

Other Viewpoints

Top speech talks about universities

It wasn't his State of the State address, in which he called for a statewide smoking ban and encouraged a tax increase in the teeth of the economic downturn.

It wasn't his magnificent "Pure Kansas Night" speech at this year's Symphony in the Flint Hills concert, in which he elegantly evoked the independence and pioneer spirit of Kansas.

When asked to identify his most important speech, Gov. Mark Parkinson said it might have been one only a handful of Kansans heard.

He gave it to the Kansas Board of Regents in August 2009, and in it he expressed dissatisfaction with the management of the state university system.

Sad to say, but the governor is absolutely right about the regents and the universities needing to get their houses in order.

They continued to prove that point earlier this month when the regents heard a proposal to increase the costs of housing and food service for student's at all six state colleges.

Officials said the higher fees were needed to contend with cuts in state money for higher education, and there's no doubt that the regent institutions are operating with fewer state dollars today than in years past.

But in continuing to add to the financial burden of students and their families, as opposed to doing more cost cutting, the universities risk putting the price of higher education out of sight for more Kansas families.

There already are indications that tuition and fees at the state universities are getting uncomfortably high. Enrollment at junior colleges and technical colleges is robust, and it's not a huge leap to think part of the reason is that those schools are more affordable than four-year colleges.

Amid that trend comes the new round of cost increases, which range from 4.5 percent at Pittsburg State University to 1.4 percent at the University of Kansas.

While the latest increases aren't necessarily back breakers in themselves — the cost of a typical double occupancy room at KU would go up \$98 — they sting when added with steady increases in tuition and fees.

That's where the universities have really hurt themselves. Tuition and fees rocketed up a staggering 144 percent at KU between 2002 and 2009, for example, and 134 percent at Kansas State University.

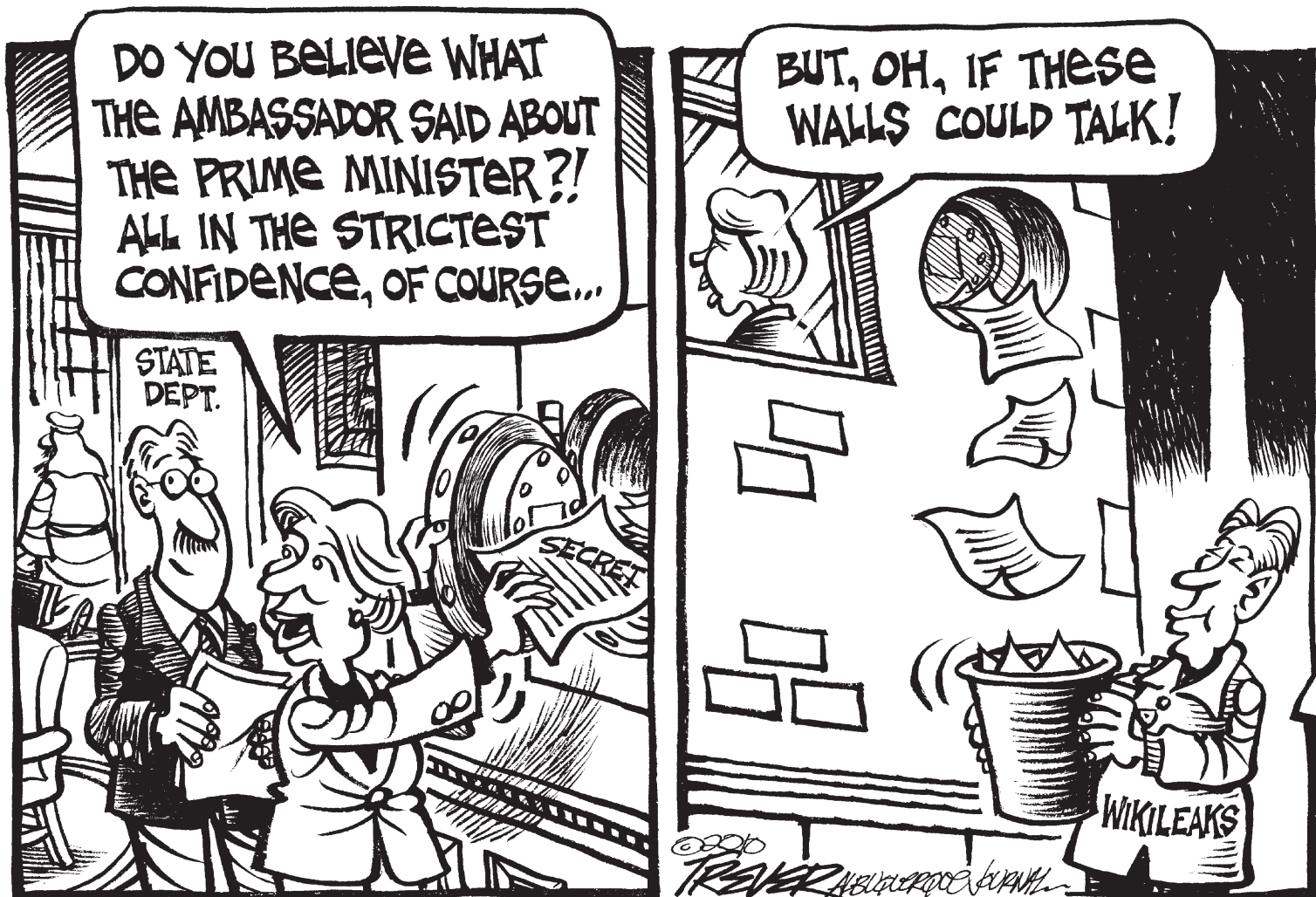
Again, a big contributor was a reduction in money from the state. Another major factor was that universities were required to maintain their budgets at 2006 levels to get federal stimulus funding. At KU, for one, university officials said they had cut back to that level last year.

But the fact is that the cost of attending state colleges keeps going up — far faster than other costs, but just when many students and their families have less money because of the recession.

As Parkinson recognized, it's time for universities to take action. He was justified in the scolding.

It's comforting to hear him expressing hope that higher-education administrators got the message. But as long as fees keep going up, we can't buy it.

— The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press



Inequality, poverty bad for democracy

If you ask people why there is so much poverty in this country, the answers you get will vary depending on the person's ideology.

Conservatives are more likely to blame poverty on drug use, the high divorce rate, laziness, irresponsible actions, a victimization complex or cultural impoverishment. Liberals are more likely to cite bad public schools, a decline in labor union membership, a declining safety net and racism (except for impoverished white people).

The problem of poverty is more complex than either side cares to admit, but clearly the conservative argument has been more influential in shaping government policy for the past 30 years.

The first thing people of different viewpoints should be willing to admit is some of the conservative arguments have merit. There is no doubt that laziness, irresponsible actions and single-parent homes have all helped grow poverty in America. Some people continue to make bad decisions no matter how many well-intentioned people try to set them on the right path. But like most simplistic theories, the "pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps" argument has prevented us from seeing the complex nature of American inequality.

The bootstrap myth doesn't take into consideration the many unexpected things life throws at us from time to time. It doesn't consider the working-class family where the major breadwinner dies unexpectedly in a car accident, leaving the single parent and kids to fend for themselves. It doesn't consider what happens when a manufacturing job is outsourced, leav-



Andy Heintz

- Wildcat Ramblings

ing the father without the means to pay for the house or a chronically ill wife's rising medical costs. It doesn't consider a young couple — a social worker and a teacher — living paycheck to paycheck while up to their ears in debt because they couldn't have gone to college without student loans.

The results of our misconceptions about poverty have led to harsh consequences, not only for people at the bottom rung of the economic ladder, but also for our shrinking middle class. But first, let's look at those who have benefited from the bootstrap myth.

Nicholas D. Kristof, in an op-ed column for *The New York Times*, reports the richest one percent of Americans account up for 24 percent of the income in this country, up from almost nine percent in 1976.

"From 1980 to 2005, more than four-fifths of the total increase in American incomes went to the richest 1 percent," he says.

Critics will argue that it's unfair to impose high taxes on America's most productive (aka wealthiest) citizens. They also argue that creating a strong safety net through high taxation would be a drag on the economy because it would give companies the incentives shrink

their workforces. In other words, high taxes means high unemployment.

While it's true that France and the United Kingdom, two countries that have a more generous safety net than the United States, do have high unemployment, it's equally true that social welfare states like Finland and Sweden — who spend more on public programs than France or the United Kingdom — have surprisingly low unemployment.

Author and economist Jeffrey Sachs, in his book "Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet," writes that social-welfare states (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway) have high rates of female labor-force participation because they ensure day care and schooling for children, giving mothers the time to enter the labor market.

Sachs writes that these states also hire many hard-to-employ individuals like people with disabilities or low school performance, into government jobs. According to Sachs the social-welfare states actually had on average less unemployment than free-market countries like Canada or the United States.

Vast inequality is not good for democracy. America should re-examine its priorities before our middle class becomes a thing of the past. It's up to us.

Do we want to fight inequality or help the super-rich buy more mansions?

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We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

Be ready for winter driving

If you're even a casual observer of weather, you know the East Coast was brutalized with the season's first round of snow and blinding winds, which brought the New York region to its knees.

With the continual winds and strong gusts this late fall, this winter could be a real doozy.

It's never too early to begin preparation for winter travel and the trials and tribulations that may be associated with it.

If you're caught in a winter storm in a car or truck, stay with the vehicle. Disorientation occurs quickly in blinding, wind-driven snow and cold.

Run the engine 10 minutes each hour for heat. Open the window for fresh air to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked.

Make yourself visible to possible rescuers by turning on the dome light at night while running the engine. Tie a colored cloth to your antenna or door and raise the hood of your vehicle indicating trouble after the snow stops falling.

Exercise from time to time by vigorously moving arms, legs, fingers and toes to keep blood circulating and to keep warm.

When you're at home or in a building and a winter storm hits, stay inside. Be sure to use proper fire safeguards and ventilation when running a stove, fireplace, space heater or other alternative heat.

If heat is not available, in the case of a power outage, for example, close off unneeded rooms; cover windows at night and stuff towels or rags in cracks under doors. Better yet, install insulation strips before frigid weather



John Schlageck

- Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

arrives.

Always continue to eat and drink, because food provides the body with energy for producing heat. Keep the body replenished with fluids to prevent dehydration.

What happens if you're caught on foot in a winter storm? How do you weather it out?

The first thing to do is seek shelter. Try to stay dry and cover all exposed parts of your body.

If there is no shelter, prepare a lean-to, windbreak or snow cave for protection from the wind. Do not eat snow. It will lower your body temperature. Melt it first.

The best plan to avoid such situations is to stay informed with the most up-to-date weather data. Forecasts and weather conditions change rapidly. Before traveling out on the roads or in harsh winter conditions, it is vital that you are current on what is happening in your area.

The most reliable way to keep track of winter weather, or any weather, is through NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Weather Radio. Weather radio is operated and programmed directly from regional National Weather Service offices.

The latest and most comprehensive information is available 24 hours each day, seven

days a week. Other sources of weather information include your local radio and television stations, the weather channel and even more convenient weather news on your cell phone or computer.

There's plenty of information available to keep anyone current on weather conditions this winter. The key is to listen, stay informed and be prepared.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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COLBY FREE PRESS
 155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
 Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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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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

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- Bruce Tinsley

