



Other Viewpoints

Fix our education but keep the boards

If some state legislators are concerned about a lack of coordination between K-12 schools and higher education in Kansas, they should look at that problem but resist throwing the baby out with the bath water.

House Speaker Mike O'Neal recently announced his intention to pursue a constitutional amendment that would abolish the appointed state Board of Regents and the elected Board of Education and replace them with a single cabinet-level secretary of education appointed by the governor. His main justification was to improve coordination for students from kindergarten through their post-secondary education.

Coordination of those efforts certainly is a good idea, but having an appointed secretary of education isn't guaranteed to improve that situation and would open the door to many undesirable political influences in the state's education system.

The Board of Education went through a difficult time fairly recently when it became politicized and experienced philosophical swings. Think how many more swings might occur if every time a new governor is elected, he or she appoints a single cabinet member with broad authority to set the agenda, curriculum and policies for schools from preschool to college.

Both the Board of Education and the Board of Regents are designed to include members from all parts of the state. School board members are elected with staggered terms by Kansas voters; the regents are appointed to staggered terms and the board often includes members appointed by more than one governor. The system minimizes the political influence of any one group or governor.

It may not be a perfect system, but it provides some key representation for Kansas residents that could be lost under an appointed secretary. Whether by appointment or popular election, the best way to ensure education excellence is to have Board of Regents and state school board members with the courage, wisdom and knowledge needed to make powerful decisions on behalf of Kansas students.

O'Neal said he didn't plan to push for action on the proposed amendment until the next legislative session. Perhaps by then, some less drastic ways can be found to address the speaker's concerns about coordination.

— The Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

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- U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran**, Russell Senate Office Building, Courtyard 4, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6521. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/
- U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 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@senate.state.ks.us
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Who remembers last man on the moon?

Jack Schmitt is probably not a name many people remember. Born Harrison Hagan Schmitt in Santa Rita, N.M., he was a geologist, professor, one-term U.S. Senator and on Dec. 11, 1972, he became the last man to set foot on the moon.

An optimist would say "the most recent man to set foot on the moon," but I've all but given up hope of seeing any more landings in my lifetime. The space shuttles are shuffling through their last flights with nothing to replace them. Sure, we send up a few probes now and then, but really, space travel has fizzled.

Having been born some 12 years after the Apollo program ended, I've always felt like I missed out on something great and momentous. I recently picked up a book called "A Man on the Moon," by Andrew Chaikin. It's an incredibly detailed book based on interviews done in the 1980s with all but one of the Apollo astronauts. (Jack Swigert had died of cancer in 1982 just after being elected to Congress in my home state of Colorado.) I'm about halfway through now, and I can hardly put it down.

I grew up hearing about space travel. I was born on the 15th anniversary of the day Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin blasted off from the surface of the moon. My mom always told how she was at home with me watching television when the space shuttle Challenger exploded (I was 2). And, of course, as a lifelong Trekkie, I've always been interested in both fiction and nonfiction space travel.

My dad, however, had a more direct connection to space program. When the Mercury,



Kevin Bottrell

• Simple tricks and nonsense

Gemini and Apollo capsules came back to Earth, they would splash down in the ocean and be picked up by the Navy.

As a young man, my dad was a helicopter crewman in the Navy. In '72, he was serving on the USS Ticonderoga, the aircraft carrier tasked with picking up the crew of Apollo 17.

I heard the story several times. He and his chopper picked up the rocks that Jack Schmitt and his crewmates, Gene Cernan and Ron Evans, brought back from the moon. I always liked that story because it means my family has a connection to the Apollo program and, in a way, so do I.

I mentioned the book to my dad the other day, and he asked me the astronaut's names — after all it had been 39 years. When he heard the name Jack Schmitt, he said, "I think I shook his hand."

Like most kids, I'd heard a lot about Apollo 11, and some about the fire that killed the crew of Apollo 1. When the Tom Hanks movie "Apollo 13" came out in 1995, it captured my interest along with that of every other moviegoer, and it remains one of my favorites to this day.

But I never knew much about Apollo 17, or

12, 14, 15 and 16, for that matter. It's as if my public school educators decided that once man had walked on the moon the first time, nobody cared about the rest. I never heard names like Pete Conrad, Al Bean, Dave Scott or even Michael Collins, who went 99 percent of the way to the moon with Apollo 11, but had to stay in the command module while his buddies went to the surface to make history. As I'm reading Chaikin's book, I'm finding that the world at the time seemed to feel the same way, and that apathy hasn't gone away.

These days the only time NASA makes the front page is through scandal or tragedy. I still have some hope that our space program will pick up again, but the last few years have been disappointing. Advances like the International Space Station or Europe's robot space freighters that have happened in my lifetime just don't seem to compare.

What we really need is someone to step up and lead. We don't have the Soviets around anymore to compete against, but we could still have a leader like John F. Kennedy stand up and give us a challenge.

Kennedy said we should commit ourselves to putting a man on the moon within 10 years, and we did it. We can and we should do it again; we just need someone to challenge us.

In the meantime, I'll keep reading.

Kevin Bottrell, news editor of the Colby Free Press, is a Colorado State University graduate who believes that the middle road is often the high one. Contact him at kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Spring is twister time in Kansas

May 4, 2007, will be a day many Kansans always remember. On that fateful day, the town of Greensburg, in Kiowa County, was all but wiped off the face of the earth.

The tornado that hit the small Kansas community of 1,500 killed 11 people and injured dozens more. Ninety percent of the town was destroyed, including 961 homes and businesses. Another 216 received major damage. Wind speeds of more than 200 miles per hour accompanied this storm.

Other killer tornadoes occurred that day, with a death in Pratt County and another in Stafford County. Some of these monster twisters were nearly two miles wide. In all, 11 tornadoes occurred May 4.

The next day, another 36 tornadoes were reported in Kansas, falling just short of the all time record of 39 in one day set in June 1992. Fourteen tornado-related fatalities were reported that year, including 82 injuries, according to the National Weather Service in Topeka. Thirteen of these fatalities occurred during the May 4-5 outbreak.

In stark contrast to this tornado onslaught of 2007, Kansas recorded the longest tornado drought in 24 years during 2009. Not until April 22, 2010, did the first tornado touch down in the Sunflower State. Prior to this, the last twister reported in Kansas was back on Aug. 2, 2009. This resulted in 262 days without a reported tornado in Kansas.

There were 88 tornadoes in Kansas last year, making it the 15th most active year in state history. Most were weak, however. Only one, in Kingman County on May 10, earned as much as an EF2 rating. Fortunately, no deaths



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

and no injuries were blamed on tornadoes in Kansas last year.

Tornadoes touched down on 21 days, including 15 tornadoes on May 10. You may remember that day for the swarm of national media attention focused on Kansas because forecasters had predicted a significant outbreak. It never quite materialized — at least with the intensity anticipated.

The first tornado of 2010 came on April 24 in Kearny County, the last on Sept. 25 in Comanche County.

When it comes to safety concerning tornadoes, the bottom line remains the same: tune in, stay informed and keep an eye on the sky.

Remember to pay attention when you hear a tornado watch, because this means severe thunderstorms and tornadoes are possible over a wide area. Tornado warnings are issued when National Weather Service radar indicates tornadoes are forming or a trained weather spotter has sighted a twister. This warning will tell the location, and if possible, direction of movement, estimated speed and the towns in the tornado's path.

Think ahead during this upcoming severe weather season. Listen to forecasts every day, and key into weather conditions in your area.

Know where your nearest shelter is and remember: when a tornado threatens, immediate action may save you and your loved ones' lives.

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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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

