



Other Viewpoints

Local tax limits schools' unfair edge

Parents in a wealthy suburban Kansas City school district wanted the ability to put more local dollars into their schools. While that may sound reasonable, a judge rightly issued a ruling in favor of fairness.

Claiming state school money is inadequate, parents in the Shawnee Mission district hit with \$20 million in cuts over the last two years sought a temporary injunction to bypass a provision in state law that caps the Local Option Budget, based on a district-wide property tax, so the district could ask voters for an increase for their kids' schools.

The law limits the amount of money school districts can raise beyond what the state provides. The Shawnee Mission district, large and relatively wealthy, is at the maximum allowed.

But a federal judge rightly dismissed the lawsuit, saying the local tax cannot be separated from the rest of the school funding formula in Kansas.

While it's understandable that parents in some districts would want to maximize their resources to offset painful cuts to their schools, it's also necessary to consider the impact of such a move on schools statewide.

The current formula helps address inequities. Allowing affluent districts to raise unlimited money through local property taxes would not be fair to other school districts.

Smaller, poorer districts would fall behind as they rely even more on their property taxes to keep up. Wealthier districts would be able to offer even more to attract and keep good teachers.

While the Shawnee Mission parents plan to appeal the ruling, their district could turn its attention to another strategy that aims to preserve the budget for all schools. More than 60 Kansas school districts have filed a lawsuit that claims the state hasn't adequately funded schools as required by law.

The educational funding situation shows no signs of easing anytime soon. Gov. Sam Brownback recently cut \$56.5 million from the state's budget, with most of it from public schools.

The recent ruling was a nod to fairness in funding. It also was just the latest drama in a state that has more contentious days ahead in the ongoing quest to get public schools the money they need to deliver a quality education.

—The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press

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"WHY, YES, I'M EXTREMELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF RADIATION FROM JAPAN... NOW PASS ME MY BACON CHEESEBURGER."

International coffee crisis looms ahead

Japan has been shaken to the core. There are riots in countries across the Middle East. But it wasn't until I heard the ag news the other day that I understood what a truly desperate crisis we are in.

Those other disasters are hard to identify with. I've been through an earthquake, but I didn't know it until the newspaper told me the next day. I can't really imagine the results of a tsunami at all, though I suppose it bears a little resemblance to a flood on steroids. The threat of nuclear disaster is totally beyond my comprehension, though I can recite a list of facts about it as well as the next person in this day and age.

As far as the Middle East, I've seen rowdy folks here and there, but generally managed to avoid getting involved with trouble. Can't even imagine being in a crowd when shots are fired, let alone being worried about being caught between soldiers who should protect you and protesters trying to gain freedom.

But a crisis that really hits me where I live? It may be selfish of me, but coffee matters.

Coffee shortages are in the cards. Bad weather in Columbia, Mexico, Tanzania and who knows where all has resulted in poor harvests, just at a time when demand for coffee is increasing. All of which affects coffee futures, which affects the price of a can of coffee at the



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

grocery store.

Talk about a crisis!

Caffeine withdrawal, I understand. I've always been fond of coffee. Even when I was a kid I'd take a sip from Dad's cup (Mom didn't use enough sugar to suit me back then.)

The folks had a ritual of sorts. They made a pot of coffee for the evening meal – in a stovetop percolator, which was usual at the time – and each had maybe two cups. Understand, these were the six-ounce “coffee cups” that came with a set of dishes.

Then they quit. Almost never did they have more than two cups, except at an evening event – which would lead to complaints about poor sleep the next day.

Fast-forward to today. It's a quarter to four and I've quit coffee for the day – I think. Somebody just started a new pot though, so I'll have to steer clear of the break room while I come down off all that caffeine.

All what caffeine?

One cup at home – and I've been good. I've switched from the tall mug I've used for several years to a smaller one, about 10 ounces.

At work, I've had about five or six cups. It sits there, right by my elbow, and disappears. Evaporates. Vanishes.

They say you need to have plenty to drink. “Hydration” is a buzzword. Healthy bodies need lots of liquids.

Coffee, however, doesn't qualify. Shucks. It's actually DE-hydrating – along with anything containing alcohol. All that caffeine, that great buzz, and I can't even claim it's healthy.

So in the afternoon, I switch to tea. Not just ordinary tea, but herbal tea, the kind without caffeine. The latest variety in my collection is peach, though there's also peppermint, cinnamon-apple and a whole slew of “zingers.”

It's not coffee, but it's there, beside my elbow, disappearing as I stare at a computer monitor. It's healthy. And the price hasn't gone up by 50 to 70 percent in the last year.

Now if only I could learn to do without coffee....

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Headlines show lacking science classes

“Radiation given off by the Japanese reactor is rapidly blown out to sea.”

“Officials are distributing iodine to prevent radiation from entering the body.”

“Iodine is an antidote for radiation.”

Wrong, wrong and wrong.

These statements being heard over U.S. network television news stations reflect the widespread ignorance and lack of science education in the United States.

First, “particles” that give off radiation can be blown out to sea, but radiation from Iodine 131 doesn't get blown anywhere.

The second error is the nature of the damage from radioactive particles. Radioactive Iodine 131, one of the products in spent nuclear fuel after uranium fission, is an isotope (it has extra neutrons). It gives off radiation when it eventually drops down to “normal” Iodine 127.

Iodine is taken into the body from the environment by eating it in food, drinking it water or breathing it in air. It is then absorbed into our bloodstream, flows throughout our body, and is soon excreted by our kidneys. But only our thyroid gland has receptors to pick up significant amounts of this element. If it is the Iodine 131 that gives off radiation, then its concentration in the thyroid produces a hot spot of local beta radiation that can cause nearby cells to become cancerous.

This accumulation is prevented if a person first ingests normal non-radioactive Iodine 127. By loading our thyroid cells with harm-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

less iodine, any radioactive iodine passes on through our body and is filtered out by the kidneys and lost in urine.

Therefore, normal iodine neither prevents radioactive iodine from entering the body nor is it an “antidote” for radiation “poisoning” as broadcast by many major network and cable stations, often voiced by a so-called “expert” who has not done his homework.

The error is not confined to one network and is not new. Dan Rather made the same error during the Chernobyl incident long ago on CBS. To a science teacher, such misinformation completely overwhelms what little radiation biology we can teach under today's limited science curriculum.

Does it matter?

Lack of science understanding affects our attitude toward nuclear energy. Misconceptions about radiation run rampant among both proponents and opponents. Our public elections and decisions by our state and federal legislatures reflect widespread science ignorance.

Not so in Japan. The above science-stupid

pronouncements on Japanese radio or television shows would bring overwhelming public correction. Similar to most developed countries (aside from the United States), Japanese students receive two to three times more science coursework in public schools. Physics classes begin much earlier because algebra is studied earlier. Their public understands isotopes and radiation.

But only a small percent of American students take physics and study radiation. Our National Science Education Standards are an embarrassment – an anemic curriculum that also ignores human anatomy and physiology. And the new science Common Core, being developed under a committee loaded with educationists rather than scientists, is anticipated to be even narrower, methods-driven, and content depleted.

The science stupidity being broadcast today to the American public – erroneous information by pseudo-experts – is unforgivable.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.



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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

