

Volume 122, Number 5 Monday, January 10, 2011



Admissions reform likely unrewarded

The Kansas Board of Regents' recent approval of new college admission standards was a needed, albeit modest, step toward helping students succeed in college and improving the national reputations of the state's public universities.

But it's unlikely that Gov.-elect Sam Brownback and the Legislature will reward universities for this and other reforms by restoring previous budget cuts. In fact, universities may be fortunate if their state funding is flat next fiscal year.

The new standards, which apply to freshmen entering high school in 2011, require graduates to complete a new, tougher college curriculum with at least a 2.0 grade average to enter one of the six regents universities. In addition, students will have to be either in the top third of their graduating class, or have a minimum score of 21 on the ACT or 980 on the SAT college entrance tests.

Currently, high school graduates must meet only one of three requirements: Complete a precollege curriculum, get the same ACT or SAT score, or rank in the top third of their class.

The higher standards will help ensure that more students are ready for college and, one hopes, more kids will work harder in high school. They also should help the universities improve their standing in U.S. News and World Report's annual ranking of best universities. Regents universities don't rank higher because, among other reasons, their admission rates are high and their graduation rates are low.

For example, the University of Kansas had the second-highest admission acceptance rate in the Big 12 Conference last year at 91 percent. At least partly as a result, KU had a graduation rate of only 61 percent, and its freshman retention rate of 80 percent was the lowest in the Big 12.

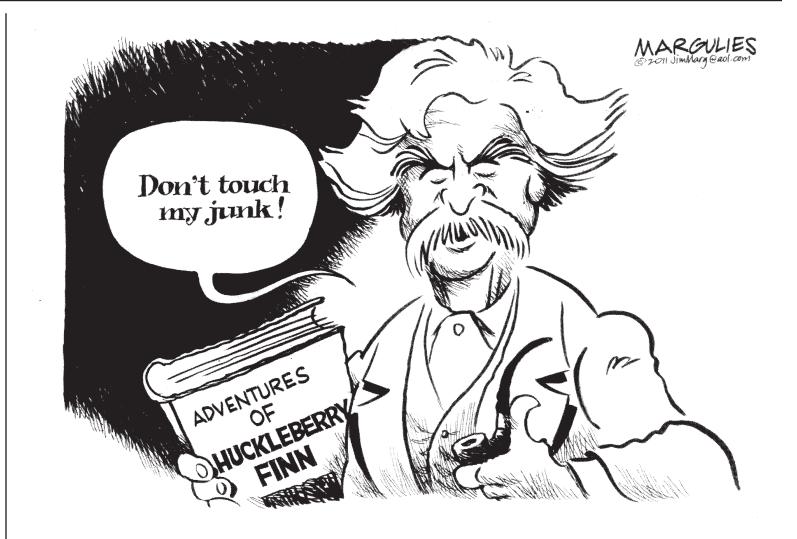
In addition to increasing admission standards, the regents approved a 10-year blueprint in September that included specific, measurable goals aimed at making higher education stronger and as beneficial as it can be to the state's economy.

Because of these reforms and the key role that universities play in growing our economy, the regents hope that Brownback and lawmakers will support the their plan to restore about half of the \$100 million in budget cuts state universities experienced the past two years. But so far, that isn't happening.

Brownback said the state doesn't currently have enough money to pay for the regents' "Kansas Commitment" plan. The new governor also said that he favors discontinuing some degree programs that graduate small numbers of students. And the universities are worried about Brownback's budget director, Steve Anderson, who has advocated cutting state money for universities and increasing tuition rates.

To their credit, the regents and the universities continue to make needed reforms, regardless of what the Legislature and governor do. Still, regents Chairman Gary Sherrer told The Wichita Eagle's editorial board earlier in 2010, "They can't continue to demand more from the system and fund it less."

Unfortunately, they can.



Declining culture has misplaced values

American culture is in a state of decline. This will continue to be the case if the people are only allowed to be passive spectators who have no role to play in solving the nation's most pressing problems.

If the grotesque salaries of professional athletes, Wall Street bankers and entertainers continue to be accepted and envied by Americans, then the current system will remain in place. The people will remain polarized and divided as they fight over the meager resources that have trickled down from the top 2 percent of the country, who have accumulated so much wealth over the last 20 years.

If firefighters and social workers continue to be ignored and underpaid while adults playing a kid's game are worshipped and lavished with more money than anybody deserves, then things like justice and fairness will be further discredited.

If the public continues to treat innocent civilians killed in Yemen, Pakistan and Afghanistan by Predator drone strikes as nothing more than "collateral damage," then they will never understand that the lives of the people being killed are just as valuable their own. If the American dream continues to be symbolized by individual success and material selfinterest, then people will continue to rationalize that it's OK to step on people in order to get to the top.

Given the dreary state of American poliis look out for your own interests. But those time taking them? who argue that idealistic stances are illogical and ineffective don't understand that the act of submission and despair.



reasons people take these stances don't have much to do with the chance they will be successful.

Many people who take principled stances on things like campaign-finance reform, military spending, war, health care and poverty know that their vision for the country will probably always remain just that, a vision. The political system is controlled by special-interest groups (insurance companies, multinational corporations, oil companies, the farm or agribusiness lobby, Wall Street banks, weapons manufacturers, coal companies) who have enough money and power to control the way decisions are made in Washington. Even the most wellintentioned senator has to "pay to play" if he wants the power brokers to fund his re-election campaign.

People choose to protest the clout wielded by the powerful because they think it's the right thing to do, not because it will be successful. This stance is dismissed because it's diametrically opposed to the way things are tics and the power corporate interests have in done in the halls of Washington or in the cor-Washington, there are certainly reasons for the porate world. If idealistic stances produce no public to reason that the only way to get ahead visible results, why should anyone waste their He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, The reason is that not doing anything is an

When people protest something wrong, even though they know nothing will come of it, it means they still have hope. The person who tells himself something isn't right, but doesn't express his concerns to anybody else, has given up hope. And life is pretty desolate without hope.

Many, if not most, of the people who hold top positions in powerful companies that influence major policy decisions in Washington are not bad people. They are just doing their jobs. Unfortunately, their job happens to be maximizing profit for short term gain.

They may be in favor of doing business in a way that is more favorable to the community, workers, homeowners, sick patients or the environment, but if they acted on their principles, they would be put out of business by the competition, whose amoral methods were better for the bottom line.

This way of doing business must change in a way that puts people and the environment over profits. I don't know how this can be done, but the current system is immoral and inhuman.

America must experience a cultural change in order to change the way Washington does business. To resign ourselves to accepting the current way our country operates is to give up on the idea that wealthy people have a right to buy more things than the rest of us, but they don't have the right to more democracy.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press sports and opinion writing.

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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.

COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920)

155 W. Fifth St. Colby, Kan. 67701

(785) 462-3963 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.

> Steve Haynes - Publisher s.haynes @ nwkansas.com

NEWS Kevin Bottrell - News Editor

bottrell @ nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter aheintz @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor mballard @ nwkansa

Vera Sloan - Society Editor

Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Reporter colby.society @ nwkansas.cor

ADVERTISING

Andrea Bowers, Kathryn Ballard, Tammy Withers

Advertising Representatives

abowers @ nwkansas.com s @ nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design khunter @ nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE Robin Tubbs - Office Manager

rtubbs @ nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator support @ nwkansas.con

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool

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 eek elsewhere in the U.S. \$72

Towns need farm families to hold on

As you travel through rural Kansas, it's apparent many small towns that once revolved around farm life are slowly fading away or have already died.

Remaining small towns wage a constant battle to stay alive. Farmers and ranchers once supported their communities and communities supported them. Although this continues today, it becomes more difficult to maintain with each passing year.

Today, many farm and ranch families work or go to school in larger towns. Many also shop in these places. The result: small-town businesses once supported by nearby farmers shut down and lock their doors because of a shrinking customer base.

Like the rest of us, farmers and ranchers may take their business to suburban malls because prices are more competitive. Smaller, surviving stores disappear because they have fewer customers.

This scenario is all too familiar in Kansas and other farm states. What can be done to bring farmers, ranchers and communities together again?

While visiting with farm and ranch friends who live in the southwest part of our state all fourth- and fifth-generation producers - I gathered some thoughts.

To bring farmers and communities together again, rural towns need institutions that bring farmers and ranchers to town every so often. No doubt this happens with some, but not with enough.

Strong communities survive when farmers and ranchers retire in their towns and become

۲



involved in civic and community affairs. Such endeavors might include operating a bed and breakfast, volunteering to operate the museum or taking on a leadership role in the county commission.

Farmers and ranchers dedicated to the health and well being of their communities remains the key to survival of small rural towns in Kansas. When farmers and ranchers remain uninvolved in community challenges because they see no apparent personal gain, revitalization efforts cannot succeed because they lack broad support from all the people throughout that area.

Without a central town focus, inhabitants soon travel elsewhere for activity and communities wither away.

A rural community's vitality depends on townspeople and farmers and ranchers communicating and working together for their own little burg.

While rural life continues to afford independence and freedom, too much threatens the survival of the family farm or ranch, its way of life and the community where each has its roots.

Agricultural communities and the people senate.state.ks.us

who live in them have always lived in the best environment in this country. It's worth holding on to. And we cannot afford to lose it.

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.



Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, Russell Senate Office Building Room C-4, Washington, D.C. 20002 (202) 224-6521

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelscamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@

