



## Other Viewpoints

### Education should trump tax breaks

Kansans not only placed Sam Brownback in the governor's seat in 2010, they cleared out any semblance of potential political obstacles to his wishes.

The GOP sweep in Kansas leaves Democrats a token force in the Legislature. For Brownback's agenda in 2011, that's the good news. It should be smooth sailing.

Here's the not-so-good news: The governor-elect will arrive in office facing a \$500 million revenue shortfall. The early signs for how he will deal with it aren't good.

Brownback keeps talking about backing economic development in the state, but at the same time he is looking at slashing funding to our greatest economic development tool: education at Kansas schools and universities.

While there may be some short-term gain in tax incentives attracting new businesses, it will be a long-term failure if it comes at the expense of a high-quality education. Without good employees, businesses fail, regardless of the tax situation.

And without high standards from elementary school through postgraduate levels, the state fails to produce not only the skills needed in the work world, but minds nimble enough to adapt and evolve, an essential for the modern business world.

Brownback has said he wants to avoid cutting economic development specialty areas, such as the KU Medical Center and pharmacy school, Kansas State's veterinary medicine school and Wichita State's aviation institute, while perhaps dropping less economically productive degree tracks.

Successful university systems, however, cast broad nets to bring in students in a wide range of majors, many of whom will benefit their states in unexpected ways.

Disappointing some supporters, Brownback has said he sees no way to reverse the penny sales tax increase passed this year under Democratic Gov. Mark Parkinson. This is smart. Parkinson didn't back the tax because he favored big government. He did so because life in the Sunflower State without it would be life without essential services.

But Brownback is talking about targeted economic development tax cuts. If the state cannot afford \$50 million to beef up our universities (which he says it cannot), it also cannot afford more tax cuts. Already, the Kansas tax burden is shouldered by too few.

For every penny of sales tax collected in Kansas, the state exempts 2 cents. Brownback should be looking at ways to spread, not increase, the tax burden more fairly so everyday Kansans aren't asked to prop up breaks for businesses.

Brownback has resisted the notion of tax increases to shore up state coffers. Surely, though, even a small reduction in subsidies so easily handed out by lawmakers to everyone from manufacturers to Girl Scouts makes more sense than to see a proud education system fail.

By the end of the 2011 legislative session, Brownback will not be able to complain that he couldn't get through his agenda for political reasons.

But if his agenda cripples education, future Kansans may look back on the broom that swept the Republican Party into complete control in the state with great sadness.

— The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press



### Liberals need a proactive agenda

As a new year begins, it's unclear where our country is headed. The only visible movement right now is the Tea Party, who seem to be advocating a big government with low taxes.

Many of the group's adherents would dispute the notion they are for big government, but that is only because the concept of big government has been narrowly defined by people who claim to be conservative. For example, the mainstream definition of big government conveniently excludes things like wiretapping, military spending, overcrowded prisons, the suspension of habeas corpus, preemptive wars, covert action by the Central Intelligence Agency, stringent anti-drug laws and gay rights.

In other words big government is defined as being for or against high taxes, and the "conservatives" have generally controlled the debate over what taxes can be considered too high. The fact that the media and the Democratic party have accepted this rigid definition is astonishing and depressing.

It should be noted that there are some members of the Tea Party, like Rep. Ron Paul, who have denounced all forms of big government, not just the parts they don't like. Despite my disagreements with some of his politics, Paul is what he says he is, which is commendable.

While Americans, including myself, should be more respectful of the Tea Party's positions, critics of the group should dispute the widely held misconception that the Tea Party is in favor of small government. We should also scrutinize their alleged hatred of socialism.

People should keep in mind the fact that



**Andy Heintz**

#### • Wildcat Ramblings

these folks drive subsidized cars (the military spending to ensure access to oil in the Middle East and pollution are excluded), on publicly funded roads to publicly funded parks where they protest while being protected by publicly funded police. Many of the elderly folks in the group also protest cuts in Medicare and Social Security, arguably the two best known socialistic programs in America; while proclaiming their hatred of socialism.

Despite my disagreements with the Tea Party, I have to admit that liberals and progressives, including yours truly, have let the Tea Party phenomenon divert us from developing an alternative vision for the country. Liberals need to remember that "the best defense is a good offense." The labor, disability rights, environmental, populist and civil rights movements were all both proactive and reactive.

Liberals need to formulate their own ideas about how they plan to sustain Social Security and Medicare without further increasing our country's deficit. They need to provide a picture of their own version of "family values" by supporting social services such as quality child care, Medicaid, maternity leave, mandat-

ed vacations, food stamps and other services that allow families, especially poor ones, the opportunity to provide their children with a decent life.

Progressives also need to emphasize that being pro-life doesn't start at conception and end at birth. Being pro-life should also include going to war only as a last resort and making sure all Americans are able to acquire life-saving health care.

Even those who argue that war is sometimes a necessary evil should be willing to admit that war ignores the rights of the civilians in the country being bombed. The people in these countries don't get to vote on whether they support a war that could kill their wife, father, brother, sister or child.

Liberals should also promote laws that enforce safety in the workplace so employees are not put in high-risk situations just because the boss wants to maximize profits. Progressives should work to strengthen the safety net for middle-class Americans so they will be protected from the grimmer aspects of globalization.

The future of America will depend on who wins the war of ideas. Progressives need to articulate a vision that hits home with all Americans if they expect to play in part in shaping our nation's future.

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.

### Common sense applies to pest control

In a conflict that has escalated during the last half dozen years, a handful of property owners are cooperating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service trying to restore wildlife in and around Logan County. They are pitted against local ranchers and county officials, who see such actions as a threat to their way of life and economic livelihood.

This confrontation reflects the long-held belief — more than a century — on the great High Plains that prairie dogs remain an unwanted varmint that eats grass needed to fatten cattle. Left unchecked, prairie dogs can be carriers of the plague and have turned some pasture land into barren wastelands that resemble a moonscape.

When the wind blows hard, and it always does, some of these pastures blow, resulting in dust storms that resemble the "Dirty '30s," according to some inhabitants of this region of the state. This results in wind erosion of valuable topsoil.

The majority of the people living here would like to continue to see enforcement of a century-old state law allowing the county to send exterminators onto their land, and even some of their neighbors, where large prairie-dog populations reside. If they can't control these fast-breeding critters, they'll soon destroy even more grassland and diminish property values.

And if that isn't enough, the Environmental Protection Agency has taken another stab at reducing the usage of Rozol, probably the most effective and efficient product for controlling prairie dogs.

The practice of using mechanical baiters to apply Rozol in prairie dog mounds is being



**John Schlageck**

#### • Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

denied. The Environmental Protection Agency has decided to adhere to the strict labeling on Rozol that requires hand application of bait at least six inches down prairie dog burrows.

Used to be in Kansas, farmers and stockmen and county employees could use mechanical means in their attempts to control prairie dogs. They were never limited to "hands only."

Such limitations on western Kansas cattlemen would be economically devastating. Application of Rozol with a bucket and ladle is a no-win situation for livestock producers who want keep the prairie dogs out of their pastures so they can keep the grassland for their cattle. "It becomes a matter of efficiency," says Mike Irvin, director of the Kansas Farm Bureau Legal Foundation. "Hand application is too time consuming and will result in far fewer acres being covered."

Denny Mackley is Logan County director for noxious weeds and prairie dogs. Using a mechanical applicator attached to a four-wheel-drive, Mackley can cover about five acres or 250 holes in 45 minutes. That amounts to between 50-60 acres a day. By hand, he says this would take nearly seven days.

Fewer acres treated means more prairie dog infestation. More prairie dogs means less grass, less gain on livestock, lower land values

and less money in the local coffers.

This battle pits the economic interests of ranchers versus benefits to a species that is not designated as threatened or endangered and is still thriving on the High Plains of western Kansas. The issue is complicated even further by the private property rights of landowners.

Licensed individuals have been using mechanical baiters without incidence of off-label use or secondary hazard to wildlife for years, according to Steve Swaffar, Kansas Farm Bureau natural resources director. These mechanical devices provide a reliable and precise application method that ensures application is performed in a safe manner specific to label requirements.

"Mechanical baiters reduce the chances of exposure to humans by compartmentalizing the bait and reduce the chances of accidental human error during application," Swaffar says.

Landowners, livestock producers and farm organizations have requested a "Special Local Need" registration be issued to allow these farmers and ranchers to continue to manage their land in a time-honored fashion.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture has indicated it will negotiate on behalf of livestock producers on the request. Swaffar believes the state agency supports the use of the mechanical device.

Stay tuned.

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.

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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