



## Other Viewpoints

# Governor needs to be more open

Gov. Sam Brownback has kept an impressively public schedule, showing up all over Kansas for summits and other events. But his policymaking needs more transparency and less “trust us,” with more opportunities for Kansans to see and shape his planned transformations of tax policy, school finance, Medicaid, social services and more.

As it is, Kansans have heard only bits and pieces about the big changes said to be coming in time for the 2012 legislative session, with little information about whose ideas – and agendas – are fueling reforms including a reduction of individual and corporate income-tax rates; a new school-finance formula changing the base level of state support and enabling school districts to raise property and sales taxes; and a Medicaid overhaul to dramatically cut costs without cutting eligibility.

According to the Kansas Health Institute News Service, the administration also is working on a major reorganization of the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services affecting programs for the physically and developmentally disabled and the elderly as well as mental health and substance abuse programs. The administration also has been less than forthright about its plans to promote marriage, including a closed-door brainstorming session in April with some out-of-state activists who hold extreme views.

In addition, Brownback acknowledged recently that he had asked representatives of the giant investment and advisory firm Blackstone Group “for input” on how to reduce spending and improve efficiency. He said the state isn’t paying Blackstone – which, according to higher-education officials, is preparing a report for Brownback. Earlier, his office had told the *Lawrence Journal-World* that Blackstone hadn’t been hired to work on the governor’s behalf.

And when the *Journal-World* recently asked for minutes, agendas and policy papers of the tax task force, which is being led by Revenue Secretary Nick Jordan and meeting behind closed doors, the Brownback administration said it may take until Nov. 30 to respond to the request.

Reagan economist Arthur Laffer is the only individual known to be involved outside of other administration officials and some GOP members of the House and Senate tax committees.

Brownback took issue with the suggestion that his tax policymaking had been private, pointing to public meetings he’d had across the state. “This is not being developed clandestinely,” he said.

But as Senate President Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, recently said in announcing his own bipartisan tax-cutting advisory committee: “There are a lot of ideas being floated around, but what they all seem to be missing is citizen input. This isn’t something that should be done behind closed doors by a bunch of bureaucrats.”

Regarding the governor’s thinking on education, policy adviser Landon Fulmer recently said, “We believe excellence boils up from the bottom.”

If so, surely they also recognize that historic reforms aiming for excellence shouldn’t be cooked up in secret and imposed on the state from the top down.

With the 2010 election having left the Legislature rich with conservatives ready to implement Brownback’s sweeping agenda without much second-guessing, transparency and scrutiny are needed now.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansan.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.

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**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 Nor’West 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.

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# Holiday choice: give instead of gorging

In the front office is a basket of treats for kids who stop in. In my in-box e-mail, there’s pictures and stories about Christmas – specifically Operation Christmas Child.

All in all, I have to say I think better thoughts about the Christmas gift wrap.

Sure, I have warm fuzzy memories about the pink fairy costume I had when I was about five. I also have warm, slightly less fuzzy memories about the homemade clown costume that superseded it, after doing a turn or three as my older brother’s costume.

Trick-or-treating when I was a kid was different than it seems to be today. All these years later, I could probably sit down and write a list of the houses I went to. My grandparents, my aunt, and every house on my block – and that’s about it.

If a kid today was held to that limit, they’d howl with outrage.

When I was a little older, we would go trick or treat for UNICEF. Back then, nobody needed to be told what that was about. It was to help children in poor countries. But in the office today, there’s a definite generation gap – well-informed younger folks haven’t a clue, generally, though editor Kevin Bottrell was



## Marian Ballard

### • Collection Connections

able to connect it with aid to children in some form.

The United Nations Children’s Fund is the full name of UNICEF, and it still exists, in spite of a rather rocky history. If memory serves, there was a scandal about embezzling or some such, way back when. All I know is that one year we were collecting nickels and dimes for them, and the next year we were not. Very little was said about why.

Fast-forward to today. Kids don’t count their treats, they weigh them. Yet they probably don’t value them any more than the few pieces I got, which were really tokens that said my adult neighbors recognized me as a person and not just something to trip over.

In between were years when Halloween was downplayed. After all, it’s really an anti-Christ-

tian festival falling right before All Saints’ Day. In some communities I’ve lived in, there was a real dark side to it, everything up to and including sacrificed cats.

That’s probably why I’m encouraged by the publicity for Operation Christmas Child. The program, started by Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, does a little of what UNICEF was meant to do, reaching out to touch the difficult lives of children in far away places. But it’s hard to embezzle a shoe box full of gifts. It’s hard to make a pair of mittens into anything but a warm offer of friendship across the miles. And it’s not giving more candy to kids who already have too much sugar, too little exercise, and very little appreciation for the excess offered to them.

Have fun with Halloween. But think beyond it, and help chase away some real goblins with a Christmas gift that can make a difference.

*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.*

# Faster connections not necessarily better

Communication and the written word ain’t what it used to be. Neither is the King’s English, grammar, punctuation or just about any integral part of listening, speaking and writing.

Why should we learn the basics of communicating in a world where today’s smart phone technology can and will do everything for us?

Today, we’re busier than any time in our history trying to keep up with the latest technology of talking to one another. It’s about brevity and moving forward swiftly, silly.

Don’t believe me, just ask the masses who today worship at the altar of these hand-held icons. You can talk, text, tweet, Facebook, photograph, play music, games, wake up, go to sleep, find a place to eat, check on the weather, – do almost anything you wish except maybe think for yourself with these wonderful rascals.

To some extent, we all rely on the latest technology to accomplish many of the tasks we once learned to do ourselves. You know carrying on a conversation, telling a story, writing a letter, adding and figuring mathematical solutions in our heads, remembering, communicating a message – actually making contact with another human being – visiting in person.

People I know are dying for human interaction. They just don’t know how to make the connection anymore.

That’s why we need to return to the basics of communication. It’s all about the destination or the journey’s end.

Answer the following question. If you were to drive from Salina to Kansas City, how would this trip be different from 1950?

You might respond the highways are much wider and smoother. Others would say today we have the Interstate system and toll roads. Someone else might respond that we have many more places to buy fuel and food – and these businesses stay open 24-hours each day.

All good answers, but what if I were to ask, what hasn’t changed?

The answer is the journey’s end. That remains the same, Kansas City.



## John Schlageck

### • Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

Today the latest/greatest technology is just around the corner waiting to be purchased. There will always be the next generation tablet, smart phone or laptop for those with the money or desire to possess them. We have been conditioned or conditioned ourselves to believe we must have PCs with us at all times and all places.

How can we live without them?

My question is how can we truly live with them?

That is the real challenge. We have become slaves to each new wave of technology; we replace our obsolete models with the latest, greatest version. At the same time, we trick ourselves into believing each new change will result in communication being done quicker.

Quicker?

Possibly.

Better?

Don’t bet on it.

There is no relationship between the tools used in writing and the ability to write or communicate. Instead the results can be far worse because we often labor forever over the copy or in most cases, we simply schlock words out there for the world to see without protocol including misspelled words, incomplete sentences, improper and unnecessary punctuation and incorrect grammar. Today in our haste it’s all about garbled garbage and plenty of it.

Regardless of the technology we use, the destination or journey’s end remains the same. Good letters, text messages, stories and communication that informs, reveals and motivates other human beings to action not consternation and confusion.

Remember, it is not the tool we use to com-

municate that is necessary, it is the thought we hope to convey to others. After thinking about what we wish to communicate or the story we hope to convey, we write it, edit it, review the piece again and rewrite the final draft. Strive to do your best.

All around us are examples of great speeches, letters and broadcasts – the Gettysburg Address, the radio broadcast of the Hindenburg crash, FDR’s fire side chat, “The only thing we have to fear, is fear itself...,” President Kennedy’s quest to land on the moon, “We choose to go to the moon in this decade... not because they are easy, but because they are hard...”

These carefully chosen and crafted words had power and meaning. They described scenes, situations and events with riveting anticipation and spontaneity.

The main reason for their greatness and longevity is that no matter how plain and primitive the tools used to convey them, those who uttered these words never lost sight of the destination.

As we work with the latest technology, never forget this. After all, what good is the message if the recipient cannot understand and is not moved to action?

*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.*

## Write us

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## Mallard Fillmore

### • Bruce Tinsley

