

Other Viewpoints

Highway plan will pay for years

Transportation plans are supposed to require heavy legislative lifting. The one approved two decades ago came only after a bitter, fruitless special session held two years earlier.

So it was astonishing that the 2010 Legislature passed a new 10-year, \$8.2 billion plan with relative ease. The bill, now on Gov. Mark Parkinson's desk, positions Kansas well to defend its April designation by Reader's Digest as having the nation's best road system....

In the last moments of the session, lawmakers finished a plan to issue up to \$1.7 billion in bonds, raise heavy-truck registration fees and retain part of the 1-cent sales-tax increase after three years to help bankroll an array of highway, bridge, airport and railroad projects into the next decade. Much of the cost will be covered by \$5.5 billion in existing highway money.

Those who viewed the plan's progress through the Legislature as rushed had a point, especially in the House. Seeing the state take on more debt is never pleasant, and it looks like the plan's money again could be diverted for other uses.

But Senate President Steve Morris, R-Hugoton had made passing a new plan a priority despite the budget crisis, arguing persuasively that letting the state's transportation infrastructure deteriorate could retard economic growth.

Judging from the 1989 and 1999 highway plans - as well as Senate language ensuring that all 105 counties in the state will see at least \$8 million each in improvements - the governor was not overstating it in saying that "every Kansan, every county and every business will benefit from this project."

- The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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Moms still worry about kids' success

Whenever two mothers get together, they begin to talk about their children.

Well, complain, explain and commiserate is more like it.

At my age and that of most of my friends, we talk about our children's relationship and career choices.

The complaints go like this:

"Why couldn't he/she have gone to a nice, close junior college like their brother/sister. It would be so much cheaper and closer."

"You wouldn't believe the terrible manners of his/her girlfriend/boyfriend/group of friends. And they stay out till all hours. They're never home"

"Johnny/Mary is capable of getting a much better job. They're so smart. They could go back to school and be a lawyer/doctor/engineer."

The bottom line is the kids don't spend enough time at home and they didn't make the choices that Mom thought they should.

They never do.

We all think our child should be the next president. We just don't want them to be a politician.

So it wasn't surprising that while the guys were out in the back yard with a beer, May and I were in the kitchen with our second glass of wine and deep into a psychological discussion of our children.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

Hers are a little younger than mine. They are just testing their wings. Graduating and looking at careers. Mine are mostly settled with good jobs and happy marriages. They just live too far away.

So between sips, she gave me her take on success.

I liked it and the next day, I called and asked her to repeat it for this column and all mothers, who like me, are worried about their adult or almost-adult offspring.

She has three criteria to measure success, she said.

1. Are you happy with the choices you've made?

If you're a long-haul trucker, don't complain because you're never home. If you're a merchant, don't complain about the buying public. If you're in school, are you happy with your studies and your life and will you be able to finish and do what you want to do?

2. Can you fulfill the obligations you have

undertaken?

If you are a parent, can you raise and educate your children? If you own a home, can you pay for its upkeep and taxes? If you join a club, can you donate some of your time and energy to its goals?

3. You are not a burden on society or your parents.

Can you stand on your own two feet and support yourself and your dependents?

If you can answer yes to all three, she said, you're a success whether you are a dishwasher at the restaurant or a congressman.

There is one other thing, she said, which she hasn't quite figured out how to incorporate into her formula, but which is still important.

4. Do you give back to your community? Do you offer your time and talents to others?

I looked over her list and decided that all three of my children are successes and they all give back.

But, darn it, they still live too far away.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

All health care reforms not created equal

A recent article published by Kansas Health Institute said Sen. Jim Barnett (R-Emporia) was ahead of the curve regarding the creation of a health-insurance exchange, or connector, in Kansas back in 2007.

The article points out that his proposal was similar to the Obamacare initiative now rejected by conservative groups, and drew support from some conservative health care reformers at the time.

As someone who was on the ground, working in the reform arena, but pushing a much different alternative to the "connector" plan, the article's premise regarding conservatives' current take on health care reform strikes me as a bit of "gotcha journalism":

• Conservatives oppose Obamacare because it creates a mandatory health insurance exchange.

• But in 2007, Jim Barnett supported such an idea in Kansas, and he was supported by some conservatives from Washington.

• Therefore, conservatives really oppose the current idea because they dislike Obama.

The article represents a striking misunderstanding about the debate at that time on the right regarding health-care reform. Let me set the record straight.

In 2007, the idea of reforming health care was galvanizing a variety of interest groups and think tanks here. The Kansas Health Policy Authority had been created as a "policy warehouse" to promote different ideas regarding the best reforms for our state.

It became clear that the only considerations the authority would hear would be those which supported the extension of government-run programs. Barnett and other Republicans

Other Opinions

• Gregory L. Schneider
Kansas Policy Institute

helped create the agency, but their actions were certainly not representative of those who prefer consumer-driven reforms.

Kansas Policy Institute sought allies outside of the authority to promote consumer-driven reforms, such as more use of Health Savings Accounts, including accounts for Medicaid recipients.

The institute brought in Michael Bond, a health economist affiliated with the James Madison Institute, to testify about such policies before House committees and before the authority. We worked with House members, specifically Reps. Jeff Colyer (R-Overland Park), Peggy Mast (R-Emporia) and Brenda Landwehr (R-Wichita), to promote our ideas in testimony and through policy papers. Colyer, a physician, promoted a series of policies, some of which were included in Senate Bill 309, which failed to pass the Legislature.

Moreover, Cato Institute health care scholars Michael Tanner and Michael Cannon testified before House committees on consumer-driven reforms. In each case, these experts warned against a "connector" model similar to the one in Massachusetts that has failed to reduce health care costs.

There was a distinct difference of opinion

on the right about how to promote health-care reform. On one side stood those who thought, incorrectly as it turned out, that one can promote insurance coverage through a health-care connector while reducing costs of care.

On the other stood those who focused on costs alone - reducing health care costs through consumer-driven options such as savings accounts (even for Medicaid recipients, something Indiana has tried this successfully through its Healthy buy Program). If you reduce the costs of insurance, more of the uninsured would purchase it, increasing the health of the private insurance market while preserving Medicaid for the poor and disabled. This has worked in Indiana but Obamacare might destroy its progress.

The conservative view of health care is more variegated than portrayed by this article. Not everyone on the right thought the connector model was a good idea, and most everyone thinks it is bad policy today. That has been a consistent view among many on the right since Massachusetts passed its plan in 2006.

We can clearly see the failure in Massachusetts now - the state recently had to borrow from the federal stimulus program to plug budget holes created by its connector reforms. Some on the right saw this at the time and have consistently warned against the adoption of such schemes on the federal level.

The Kansas Policy Institute is an independent non-profit organization that advocates for free enterprise solutions and the protection of personal freedom, with a focus on state and local economic issues in Kansas.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

