



Other Viewpoints

Budget slash tests schools' ingenuity

Public school officials have cause to be angry about the state of affairs in Topeka. School districts across Kansas have been dealt blow after serious blow by a Kansas Legislature intent on slashing state aid.

The Garden City School District has seen \$7 million in cuts in the past three years, with another \$1 million in cuts expected. It's enough to upset anyone involved in the daily work of providing students with the best possible education.

But when district patrons hear school officials say the situation is such that they have to "do less with less," there's even more cause for concern.

That was the recent take of Superintendent Rick Atha and school board President Mike Utz, commenting on the grim economic situation that saw the board recently eliminate jobs and approve a two-mill hike in the property tax.

The school board cut 14 library paraprofessional and 13 teaching positions in February. Since then, the board chose not to fill the position vacated by Assistant Superintendent for Personnel Shelly Kiblinger, who's on her way to Hutchinson to become superintendent.

The frustration for school officials is understandable, especially as state lawmakers who support deeper cuts fail to consider the cost to communities and the state in shortchanging the school budget.

School officials know, as do many business operators, how difficult it is to get things done with fewer people. Still, we want to believe it's possible to avoid a significant slide in the quality of public education.

"Doing more with less" has become a common catch phrase at a time many businesses that reduced staff during the recession remain determined to survive and even prosper.

While the school district likely won't be able to do more with less financial support, unfortunately, we know the district will do its best to improvise and maintain the quality of local education with less money.

It won't be easy, as fewer people have to work harder to get the job done. School districts must do their best to find a way — just as many businesses have done in a painful economy.

— *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

Where to write, call

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

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

State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7659 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov

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

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 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
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Sports

colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Tomi Miller, Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Reporters
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Andrea Bowers, Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representatives
abowers@nwkansas.com kb Ballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NORWEST 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 NorWest 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 week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



MARGULIES
© 2011 JimMargulies.com

History gets personal over a lifetime

Jim and I have just finished watching "Into the West," a four part series of video disks.

This series produced by Steven Spielberg for TNT told about most of the important historical happenings in this country in the 19th century. Though the family it followed was fictitious, everything else was historically accurate. The actors playing the roles of Comanche Indians even had to learn and speak the Comanche language.

Watching this caused me to think about what I consider to be the most important events during my lifetime.

First was the Great Depression. I was born in 1934, when people were trying to get back to making a decent living. No one felt shame for being poor, because most were poor and everyone tried to help neighbors.

We lived in Oklahoma City. The radio was our pastime and we all listened to stories like "Intersanctum Mysteries," "Amos and Andy" or "One Man's Family" in the evenings.

On Sunday afternoon, Dec. 7, 1941, my mother and the neighbor lady were wallpapering our bedroom when an announcement came over the radio that the Japanese had made a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The next day, President Franklin Roosevelt made a speech stating Dec. 7, 1941, was "a day that would live in infamy." He condemned the Japanese. On Dec. 11, Japan, Germany, Italy and their allies, declared war on the U.S. Congress then declared war on them.

My dad was drafted and my mother took a job as a riveter at an airplane factory in Oklahoma City. A lot of things were scarce during



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

the war, including sugar, rubber and chocolate. We saved foil from candy bars and gum wrappers in a ball and got into afternoon movies free with that or a roll of rubber bands.

One Saturday in February, 1945, my mother was doing wash in the neighbor's garage. She had a ringer washing machine, with an electric ringer you didn't have to crank by hand. She was kind enough to share with mom.

That was when I got that dreaded phone call. Communication is one of the things that has advanced during my lifetime. In those days you could make a person-to-person call and if the person you were calling wasn't there, you didn't have to pay for that call.

This person-to-person call was from the Red Cross asking to speak to my mother. I hurried across the street to get mom. When she got to the phone she was out of breath. She said "Hello" and someone spoke and she just sat silent for a few minutes, then hung up and started crying. The person on the other end had said, "I am sorry to inform you that your brother, Lt. Col. Charles LeRoy Wheaton, was killed when the transport plane he was in exploded on takeoff on Feb. 23. He was buried in French Morocco." Then they just hung up.

We moved to Colby when I was 12.

Next was the Korean War. When Jim, my high-school boyfriend, was a senior in 1951, he was drafted. We were married Nov. 22, 1953, when he was on leave. He left for Seattle Nov. 26 and was shipped to Korea. Luckily, the war was over and he didn't have to fight.

I think it was around 1955 the Vietnam War began. This brought protests and returning servicemen were treated disrespectfully.

On our 10th anniversary, Nov. 22, 1963, President John Kennedy was shot in Dallas. We didn't celebrate much that year.

On July 20, 1969, we gathered around the television to watch Neil Armstrong walk on the moon saying, "One small step for man, and one giant step for mankind."

I was watching in 1986 when they were ready to launch the space shuttle Challenger, with teacher Christa McAuliffe on board. I watched as the astronauts and Christa marched to the ship. I was also watching when the ship exploded just after launch. I just sat and cried.

My daughter Linda called me early on Sept. 11, 2001, to tell me a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York. I turned on the television and had just sat down in my chair when another plane crashed into the other tower. Again, I just sat there and cried.

There have been a lot of other catastrophes, but I have gone on too long. When you get to be my age, your brain gets pretty full. Some things have to escape or it might explode.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here.

Flint Hills burnoff a tallgrass tradition

The sky above the Flint Hills in Riley County was clear and blue as the sun rose April 12. It was a day cattlemen had been waiting for. After days of roaring southerly winds, conditions were calm.

Dew still glistened on the grass as cattlemen everywhere hurried to begin the spring ritual of controlled burning of the tallgrass prairie. In less than two hours after daybreak, the first fires crinkled and cracked as orange flames licked at the Kansas sky, sending smoke climbing to the heavens.

Burning conditions were ideal as Barb Downey and husband Joe Carpenter flicked his Bic starting the first fire at 8:30 a.m. The breeze, 5 to 10 mph out of the south, was already pushing a straight head fire toward the north end of the pasture, where they were setting back fires. Back fires or back burning provide a natural fire break that a head fire cannot cross because there is no fuel (grass) left.

Joe notified Riley County officials of his burn plan in advance. He knows doing so is key to keep prescribed fires from turning into accidental wildfires and ensuring burning is allowed under existing conditions.

"There's still always nervous anticipation when you light that first fire of the day," Carpenter says. "Even with perfect conditions like today, there's always that chance something will sneak around the hill, or leaves will burn through where you didn't think they would, and the worst thing you want to see is a fire out of control."

With that in mind, Carpenter and Downey had carefully orchestrated this 2,000-acre burn with four other neighboring landowners and



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

several ranch hands. More feet on the ground means more people to monitor and control burning.

They've been in constant contact during the last month in an attempt to select this day, based on weather and wind velocity to ensure a safe, controlled burn. Minutes before the first match was struck, all members of the team visited by cell phone.

For Carpenter and Downey, burning their pasture remains part of an ancient phenomenon that began long before humans ever walked these hills. In those days, fires were ignited by lightning storms and the prairie was charred to restore the health of the native grasses.

Today's artificially ignited controlled burning of the tallgrass prairie in east-central Kansas is an annual event designed to mimic nature's match. It has become a tradition, part of the culture of the communities and the people who inhabit this region of our state.

"It's about neighbors helping neighbors," Barb says. "We do together what would be difficult to do alone."

Fire is an essential element of the ecosystem. Burning these pastures is one of the best ways to maintain the native prairie, keeping out invasive trees and brush species.

This annual pasture burning only occurs for a few days each year. It's not a procedure that is drawn out and lasts for weeks. However, weather conditions dictate the length of the burning seasons most years.

"A properly set head fire has a nice, solid line of flames that will carry a lot of heat out ahead of it," Barb says. "Such a fire will singe the growing nodes of any brush and then flash over the grass itself — not burning the grass crowns — but hitting the brush and woody plants hard and doing exactly what a prairie fire is designed to do."

The fire burns so rapidly and passes over so quickly that the ground cools quickly and the grass plants remain undisturbed. The new grass is ready to come out in two or three days.

"There's a decent amount of moisture in the ground," Barb says. "There's plenty of moisture to get the shoots going. Those healthy roots go down six or eight feet in the ground."

With each day of sunshine bearing down on the now-blackened soil, the grass soaks up radiant heat and soon pops out beautiful and green ready for cattle grazing.

Landowners and cattlemen are proud to do their part keeping the native prairie the way it is intended to be — covered with grass. Without the spring burns, this unique grassland would soon disappear, covered with shrubs, woody plants and trees.

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



©2011 by King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved

MALLARDMAIL@GMAIL.COM Tinsley 4-18