



Other Viewpoints

Keep budget caps; defend our schools

The Garden City schools joined other districts across Kansas recently in cutting expenses and streamlining their operations – a painful exercise forced by the prospect of cuts in state aid. Still, when it comes to budgeting, the Garden City School Board has done its best to ease the burden on its taxpayers.

As part of that, the district has its local taxing authority, known as the Local Option Budget, at 20 percent of the state maximum of 30 percent (school districts do have the option of exceeding 30 percent with voter approval.)

At 20 percent, district has flexibility if future budget issues emerge. It's a prudent approach district residents should appreciate.

Now, with a looming shortfall in state aid to public education, state and local officials know they must consider every possible option to pay for good schools and avoid deeper cuts to staff and programs.

One option for districts would be spending down their reserves, although some reserves may be used only for such specific purposes as paying off bonds and interest.

Another option would be raising property taxes through the local option budget – a troubling strategy, considering the disparity in the fact that a 1 mill increase could generate a range of \$17 to \$576 per pupil statewide, depending on the wealth of each district.

Without equitable funding, smaller, poorer districts would be left to rely more on their property taxes to keep up, and to meet such challenges as attracting and keeping good teachers as wealthier districts are able to offer more.

The current school funding formula helped eliminate such inequities. Kansas law calls for every child to have an equal opportunity for an adequate education.

Still, it's no wonder wealthier districts favor a plan to shift the constitutional responsibility of the state to taxpayers by lifting the 30-percent cap on local option budgets.

In rural, western Kansas – with plenty of smaller districts – no one should endorse a plan that would widen the gap between the rich and the poor, as removing the cap would do.

Lawmakers from this part of the state should be ready to fight any move to create such an unfair disadvantage for their constituents and school districts.

– The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press

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Defend poor for America's future

It's hard to be optimistic about the future of America lately.

President Barack Obama and the Republicans just cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans, which will only add to the already high federal deficit.

Robert Reich, secretary of labor under President Bill Clinton and professor of public works at the University of California at Berkeley, wrote on his blog that the typical male worker today is earning less than the typical male worker did 30 years ago.

"Yet the richest 1 percent of Americans is now taking home a larger percentage of the nation's income than at any time since 1928," Reich writes.

Given this abysmal situation, you'd think self-proclaimed working-class heroes like Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity or Rush Limbaugh would be mad as hell and ready to fight for the little guy. This would be a perfect time to call these politicians pinheads and elitists for screwing over middle class Americans.

But these three are all rhetoric and no substance. They also all happen to be millionaires who apparently don't want to vote against their economic interests.

If we want to fix our nation's problems, the public is going to have to decide what it wants out of its government. Do we want to be a country with really low taxes or do we want to be able pay for programs like Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare?



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

The American public often acts like it can have it both ways, and self-interested politicians dishonestly promote this wrongheaded belief. If we want to take care of our low-income, disabled and elderly citizens, we are going to have to be willing to pay for it.

Personally, I think raising taxes on the top 2 percent is the moral and economical thing to do. Critics argue the government is unfairly taxing its most productive citizens in order to give benefits to its least productive. In other words, the government supports parasitic policies that take money from the producers and distribute it to the leeches (who happen to be about 98 percent of the country).

Let's take a look at the "soaking the rich" argument. Many conservatives who argue that it's immoral to raise taxes on the rich back this statement up by claiming the super wealthy are our nation's most productive citizens. This is certainly true in some cases: Surgeons, doctors, certain corporate presidents, Warren Buffett and Bill Gates are certainly some of our nations most important people.

But are all rich people as important to the country as a Buffet or Gates? Even though they don't come out and say it, the promoters of the "soak the rich argument" imply, perhaps unknowingly, that professional athletes, musicians, trust-fund kids and even the liberal actors and actresses they revile are all included in this list of hard-working rich people being unfairly taxed. These certainly are some of the richest people in our society.

Many working- and middle-class Americans would rightly argue that soldiers, social workers, teachers, police officers, miners, family farmers and teachers are at least as productive, if not more so. I think most of those who argue against taxing the rich either intentionally ignore the existence of our nation's less deserving rich – or they are in denial.

The bottom line is that America's wealthiest citizens have been raking in the money for the last 30 years. While some of these people certainly worked hard to become successful, forcing them to pay a little more taxes in order to ensure the survival of the middle class is still morally justified. Turning a billionaire into a millionaire is better than letting more middle-class citizens fall below the poverty line.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Christmas past marked with faith

Seems a long time ago my mother told me about one of her first Christmas celebrations. The Christmas was 1930, and she would have been 6.

As my mom recalled the events of this Christmas, she told of buttoning her winter coat and tying a scarf snugly over her ears. It was a cold evening, and the wind was howling out of the north on her family's Phillips County farm. The rest of the family was already waiting in the Model-T Ford, ready to head to Logan and midnight Mass.

Mom would go to Mass in the parish church in Logan that night. Later, after she and Dad married, she spent the next six decades attending Mass at St. Martin's in Sheridan County.

As she grew older, her step slowed from those youthful days, but her conviction about the true meaning of Christmas never wavered. Summing up my mother's thoughts about Christmas is an easy task: Mom believed the Christmas season and the rest of the year was simply about caring for one another.

Mom always told us, "That is the ultimate Christmas story – God's love for man and our own love for each other." Words she lived by.

Eighty years ago, church was the social center for life among rural Kansas people. Christmas was very much a religious festival, and the highlight of Christmas Eve was going to church.

Going to church was a family tradition for the Becker family. All the children would dress in their Sunday best, and unless you were sick in bed, you wouldn't have dreamed of missing church.

The trip to church in the Model-T was one not soon forgotten. As Mom used to tell us, the interior was outfitted with those cloth side curtains you installed during the winter to keep



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

everyone warmer. The trip was still cold, and Grandpa Bert always threw a lap robe over the children.

Like every other child at the time, Mom could not wait for Christmas and believed the day would never arrive. While she was in church, Santa would visit her farm home.

Although Mom never actually saw Santa, she absolutely, firmly believed in the jolly old man. And while she always understood the Christ child was the most important part of Christmas, the Becker family did a good job of balancing the two.

After they returned from Christmas Eve services, her mother would light the kerosene lamp and the children would gather around to open Santa's gifts. No electricity back then. It was still just an idea country folks dreamed of.

Growing up during the difficult times of the Dust Bowl, money was scarce. Anything that cost money was rare at Christmas. Gifts consisted of something useful like clothing and one toy for each child. There were four children in the family.

Mom always remembered the first and only horse she ever received for Christmas. She named the mare Dolly and as she told us, "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. I rode her nearly all day long."

While some of her neighbors cut a red ce-

dar and placed it in their houses at Christmas, the Beckers didn't have such trees in their pastures. Grandpa Bert erected some sort of stand with a pole and Grandma Rose, Mom and her brothers and sister would go out and cut branches from the evergreen trees they'd planted in the windbreak. They'd bring these inside and poke them in the stand to make their Christmas tree.

On most Christmas days, relatives would come to visit or the Beckers would jump in the family automobile and drive to see their cousins.

One of the special meals on Christmas day was always pan-fried chicken. Mom always said that was the best, and her mother cooked the best.

My grandmother and Mom always made the best peanut brittle and fudge with walnuts. These had to be hidden until Christmas so the children wouldn't snitch these yummy, tasty delights.

Yes, the toasty feeling of a wood-burning stove, the smell of frying chicken and the anticipation of Christmas are memories my mother always cherished. She always said you never grow too old to enjoy this magical time of the year.

As she grew older and these stories were told and retold, she always made sure we understood the joy in the eye of the child remains always in the heart of the man or woman dedicated to caring and helping his or her fellow man.

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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

