

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

With every hike comes a risk

From The Wichita Eagle

Just in time for the tuition hikes to be approved for fall, the Kansas Board of Regents released a study indicating that a state university education usually costs less in Kansas than it does in five neighboring states.

That’s good to know, though of limited comfort to price-sensitive wannabe students.

With the notable exception of research institutions in Colorado and Oklahoma, which charge less than comparable University of Kansas, Kansas State University and Wichita State University, resident undergraduates in states next door could end up paying from 3 percent to 68 percent more for comparable college degrees, the study said.

Such comparisons remain valid and reassuring, as they were when Kansas’ universities got aggressive about tuition increases early in the decade.

But they won’t ease the sting many families will feel this fall from the latest proposed increases, which range from 4.9 percent at Fort Hays State University to 6.5 percent at WSU to 9.7 percent at Emporia State University.

Regents chairman Nelson Galle clearly is right that “rates at our state’s universities continue to provide Kansans with an exceptional educational value.”

However, the regents and the institutions they govern cannot afford to be cavalier about tuition, one of the biggest investments a family can make.

Seeing that tuition has gone up again, many potential students may decide the barrier to enrollment is impenetrable and not bother to explore the many aid options. ...

Of course, perhaps the most important factor in the tuition issue is the Legislature, which arguably has forced higher tuition on higher education by scaling back state funding of university budgets — from 49 percent in 1985 to 29 percent in 2005.

That has put more pressure on institutions to cover costs through tuition, research money and grants. ...

Even if there are good reasons for tuition increases — and there are — every hike carries the risk of pricing taxpayers out of their own universities.

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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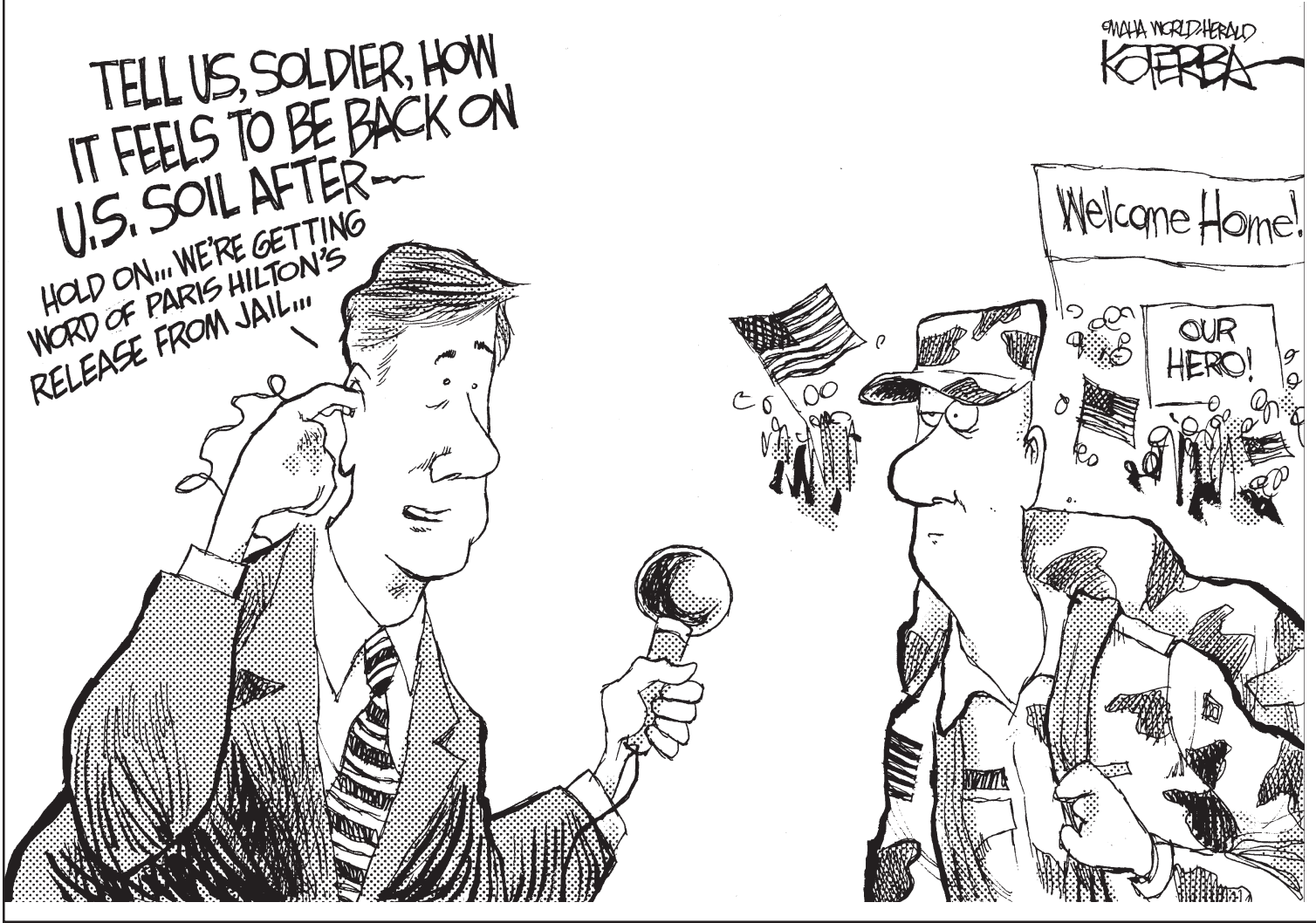
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Bridging barriers



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

I received a letter from Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn written by a Virginia State Trooper in the hopes of raising awareness and understanding about those who “protect and serve.”

As I read the letter, it reminded me of a law enforcement dialogue night a few years ago, sponsored by the Community Awareness Team, which no longer exists.

However, for those unfamiliar with the team’s work at that time, its primary purpose was in bringing youth and adults together to provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals and families in this community.

I remember feeling honored to have been invited to the dialogue night since it was the first of its kind in Thomas County. We had law enforcement officials from the county and city and about 18 high school students.

The three-hour meeting was mixed with fun, thoughtful interactions and enjoying one another’s company, along with the more serious intent of increasing mutual understanding, opening the lines of communication and walking in someone else’s shoes — even if only for an evening.

Too often, our youth and our police only talk to one another when there is some kind of trouble. Consequently, the intent was to start talking, listening and learning before any trouble occurs.

The most enlightening part, in my opinion, was when all of us shared our thoughts from the evening’s experience.

If memory serves me, one young person said while he understood that many officers believe by letting things slide, they are doing young people a favor, but in actuality it could encourage destructive decisions. Another young person said she realizes the officers seem to give in to extreme pressures from different parts of the community, that is, parents, taxpayers and/or county attorneys.

One attendee thanked officers for enforcing the laws. In doing so, they really are helping our youth make good decisions despite what the pressures are.

Officers attending also said these types of gatherings were a good thing. By doing this, one policeman said they can gain a broader perspective of each other’s views — a strong tool in bridging the age barrier.

Personally, I was sad the community couldn’t continue these types of dialogues to help everyone understand one another’s problems and issues.

Which brings me back to the letter I received. It might be good to note, that the author, Mitchell Brown, died in the line of duty two months after the article was written. I want to thank our sheriff for passing this along.

Here it is:
Mr. Citizen, it seems you’ve figured me out. I fit neatly into the category where you’ve placed me.

I’m stereotyped, standardized, characterized, classified, grouped, and always typical. Unfortunately, the reverse is true.

I can never figure you out.
From birth, you teach your children that I’m the bogeyman and then you’re shocked when they identify/associate with my traditional enemy — the criminal.

You accuse me of coddling criminals — until I catch your children doing wrong.

You may take an hour for lunch and several coffee breaks each day, but point me out as a loafer for having one cup.

You pride yourself on your manners, but think nothing of disrupting my meals with your troubles.

You raise Cain with the guy who cuts you off in traffic, but let me catch you doing the same thing and I’m picking on you.

You know all the traffic laws — but you’ve never gotten a single ticket you deserve.

You shout, “foul” if you observe me driving fast to a call, but raise the roof if I take more than 10 seconds to respond to your complaint.

You call it part of my job if someone strikes me, but call it police brutality if I strike back.

You wouldn’t think of telling your dentist how to pull a tooth or your doctor how to take out an appendix, yet you are always willing to give me pointers on the law.

You talk to me in a manner that would get you a bloody nose from anyone else, but expect me to take it without batting an eye.

You yell that something’s got to be done to fight crime, but you can’t be bothered to get involved.

You have no use for me at all, but of course it’s OK if I change a flat for your wife, deliver your child in the back of the patrol car, or perhaps save your son’s life with mouth to mouth breathing, or work many hours overtime looking for your lost daughter.

So, Mr. Citizen, you can stand there on your soapbox and rant and rave about the way I do my work, calling me every name in the book, but never stop to think that your property, family, or maybe even your life depends on me or one of my buddies.

Yes, Mr. Citizen, it’s me the cop!

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

Tax relief

state by 2012, including many farm and ranch limited liability companies and partnerships.

With many farms and ranches operating on narrow margins when compared to investment, absorbing this franchise tax has been a real burden to the bottom line of these family businesses — much more so than to large, publicly-traded companies.

In agriculture today, the rule rather than the exception remains increased production. With increased production comes increased operating costs including fuel, fertilizer, seed, herbicides, insecticides, etc. Increased production also means additional machinery and land. These all add up to an increased net worth and more franchise tax.

To be in the business of farming, there must be land. This land also contributes to net worth and as a result, this franchise tax was levied on property needed for making food, fuel and fiber.

For business purposes, many agricultural operations are organized under this structure of limited liability and limited partnerships. They have to be to grow and prosper. Many Kansas farming operations have multiple crops, sometimes several farms and often support two or even three generations of a family. Each was subject to this franchise tax — each subjected to this additional tax burden.

This tax was unfair to capital-intensive businesses. The Kansas franchise tax amounted to

essentially another form of property tax on Kansas landowners, farmers and ranchers.

No one would argue it’s in our state’s best interest to have a healthy, vibrant economy — one that encourages creation of jobs, income and wealth. With the elimination of the franchise tax, this state no longer has a roadblock that discourages growth and penalizes accumulation of assets.

This franchise tax was nothing more than an annual bill for the privilege of doing business in Kansas, unrelated to realized income, profitability or productivity. It will no longer be an economic disincentive for businesses who may be contemplating expansion or locating in this state.

With this phase out, there will be a beneficial fiscal impact. With this more favorable tax policy, Kansas has the potential to attract new businesses. Elimination of this deterrent to growing assets will stimulate new economic growth and increased opportunities in a state desperately needing them.

Simply put, Kansas has done away with a bad tax that hampered small business, farming and landowners in Kansas.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce

Tinsley

