

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

Hard to justify tuition increase

From the Lawrence Journal-World

Although a huge backlog of maintenance projects at state universities has been viewed as a top priority for this year's Kansas Legislature, there seems to be little progress on reaching consensus about where to find the money to address the problem.

Last Tuesday, the Senate Ways and Means Committee rejected the governor's proposal to use a surcharge on Kansas Turnpike tolls to raise maintenance dollars. Although the plan earned points for creativity, it seemed wrong to many legislators to divert turnpike tolls — which traditionally are dedicated to funding highway-related projects — to the maintenance project.

Another Senate committee previously rejected the idea of raising university tuition to help cover the maintenance bill, but proposals to use tuition increases to fund at least part of the maintenance costs continue to surface. The same is true of proposals to impose either a sales tax or property tax on university communities, like Lawrence, to help cover part of the bill.

One senator even has proposed selling Kansas University Hospital to raise money for university maintenance and help shore up the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System. That proposal also may get points for creativity, but it raises the question: What state asset will we sell next time we need to address a special state need?

It's hard to justify additional tuition increases for university students who are paying as much as double the tuition charged five years ago. ...

State universities serve a statewide mission and are a statewide responsibility. For whatever reason — through poor management by university leaders, poor oversight by state leaders or some other cause — the state's investment in university buildings now is threatened. It may be painful, but legislators must focus on a statewide solution to deal with this problem.

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

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COLBY FREE PRESS

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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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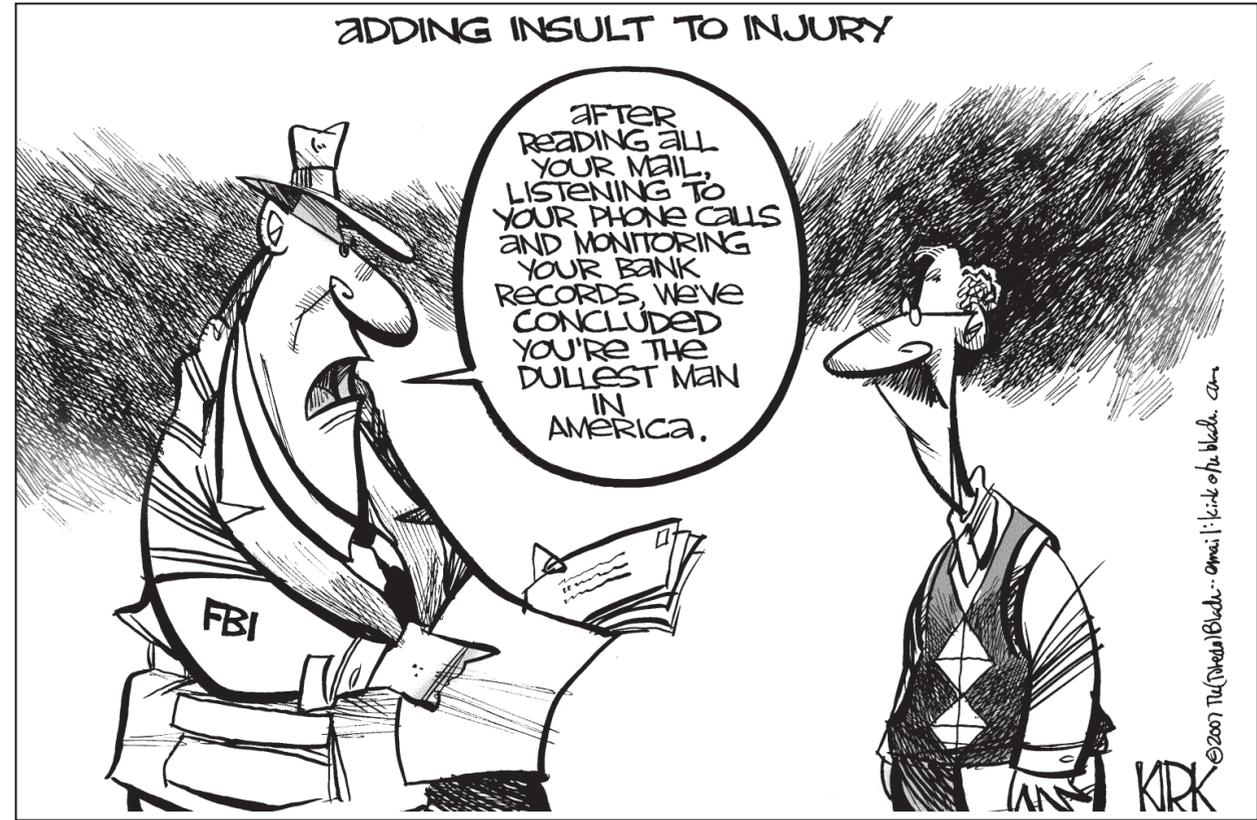
Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight

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
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National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months
\$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of
Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove
counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months
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The left coast strikes back

Even though it was not a direct hit, rural America was damaged last week.

The past few presidential election seasons, certain groups of people have said Iowa's caucus and New Hampshire's primary, which have traditionally started the season, have misled voters across the country.

Mainly picking on Iowa, critics have said the Hawkeye State is not representative of American needs and issues, so why should Iowa people make the first major step in who the next president could be?

Last week, California Legislature will lead the media to its state 10 months from now because it rescheduled its primary to Feb. 5, 2008, about a month earlier than the March 2 date from 2004. Iowa's caucus is scheduled for Jan. 14, 2008.

Sure, Iowa and New Hampshire will still get attention since they are still first on the block, but expect the talking heads and column writers to make countless number of references to the candidates posturing for the California primary (I'll come back to that).

According to the Western Democrat, a Web site dedicated to the news and views of Democrats in western states, the concerns in the Midwest and New England does not matter.

"Legislative leaders say an earlier primary will give California some influence in selecting the next president and force candidates to address



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

issues such as immigration that don't resonate in Iowa and New Hampshire," the Web site states.

It's not the first time those kind of comments have been made.

In 2004, Western Governors Association meeting, which includes Kansas, members approved a resolution to create a committee to develop a presidential primary for early 2008.

"Why shouldn't the fastest-growing, dynamic, ethnically diverse states of the West have a much greater voice in the election of a president than the lily-white states of Iowa and New Hampshire?" said Larry Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. Each state has its issues and just because a rural state issue is not the same as an urban state issue, like California, does not mean the rural states are not important.

Take No Child Left Behind, for example. The

federal program requires every public school district to reach certain levels of student success.

In western Kansas, where class size is vastly different than in Southern California, it may take just one or two students to fail in western Kansas and that school district gets red flagged.

Iowa and Kansas are hopefully joining forces of their livestock industries and representatives.

What we eat everyday is about the only thing left that is made in the United States. Some environmental groups don't want American raised livestock anymore.

At the same time, other countries around the world have had far more BSE cases than America.

It would be nice if somebody admitted that rescheduling California's primary to compete with Iowa and New Hampshire had nothing to do with issues.

California had 55 electoral votes in 2004. Add what Texas had, 34, and that was one-third of what was needed to win the presidency in 2004.

It's obvious California wants to decide who the next president will be and rural America's votes and interests don't matter.

— *John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.*

Your turn

College is at a crossroad

Glenn "Skip" Sharp
Colby Community College Vice President of Student Affairs and Marketing

Ten years ago my wife and I moved to Colby after living in Goodland for 33 years. I always had much respect for the college because I had worked with Joe Mildrexler, a friend and colleague for many years. I wanted to be a part of the pride and success of this college. I have never regretted the move we made in 1997.

I have observed the sacrifices on the part of staff, faculty and administration to cut budgets and freeze salaries so that we could keep the mill levy as low as possible and maintain a positive cash reserve. We are all working to keep this college the "pride of the plains."

The college needs your help now. No one likes to do anything that will increase taxes of any kind, but the college is at a crossroad. Everyday my staff and I are working to improve enrollment and retention. The facts show that the population of northwest Kansas is declining and so are the number of students in grades K-12. If the college is to continue to attract the necessary

enrollment to keep its doors open, it must reach out beyond 100 miles.

Asking a student from Larned, McPherson or Beloit to come to Colby, we must have facilities that attract those prospects. The students need a new dormitory. The students need facilities that will generate new classes and additional credit hours. The college needs to be able to convince prospects to drive past community colleges at Great Bend, Concordia, Dodge City and Garden City to come to Colby. The college needs you to help make this happen.

I do not believe in scare tactics, but I lived in Sherman County when the Rock Island Railroad went bankrupt and over a hundred families no longer had work. I do not want to think about what will happen to Thomas County if 160 employees no longer have a college at which to work. I have seen what it does to a community. I do not believe that the citizens of this county want this to happen.

At the college we are concerned about the impact this project will have on all citizens. Many families work several jobs to make ends

meet. We have farm families that are struggling each year to keep things going. I just ask that you think about the impact the college will have on your future before you vote on the bond issue. If you have questions, call the college.

If you own a home with a market value of \$60,000, it is estimated to cost you 22¢ per day or \$82 per year in increased taxes. My home has a value of \$120,000 so I will pay twice as much or \$165 per year. That is \$3,300 over 20 years. If I do not make this investment and the college fails to succeed, I am certain I will have a home worth less than \$90,000. That is a property value loss of \$30,000.

By the time these facilities are completed, I will be retired and on a fixed income like many of you. I still believe this is a necessary step. We are all being asked to make such an investment in the future of Thomas County. I hope you will be able to see this is a positive and not a negative and vote yes for the college bond issue. Vote yes for yourself and your future in one of the greatest places to live and raise a family — Thomas County.

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

