



Other Viewpoints

More than money needed for teachers

University of Kansas Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little recently joined a number of her colleagues in an important discussion with President Obama.

In the meeting Wednesday at the White House, Gray-Little joined university officials in pledging to do more to boost excellence in science, technology, engineering and math.

During the gathering, Obama announced a \$250 million initiative to train math and science teachers and help meet his goal of pushing America's students from the middle to the top of the pack in those subjects in the next decade. The president's "Educate to Innovate" campaign would help train more than 100,000 teachers and prepare more than 10,000 new educators in the next five years.

One solid step in that direction in Kansas came with UKanTeach, a program established in 2007 at KU to train science and math majors to become teachers. UKanTeach, which expects to have 120 math and science teachers a year graduating from KU by 2014, was cited as a top program in answering Obama's call for a larger, more diverse pool of math and science teachers.

Tuition assistance and other initiatives will be vital in encouraging more students to consider teaching.

Many students who excel in math and science overlook education in favor of more lucrative professions. They need to see rewards of teaching that go beyond a paycheck, especially helping youngsters develop into productive adults.

Still, there's no doubt teachers face a myriad of challenges, not the least of which are demands of the No Child Left Behind Act. Policymakers must rethink a system that forces educators to "teach to the test" to achieve standardized goals at the cost of nurturing each student's individual abilities.

Every profession can be demanding. While teachers may feel underpaid, burdened with administrative duties and at times frustrated by stubborn, defiant students, the reward in helping a child succeed can't be denied.

The nation does need new strategies that encourage more college students to become math and science teachers. As part of that, reinforcing education's image as a rewarding, honorable profession may be the most important task of all.

— *The Garden City Telegram, via The Associated Press*

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COLBY FREE PRESS

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State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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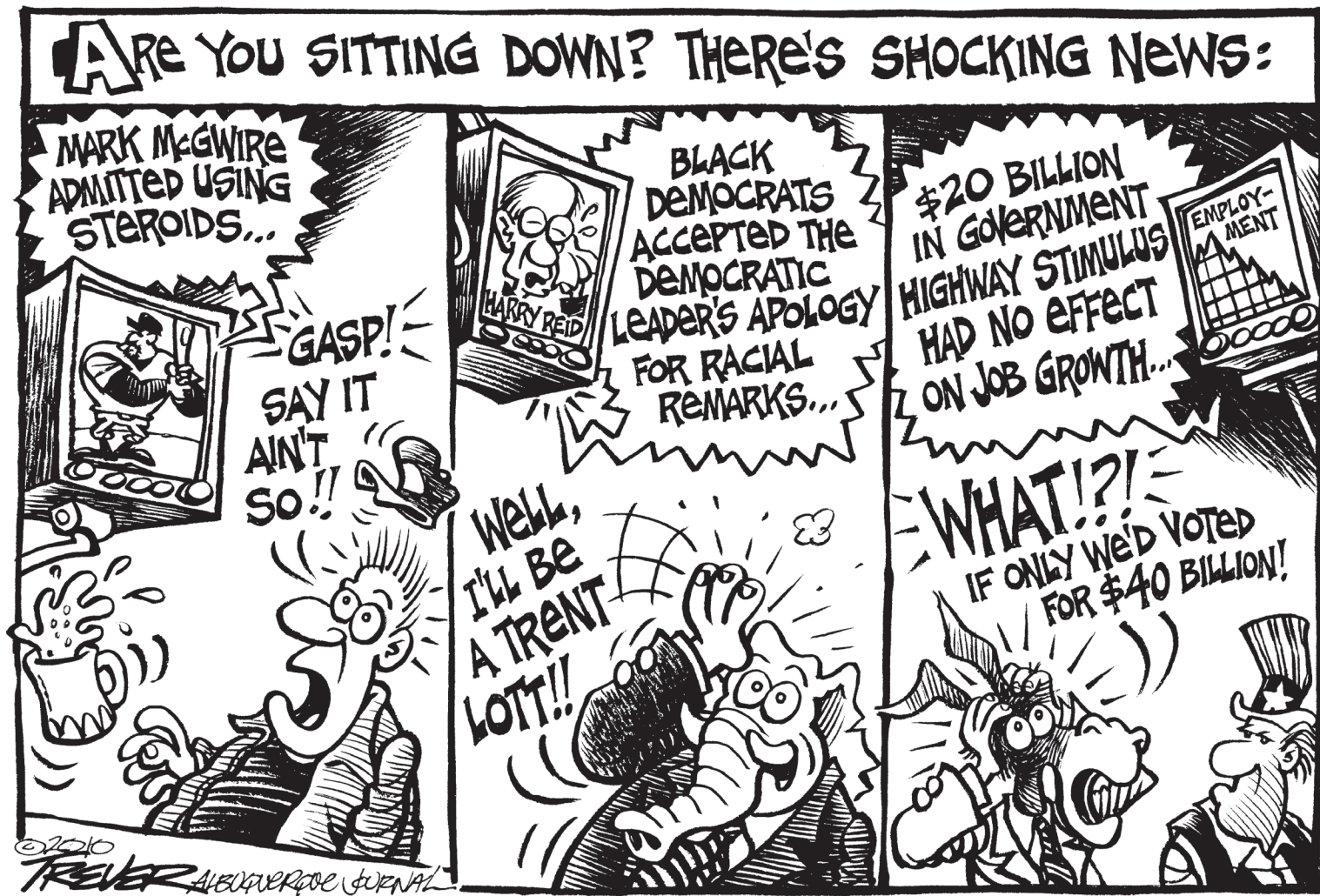
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 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 herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



Little crisis pales in perspective

Port-au-Prince, Haiti, probably has temperatures in the 80s this week. I don't know for sure, because the website I found hasn't been updated for a while.

That's no surprise. Digging out from an earthquake tends to take precedence over knowing the exact temperature, and the airport is probably getting ready for the field hospital to be set up there.

Since 4 p.m. (Central Time) Tuesday afternoon, the world has been reminded once again of this Caribbean nation which began in a slave rebellion but has suffered from dictators and poverty for years.

Meanwhile, back here at the *Colby Free Press*, we feel like we're suffering, living life in the trenches.

The ad staff are refugees. The "morgue" has become No Man's Land. The basement, which was full and overflowing with water just a few days ago, is still dark and muddy, and I hear the shackles in the dungeon are in danger of rusting away from the damp.

Our crisis is small, though, in comparison to those who suddenly find themselves, not only homeless but with water, food or medical care in any form. We have had the water turned off for a few hours as city crews worked on the lines, but it's not a big problem to bring a bottle from home.

The challenges we face, though, are parallel, in a small fashion, to those of the Haitians.

We started with emergency response. Identify what's wrong — too much water here, buildings falling down there.

Then, minimize the damage. In an earthquake, you get out and get other people out, a stage the Haitians will be in for days yet.



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

In a water main break, you call the city and start moving to higher ground. In our case, this meant cleaning out the workroom and a storeroom, where office supplies and file copies of old newspapers — the morgue — are stored.

Then you start on recovery. Port-au-Prince is salvaging supplies from destroyed homes and businesses and trying to get food, water, and medical care to the refugees. Our recovery is far less overwhelming, though still a challenge.

Our front office staff has it the worst, since the front office has no furnace and only some electricity. That's since some of the wiring was in that swimming pool — oops, I mean basement.

They've all put on brave faces as we've moved extra desks into the newsroom and the hallway next to it. It's crowded. There's a lot of floating going on — of people — as desks, corners, and telephones are put to use by whoever gets there first to get the work done, get the ads built and get the paper out on time.

The rest of us have it a little easier, since our desks still have their spots, our computers are still hooked up in their old familiar places, though we occasionally have to wait in line to use a telephone or sit down at a desk. Still, it's crowded and noisy and confusing to work

with twice as many people in the newsroom as normal.

A crisis such as an office flood does tend to brink out the best — and worst — in people. We don't like making do, but we do know how to grin and get on with the job. Our customers, for the most part, have been a big help by simply being patient while we sort things out.

War stories are an important part of life in the trenches, and some old war stories have floated to the top this week. We've got it good, all things considered. I seem to remember photos of a newspaper building in North Dakota a few years back, surrounded by the flood waters of the Red River and the smoke and flames of burning building nearby. Newspapers work hard to overcome bad weather, fire, illness, strikes and almost any other setback you can imagine — and get the paper out.

Our crisis here is small. We've got some files to dry out, some repairs to the building, and the noise of city equipment on Fifth Street and in the alley, as workers labor to find and repair problems in the water lines.

We will not suffer thirst. We are not dead, hurt or homeless, or in any particular danger of a repeat. When the mud is cleaned out, the wiring repaired, the furnace replaced, we will go back to normal. Maybe even better than normal, since some necessary spring cleaning got lumped in with the cleanup.

I look at the hundreds of thousands reported dead in Haiti, and realize that we are blessed, indeed, with our little, safe crisis.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Tax increases not needed for schools

A recent commentary by state Board of Education member David Dennis said educators "...just ask that (legislators) make their decisions based on accurate information, with the future of our students in mind."

We completely agree, and just ask that educators do the same. Unfortunately, some have been making their case for tax increases and lawsuits with a healthy dose of inaccurate and/or misleading information.

For example, Mr. Dennis said another board member "alleges" that schools started the current year with \$700 million in carryover cash reserves (in addition to money for capital projects and bond payments). This is no allegation; it is a fact that we obtained from the state Department of Education. Here are some other facts we discovered that have been confirmed by the department:

- Deputy Commissioner Dale Dennis says schools can legally use those reserves for current expenses, freeing General Fund receipts for other purposes.

- That \$700 million total has grown 53 percent over the last four years, which means that schools haven't spent all of the money they received.

- No independent audit of the necessary ending balances in each fund has been performed.

Certainly some carryover is necessary, but the minimum required balances have not been determined. Since these balances have grown 53 percent, it's quite likely that a good portion of it could be used to avoid budget cuts.

Here's another fact confirmed by the department that has been conveniently ignored or distorted:

Other Opinions

• **Dave Trabert**
Kansas Policy Institute

• Schools are getting a lot more than the \$4,012 in Base State Aid Per Pupil. Total aid to schools from state, federal and property tax sources this year is \$12,225, or just 3.43 percent less than last year.

There is also ample evidence that schools are spending more money than necessary. A July 2009 study by the Legislative Division of Post Audit found many districts are much less efficient than others and offered 80 recommendations to save money. The 2010 Commission ordered the study, Phase 2 of which would have sent auditors into schools to help find ways to save money. But districts objected, so the 2010 Commission cancelled Phase 2 and now is calling for more state aid to schools, knowing that other options exist.

Our own study of K-12 expenditures found per-pupil spending in 2007-08 ranged from \$9,017 to \$25,240. If high-spending districts had been just been at the median cost-per-pupil of similar-sized districts, it would have saved \$636 million. The complete analysis is available at www.KansasPolicy.org.

Mr. Dennis referenced another post-audit report that found a correlation between increases in education spending and achievement scores, which he and others have used to justify their demands. They neglect to mention, however, that the report did not say that higher spending caused test scores to increase. (It's a well-known research principle that correlation does not imply causation.) That same report also said educational research "...offers mixed opinions about whether increased spending for educational inputs is related to improved student performance."

The truth is that these facts and others refute schools' case for higher spending.

The Kansas Policy Institute is an independent, nonprofit organization that advocates for free enterprise solutions and the protection of personal freedom. Our work is focused on state and local economic issues in Kansas with particular emphasis on education, fiscal policy and health care.

Write us

The *Colby Free Press* encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area.

Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

