

Other Viewpoints

Dropping services moves cost down

Since 1973, the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services has been tasked with protecting the state's children and promoting adult self-sufficiency. Through its oversight, it serves more than half a million Kansans.

We're not sure if the agency's mission is changing under Secretary Rob Siedlecki, but the methods of carrying out that mission certainly are. Since being appointed by Gov. Brownback, Siedlecki has been reinventing the safety net the department is supposed to provide. The pair's commitment to a "culture of life" and faith-based initiatives might render that safety net unrecognizable, however.

With the start of the new fiscal year and the requirement to find more than \$40 million in savings, transformation is in full swing. So far, the agency has announced it would:

- Reduce county social services offices from 42 to 33.
- Consolidate the six administrative regions to four.
- Terminate superintendents for two state hospitals.
- Lay off or accept the retirements of other agency officials.
- Cut all contracts and grants by 3 percent.
- Eliminate funding for the Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health.
- Eliminate other grants for mental health services.
- Reduce Medicaid reimbursements by 2.5 percent for social services and mental health treatments (currently on hold).
- Explore privatizing or closing the Kansas Neurological Institute, state hospital for severely developmentally disabled.
- Create a division for faith-based or community initiatives.
- Reduce Rainbow Mental Health Facility in Kansas City.
- Stop accepting referrals to overcrowded state hospitals.

"We don't know where SRS is taking us," said Amy Campbell, executive director of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition.

We believe we have an inkling. It appears the agency is going to effect significant savings at the state level, even though the need for services is increasing. The costs cut by the state will be transferred to the local level.

If cities and counties pick up the tab, expect increases in property taxes. If cities and counties don't, law enforcement agencies will be forced to use more of their resources. Which will lead to steady increases in property taxes.

In short, anything the department or the governor will claim they saved taxpayers simply won't be true. The money still will be coming out of taxpayer pockets. And likely it will be more than before this shell game began.

To be fair, they are not just about cutting. Siedlecki said the department was developing a "fatherhood initiative" to help reduce childhood poverty.

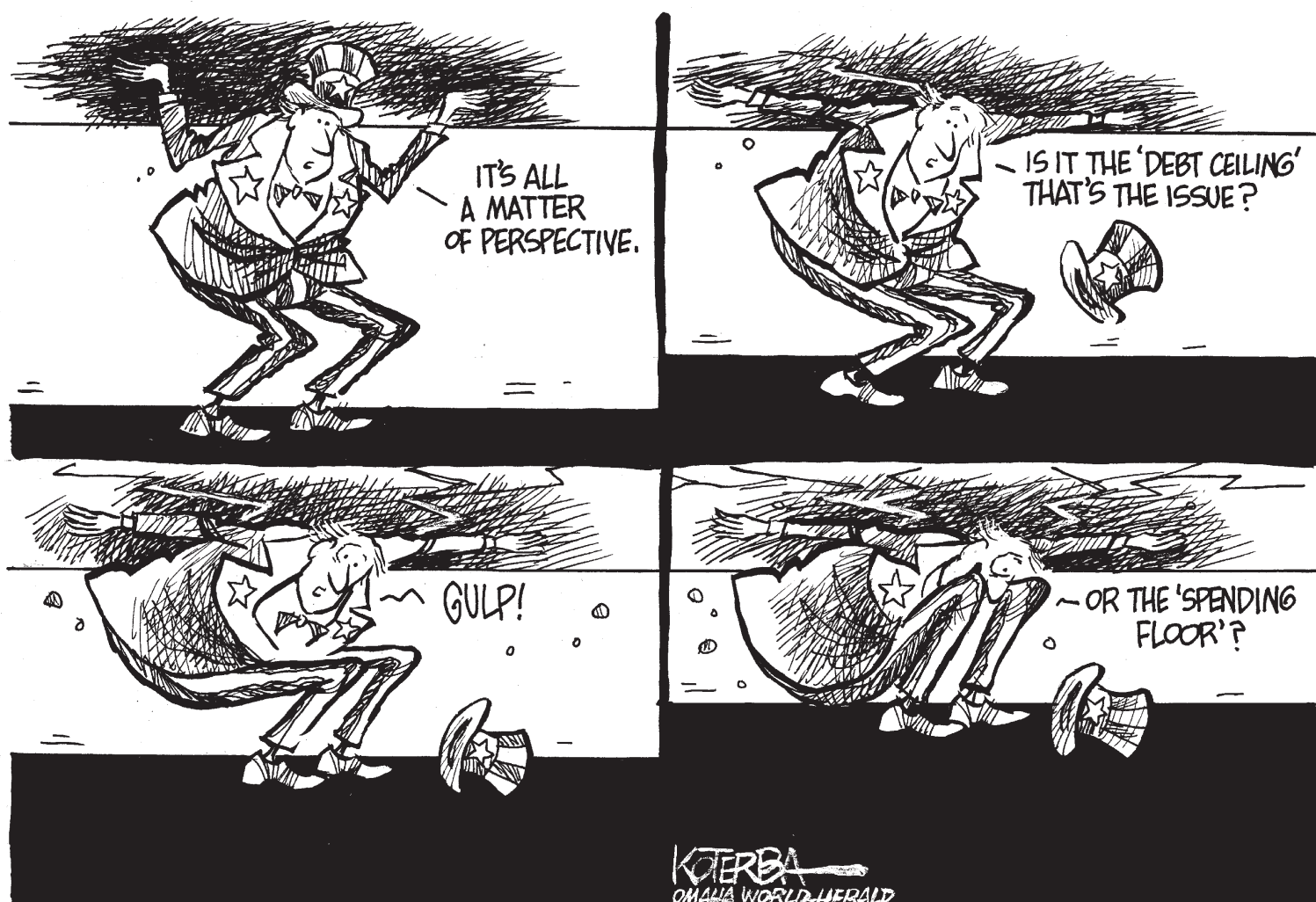
And as then Sen. Brownback wrote in his book "From Power to Purpose" in 2007, marriage is the best solution to the problems of overall poverty. This year, the agency is preparing to launch a Kansas Healthy Marriage Initiative.

To help develop the initiative, state taxpayers paid \$13,000 to bring conservative Christians from around the country to the Kansas Family Strengthening Summit.

And we haven't yet heard about the adoption initiative. Things are going from bad to worse in Topeka as far as we're concerned. That concern is shared by many in mental health, social agencies and law enforcement.

Strengthening religious beliefs is the job of the church - not the state. They are separated for a reason.

- The Hays Daily News, via the Associated Press



Kid's books deserve a second look

July seems to be a month of goodbyes. Not only are we bidding farewell to the space shuttle, which is set to return to Earth for the last time Thursday (my birthday), but we have also seen the end of the beloved Harry Potter film franchise.

I was a latecomer to the Harry Potter phenomenon. My parents began reading the books long before I did. As so often happens, students in my mom's fifth grade classes were reading the books and she figured she should as well, so she would know a little about what they were reading. She loved them and got my dad into them as well.

I've been a fantasy genre fan, ever since my parents read J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" around the dinner table, but I still resisted. "They're kids' books," I told them. Sure I had friends my age who were reading them, but I had more serious books to read. Besides, I was in college and had textbooks to read and papers to write. The first two movies were out on video and I watched them when my parents bought them. Although I enjoyed it, they still seemed like they were for kids.

Then I saw the third film, "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban," in the theater. I was dating a girl at the time who was a huge fan and convinced me to go. That film was what really got me into Harry Potter, because that's the point in the series where it really stops being for kids. From the third book and film the series starts to delve into more adult themes



Kevin Bottrell

• Simple tricks and nonsense

like murder, revenge and love.

I liked the third movie so much I finally decided to give the books a try, and once I did I couldn't put them down. I'm sure it took me less than two weeks to read all the way from the start of book one to the end of book five, which was as far as the series had gone at the time. They were incredible. Great story lines, great characters, great action. Everything you could want out of a good story.

The sixth book came out during the summer when I was working as a resident assistant in the dorms at Colorado State University. I read it in one day. I hadn't really set out to do that, but I did suspect that a friend of mine would read it in a day and I should keep up. It took all day, I started in the morning and finished in the evening. I kept going to see the movies as well, and they kept getting better, especially under director David Yates, who took over for parts five, six and seven.

The seventh and final book came out after I had graduated (on my birthday - I'm sensing a pattern). This time it took me two days. I was,

after all, a working man by that time. It was almost disappointing how quickly it went. The book was fantastic, don't get me wrong, I was just sorry to see the series end.

Now with part two of the seventh movie out (near my birthday, but not on it) we have really come to the end. I saw it Sunday night, and it was as fantastic as the book had been. But again, I'm sorry to see the end.

Plenty of authors have been jockeying to have "the next Harry Potter" series. Only the Twilight series has come close to that level of success. That series, however, does not have a positive recommendation from my mom. I have been reading *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin, and while that series hasn't had quite the effect on me that Harry Potter did, the books are very good nonetheless.

So let this be a lesson to all you readers out there. Don't judge a book till you've read it. I thought the Harry Potter series was going to be a bunch of silly kids' books, but boy was I wrong. I still go back and reread them every so often. It doesn't take long to go from start to finish. I'm glad I got over my preconceptions and finally converted to the cult of Harry Potter.

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@nwkanssas.com

Crops scorched; optimism still green

If you're a Kansas farmer you've probably jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. The fire in this case is the continuing scalding temperatures and lack of precipitation.

Here's what I'm talking about. Ben McClure, Stevens County, farms a few miles from the Oklahoma line and not far from the Colorado border. Here in far southwestern Kansas conditions are bone dry.

McClure has received one inch of moisture since he drilled his wheat crop back in mid-September. That's 10 months ago.

Ben told me he's looked at the Garden City K-State Research Station stats and the average precipitation from October through May is 8.93 inches. These records go back to 1921. That means he's nearly eight inches short.

"All I can say is it's dry," McClure says. "It's hard. It's not going to be a good year."

Temperatures have been topping the 100 degree mark and it's hurting the young producer's crop every day. While he can't say for certain, the Stevens County farmer believes corn yields will be down 100 bushels per acre in some fields, especially in southwestern Kansas. Some may even be abandoned.

As of mid-July he's still hopeful he'll harvest 200-bushel corn. But that may be a stretch, especially if no moisture comes.

The really bad thing about his fall crops of corn, sunflowers and cotton is their yields will be down on the heels of a disastrous wheat crop. McClure's dry-land wheat was a complete bust as crop adjusters estimated it to yield one-third of a bushel per acre. He did harvest 800 acres of pretty good irrigated wheat.

Still the fall crops suffer each day without moisture - even the irrigated crops. With temperatures as hot as Hades, the fall crops require a ton of water. By 9:30 in the morning, as Mc-



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

Clure drives through his fields looking at the crops, his corn is already starting to stress and the temps are still only about 80 degrees.

"The leaves on the corn are already starting to curl up and trying to protect any moisture the crop has," McClure notes. "A half day after the sprinkler moves past the corn it's already suffering from lack of moisture. We can't keep enough moisture on our crops."

The Stevens County farmer is pouring as much water to the crop he can. Standard operating procedure is for the pivot irrigation system to make a complete circle over a quarter (160 acres minus the four corners) in three and one half days. During this period, one inch or moisture is delivered to the corn crop.

That's under ideal conditions if each irrigation well can provide enough water. Some of McClure's wells don't pump enough water to put one inch of water on the crop in three and a half days.

Some of his systems take longer - up to five days. That's too long and the crop yields continue to decrease.

"When Mother Nature cooperates, you have an easier time farming," McClure says. "This heat is cooking our crops."

Just a little north of McClure's farm - between Sublette and Garden City - the corn plants have already flashed. There's no green pigment left, he says.

"These crops are scorched, scalded and burnt up," the Stevens County farmer says. "Corn fields are uneven. Some are tasseled while others are knee high."

McClure knows 2011 is going to be a difficult year income wise. He knows all too well that even though commodity prices are high, a farmer still has to grow the bushels to sell.

So how's the 38-year-old grain producer doing facing such challenges?

"Oh, I guess good," McClure says. "There's still plenty to worry about ... at night. There's still tomorrow."

Absolutely there's another day. He's got sprinklers to keep running. McClure believes he has "a great group of guys" helping him. He knows they're doing all they can to keep the thirsty crops watered.

McClure realizes he's not in this dilemma by himself. He's concerned about his neighbors who farm, businesses in his community and other farmers and towns across western Kansas that will suffer because of the drought.

"If only we could get some rain, but even with rains, it'll take several years to heal," McClure says.

In spite of the current situation, McClure wouldn't trade his farming vocation for any other. He considers himself blessed to be a farmer and have the opportunity to grow crops and livestock for others.

"It's a real privilege and honor to be able to do that," McClure says.

Make no mistake about it. He will persevere.

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



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