



Other Viewpoints

Rehab could help prisons, inmates

A recent study finds that 43 percent of Kansas' released inmates were back in prison within three years. When you consider 8,700 inmates are in Kansas' prisons and another 7,000 incarcerated in county jails, that is an alarming number. From a public safety standpoint, it is an issue. From a financial perspective, it is even bigger. It costs Kansas \$341 million a year to house its inmates.

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback says that reducing the number of repeat convicts would ease that financial burden while rehabilitating them. He says that can be accomplished by matching every inmate leaving prison with a faith-based mentor.

Brownback said that the mentors would help the inmates re-enter society, thus keeping them out of prison. However, he acknowledged that the state probably doesn't have much money to start a prison mentorship program.

Add this one to his wish list, which, amid a challenging budget season for lawmakers, appears to be filled with items that might be considered difficult to realize. Clearly, it is going to require a collaborative effort between the state and private sectors.

The state already has partnered with Prison Fellowship – the world's largest outreach to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families – to sponsor Out4Life, a statewide effort that will bring together more than 250 businesses, nonprofit organizations, churches and other community groups.

The goal is to form local coalitions that help released convicts make successful transitions back to the community.

It sounds like a noble venture and, thanks to the private-sector partnerships, appears to come at a reasonable price. If it drops the amount of money necessary to house the convicts of this state, it makes perfect sense.

Rehabilitating our prisoners used to be a goal. This program could help to make that goal a reality for more inmates.

– *The Hutchinson News, 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, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. 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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DEMOCRACY: Inspired by Ancient Greece



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MARGULIES
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College, region need to build together

Recently I shared some thoughts about the state of Colby Community College and our great challenges for the coming years: enrollment, facilities and funding.

I also raised an issue I wanted to develop further – the interconnectivity between the community and the college.

When I interviewed for my current position, I spoke of wanting to make the college indispensable to the people of northwest Kansas – something so valuable that the community cannot live without it. My sense is that the college has been viewed as important but not essential to the future of the region. Are we the catalyst we should be for the future of northwest Kansas? In what areas must the college invest itself to further cultivate this relationship within the local community?

First and foremost, the college must be committed to providing educational access and opportunities. This is more than just teaching classes. An educational investment is offering programs that meet the needs of our people and the economy of Kansas. Programs like nursing, addressing our nation's aging population; farm and ranch management, addressing the agrarian foundation of our area; and business management, addressing the growing service sector along Interstate 70.

The college must continue to develop collaborative relationships with local school districts, ensuring that students can take college classes while still in high school. The college recently announced a program to allow motivated outreach students – those who graduate high school with 18 hours of college credit through Colby – to earn an associate's degree in a year, tuition free. These and other educational investments by the college are necessary if we ever hope to stem the "brain drain" and population loss we are experiencing. But an educational investment is not enough by itself.

Colby Community College must also make



Steve Vacik

• From the president

a serious commitment to the community. Community is our middle name – really. It is at the core of our mission. As such, we must invest in the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of our community beyond the classroom and campus.

On some levels the college has done that well for years. Many organizations use our facilities and resources for weekly meetings, concerts and conferences. The college has also been host and sponsor to events that enrich the local community. Since I arrived in mid-April, the college has been involved in the Kids Fishing Derby, the High Plains Boy Scout Powwow and the Prairie Fair for grade school children. We are also making a concerted effort to offer continuing education opportunities, classes that can make a difference in our everyday lives on such topics as using new cell phone and smart pad technology, gun safety for women and horsemanship camps. Could we do more? Absolutely – and my hope is that you will see us doing more with and for our community. And that includes reaching into all 14 counties in our service areas, helping to improve the quality of life in each.

Maybe most significantly for the future of northwest Kansas, we must commit to working more closely with economic development than ever before. When I was still in Mississippi, I witnessed tremendous industrial growth in the area in which I lived – companies that 20 years earlier probably wouldn't have given that location a second thought for new projects. Why?

There were a confluence of factors, certainly, but it never failed that when CEOs and plant managers spoke publicly about why they chose to come, they always referred to the community college and the training and support it provided.

At this time, we probably aren't going to land a manufacturing plant that employs 500 people. Then again, we must prepare for the future and the new economy so we can be viewed as a prime location for growth. To stave off the population exodus, growth must be diverse, robust and systematic.

The college is committed to assisting in that effort. Though resources are limited, no one is better positioned to offer training and support necessary. A friend in development once told me never to promise something you couldn't deliver; find out what people need and figure out how to deliver it. My promise, then, is that the college will do whatever we can to further economic development. My experience is also that economic development must adopt a regional approach, but that is a conversation for another time and place.

Colby Community College and northwest Kansas need each other, like any good team. Using our resources and strengths, we will all become stronger and provide a foundation for future success limited only by our imaginations and sacrifices.

In that spirit, thanks to the Colby City Council and Carolyn Armstrong for their support of the upcoming Honeywell project, which will allow us to make some vital infrastructure improvements on campus. Different and better is awfully exciting – at YOUR community college.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. He is a native of Fargo N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

Fix Medicaid by empowering states

If only Washington could check itself in for treatment. It is addicted to overspending, responds to each special interest "problem" with another federal program, and passes the buck to someone else. These compulsions need immediate attention.

In tackling the challenges facing America's health care system, President Obama and the last Congress responded by throwing astronomical amounts of money at the problem – without real accountability. It responded, in part, by expanding an existing federal program – Medicaid – and passed the buck to states.

When Obamacare became law last spring, states were already struggling to keep up with the pre-existing conditions of Medicaid.

Now, states are expected to do Obama's dirty work in fulfilling huge Medicaid mandates. State legislators and governors have to pay for nearly 25 million additional Medicaid enrollees expected to cost more than \$400 billion over the next decade. Given that on average, states cover about one-third of Medicaid mandates, this will strain states even further.

Medicaid spending was already proving challenging for states. How couldn't it when the number of Medicaid enrollees has grown from 35 million to 60 million over the past 10 years and when Medicaid spending in the



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

states has soared by 192 percent over the past 20 years?

There are times when people find themselves needing assistance from programs like Medicaid. However, Obamacare's expansion of the eligibility threshold modifies Medicaid so that it is no longer about serving the poor and disabled, but about making Medicaid an open-access program that serves middle-class Americans. Those who earn 134 percent of the poverty level will be eligible for Medicaid come 2014.

In the Kansas State Senate, I was part of a Medicaid task force that evaluated how the Sunflower State could improve its Medicaid program. The biggest hurdles we found? Washington's red tape.

States need flexibility to deal with Medicaid as they see fit. In the same way that one set of education standards does not work for all

50 states, neither does one set of standards for Medicaid. Kansas, New York and Nevada have little in common when it comes to meeting the needs of patients and providing the methods of delivery.

House Republicans have not only passed legislation to roll back these onerous requirements on the states by eliminating Obamacare, but have also passed legislation to make Medicaid spending more efficient while simultaneously preserving access to Medicaid for those who need it.

The House has passed – with the support of many of the country's governors – a bill to change the way states receive Medicaid funding. By changing to a system of block grants, folks closest to American citizens – governors, legislators and local officials – not some bureaucrats sitting in Washington, D.C. – will make decisions best for their citizens and design programs that work best for their states and their people.

It is time to check in Medicaid for a much-needed treatment, an update to a 46-year-old program. Failing to embrace this alternative treatment of Medicaid only enables a spending-addicted Washington.

Tim Huelskamp is the congressman from Kansas' 1st District, serving his first term.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

