while smaller rural districts would need 35 to 40 mills to reach that same maximum. I would have liked to see more money put into base state aid per pupil, but the trade-off was just too much. Our rural schools will benefit from the school finance package totaling \$466 million



Ralph Ostmeyer

● Senator 40th Dist.

over the next three years.

In a perfect world, there would be enough money to go around, but unfortunately, other programs will have to be cut in order to balance our budget around school finance. I have always believed that Kansas should have balanced books, just as all farmers and businesses have to do each year. If we continue the trend of allowing the courts to dictate how our money is spent, then what need is there to have elected officials? The governor signed the school finance bill, and I am confident the courts will find it equitable.

We successfully defeated gambling again this year, but it will continue to be a huge topic going into the future. Based on current spending, the State's ending balances will fall below the 7.5 percent required by statute over the next few years. This is all we need to know to realize that gambling pressures will continue.

Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley

