

# Opinion



## Another Viewpoint

### Students need help to succeed

By now, area students have settled into their classes. They have learned their teachers' names, found a place to sit in the lunchroom and figured out how to get from one end of the building to the other in five minutes. The challenges students will face at school go beyond first-day jitters, though.

Education has become a complex political issue. In Kansas, we know this firsthand. Our elected leaders have tackled school funding and whether to teach evolution. The inflammatory nature of these debates has put our state in the national spotlight, at times making us the butt of jokes.

These issues are far from resolved. Science requirements change with every new election of State School Board members. School officials are considering how best to use their budgets, and lawmakers must figure out where the money will come from.

Those are just two issues in a long list of education-related topics that politicians, school administrators and voters love to squabble over. To refresh your memory here are a few others: No Child Left Behind, vouchers, school uniforms, metal detectors, school-to-career education, teachers' pay, sex education. ...

While all this talk is bouncing back and forth, our students are in their classrooms working on long division, trying to remember the capital of Rwanda for a pop quiz, or navigating the complex social maze of high school. Perhaps in our zeal for the issues, we forget about those kids.

What we really want is for our children to be happy. We want them to be able to pursue any path they want to take. Education is the key to the American dream. ...

As family members and concerned community members, there are ways that we can help students succeed in education, without storming the White House. ...

We are sure that people will continue to disagree about the "right" way to educate our children. But no matter what the end results of those debates, children need caring adults willing to guide them and teach in order to turn into successful adults themselves.

— *The Salina Journal*

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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**, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715, Fax (202) 225-5124

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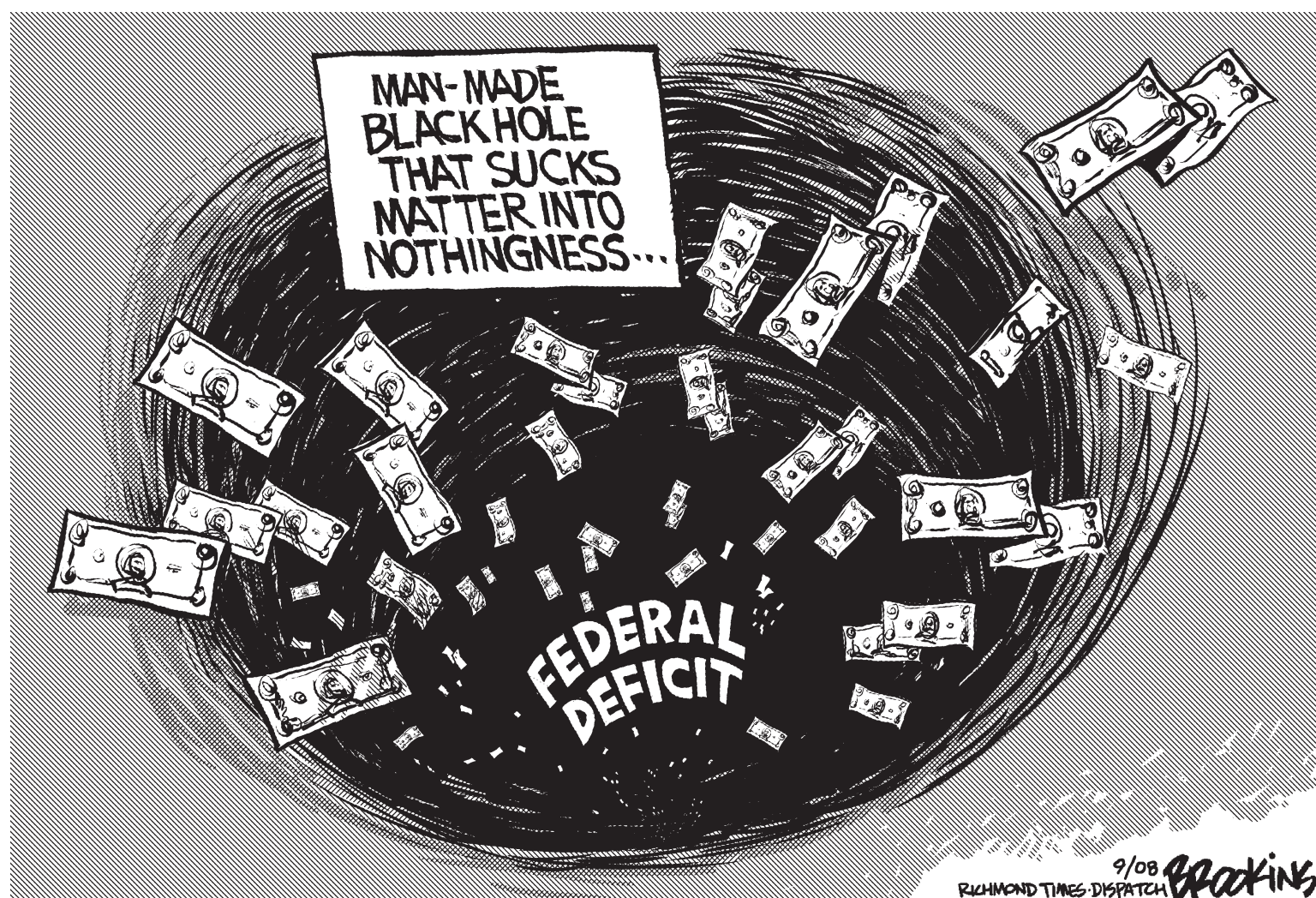
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### Make it a safe harvest

The roar and hustle of fall harvest is just around the corner. Time is precious. Hours are long. Breaks often don't happen.

Because of this busy period in farming, accidents are more likely to happen. Agriculture continues to rank as one of the most dangerous occupations in this country and across the globe.

To place the spotlight on farming, ranching and the related health and safety issues impacting this industry, the National Safety Council has designated Sept. 21-27 as National Farm Safety & Health Week.

This event is designed to commemorate the hard work, diligence and sacrifices of this nation's farmers.

This year's event marks the 65th consecutive year, beginning with Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1944.

This year's theme is Farm Safety – Protect YOUr Investment. This theme emphasizes "You," including using personal protective equipment to prevent accidents.

"This theme highlights the value of safety and wellness of the agricultural producer and the importance of protecting hearing, lung function, vision, skin and the musculoskeletal system," says Holly Higgins, Kansas Farm Bureau safety director.

"Every year farmers and ranchers are injured and killed because of preventable accidents."

Last year there were 715 deaths and

80,000 disabling injuries attributed to agriculture.

Twelve of these deaths occurred in Kansas and the majority of them involved farmers above the age of 50.

Farmers and their families can ill afford the pain and inconvenience of workplace injuries and death.

Farmers typically lose four days for every injury they suffer, Higgins says. Still, the daily duties of feeding and caring for livestock and planting, tending and harvesting crops continue.

"We like to label injuries and death in our industry as accidents," Higgins says. "The truth is these accidents generally happen for a reason."

An accident occurs when a person walks out of the house while a plane is flying over and a piece of the plane falls off and hits them on the head, Higgins says. That's an accident because there is absolutely nothing the person could have done to prevent this from happening.

On the other hand, if a person has the opportunity to prevent something from happening and you don't take the time to do it or think the task through, then such an accident could have been prevented, Higgins says.

"Our farmers and ranchers should think about how much time their lives are worth," the KFB safety director says.

"During harvest there is always a tremendous amount of work to be done in a short time. But it's always smart to take a moment to rest and relax, eat, drink water and keep a clear head."

The Farm Bureau safety director encourages farmers and ranchers to, "do for yourself what you'd do for others."

"You only have one life," Higgins says. "Cherish this."

And if a farmer or rancher takes care of himself or herself during this busy harvest season, they'll be healthy and ready to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas and the holidays after harvest.

Higgins has this suggestion for the upcoming holidays.

"Why not have a great big bag sitting by the tree with all the items a producer needs to keep him/herself healthy and safe," she says.

"Pack this bag with steel-toed safety boots, gloves impervious to chemicals, hearing protection, eye goggles and sunscreen. That would send the appropriate message to the farmer or rancher from their family to take care of yourself because we love you."

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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.

### Maybe we live too long already

Love my health care, I'll survive; Now that I'm, Past sixty-five.

Americans don't live quite as long as folks in other developed countries. But not to worry.

Anyone reading this is probably OK.

It's just that the poor, principally blacks and Latinos, drag down our average life span. These are the citizens most often with faulty health insurance, or in a remarkable number of cases, no insurance at all.

But that's OK too. The United States is a free-enterprise land. Rewards go to the swift. The slow get pushed to the side, or over the side.

That's just how our frontier-based health care works. Since we're a democracy, if we didn't like it we'd do something about it.

Or more accurately, since we're a democracy the insurance companies are able to keep us from doing anything about it.

They spend billions on advertising and lobbying to protect our devilishly expensive and inefficient system.

It costs us roughly 50 percent more than other Western nations, and still leaves millions of individuals poorly covered or uncovered altogether.

But you already knew all that. You knew that in addition to health insurers spending massively to thwart the imposition of universal coverage, they also spend massively to compete with one another.

So do hospitals, so do medical practices,

so do clinics, so do drug companies. They all charge an arm and a leg to cover their "costs," of which executive salaries and advertising are the most annoying.

I'm sitting here looking at full-page ads by two nearby hospitals, a very common phenomenon. Such ads may help out newspaper moguls, but they up the ante for the rest of us.

That's one beauty of Medicare — there's no advertising. You don't have to grapple with "choice." Except for the impenetrable Part D for drugs and the so-called "Medi-gap" supplemental plans, there's no need to cover the kitchen table with brochures trying to figure out which insurance plan is least worst for you. You're covered. Period. Automatically.

That's why the insurance companies hate it. There's no place for them. It's the same way that Wall Street hates Social Security.

Thus for the health care barons a lot is at stake in this coming election. No, the Democrats are not touting any big changes. They don't dare. Besides not agreeing among themselves, they're scared to death of a re-appearance of Harry and Louise, this time saying, "Vote Republican!"

Nonetheless, the rapacious insurers remain fearful of a Democratic sweep that would give reformers a fast horse to ride. So they have to give some money to Dems too, or they won't even get in the door if the election goes sour. Without a Republican president, health care could shift dangerously to the front burner.

The ultimate goal of any such dreaded reform is easy enough to see. "Medicare for Everyone!"

That's a fine slogan though it does short-change the financing mechanism. Luckily, that's an easy fix. Today, since most Medicare recipients are no longer working, the system lets employers off the hook.

The solution then for expanded Medicare is to mimic Social Security where both worker and boss pay into the pot. That's the American way.

With everybody in the pool, with advertising and profits eliminated, with salaries shrunk, and with bargaining power enhanced, rates would be very reasonable. You can see why the insurance industry is scared.

Can you imagine a society where dental, vision, psychological, and pharmaceutical care are all paid for?

And maybe nursing homes? (Say yes if you've been to France.)

But few of us can envision such a thing. It's just too far out of the American experience. Only government workers get stuff like that.

It would make our businesses more competitive internationally and our society more equal. You can bet Wall Street will spend like crazy to stop anything like that.

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### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

