



Other Viewpoints

Goals praiseworthy, but where's detail?

Speaking to Kansans last week from the House chamber, Gov. Sam Brownback could point to a landmark achievement of his first year in office – the end of the budget crisis – as he set some huge and worthy goals for his second.

If he failed to mention the severe budget cuts that helped turn a \$500 million deficit into a projected surplus of at least \$200 million, or to explain how it would be fair to cut income-tax rates while leaving the 2010 sales-tax increase in place and taxing income-tax credits that help low-income Kansans, or to acknowledge that his preferred school-finance reform could force property-tax hikes on local districts. Well, State of the State addresses are for broad, carefully shaded strokes, not hard truths.

The governor is right about Kansas needing to see its population and economy grow. And it was great to hear him aim for an ending balance even more generous than the statutory requirement of 7.5 percent, to resolve to “stop digging” the hole that is the state pension system’s unfunded liability, to take on Medicaid’s rising costs, to advocate the state pay down its debt, and to call for repeal of the state’s “use-it-or-lose-it” doctrine on water.

But as House Minority Leader Paul Davis, D-Lawrence, argued in the Democratic response to Brownback’s speech, many Kansans would sooner see their property taxes cut than their state income taxes.

And it continues to boggle the mind how conservatives such as Brownback, who so decried the 2010 sales-tax hike upon its passage, could now so blithely embrace its continuation, even as the Kansas Chamber of Commerce works to unseat lawmakers who voted for it.

The hard part for Brownback will be selling the details of all of the above, especially when the administration has been so insular and single-minded in crafting its reform plans. If the governor expects passage, he’ll have to explain a myriad of details and calm as many fears. Social services, which have taken a beating in recent budget cycles, especially deserve to have their priorities addressed as state revenues increase.

Brownback also may be misreading Kansans’ view on public schools. Those parents who “know what’s best for their kids,” as he suggested, also know that their local schools have had to spend too much time cutting teachers and programs the past few years. Though his reform proposes not to reduce state aid further, there are reasons to wonder about that as well as his claim that his new formula would end the cycle of lawsuits.

It will be up to the GOP-led Legislature, election year and all, to be sure that Brownback’s ideas align with the state’s needs. Kansans can help, by making sure their governor’s confident voice isn’t the only one heard under the Statehouse dome.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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Record of history should stay open

An unusual request by a former public official charged with stealing from his employer highlights problems with pleas to change history.

Steven Collier, former Barber County public works director, faces trial in federal court on charges of stealing vehicles and money from the county while he worked there. He has asked the court to eliminate a provision of his pretrial release agreement that requires his probation officer, as a condition of his bail, to inform his supervisor at any job he takes of the charges against him.

Mr. Collier’s lawyer, Douglas Adams, claimed in court filings that this has resulted in him losing at least one job, saying the defendant could become destitute as a result.

It’ll be interesting to see what the judge decides, because our courts have a long history of openness when it comes to criminal cases. However, an affirmative requirement that the probation officer go out and talk to employers is a bit unusual.

Whatever happens, it’s hard to argue that the charges pending against any defendant should be a secret. We know someone charged with a crime is innocent until proven guilty, but surely the defendant himself owes it to any new employer to tell them about the charges.

And certainly, the public record in criminal cases must remain open. That’s a critical part of our system, designed as much to protect de-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

fendants from trumped up charges as to protect the public.

The allegations against Mr. Collier do not amount to petty crime. According to the government, while he was the county’s road boss, he and his wife managed to get title to a semi-trailer rig and dump truck paid for by the county. These later allegedly were sold, along with a John Deere tractor the couple supposedly put on Craigslist.

Another count alleges that the couple forged an invoice for steel beams, then used the money to buy a bulldozer which they sold. Both pleaded not guilty to all counts.

It’s a pretty amazing story. It’s hard to believe that any prospective employer would not want to know about these charges. If it was me, I’d be pretty careful about hiring anyone who’d been accused of blatant stealing from his last employer. It’s vital for a manager to be able to trust his or her employees.

It’s quite possible someone would hire such a person while he or she was awaiting trial,

especially someone who knew the person and had a job where they would not handle money or be able to charge to the company’s accounts. But that employer should be able to make an informed decision.

In a related issue, sometimes people go back to court years later and ask to have old convictions or records expunged on the grounds that they’ve behaved for years. And sometimes, that might be fair. Anyone who has changed his spots might deserve a clean record and a second chance.

There should be conditions, though. Any subsequent conviction ought to wipe out the change and reopen the court records.

That’s something for judges to decide, however. As a newspaper, we can’t alter what we have printed. We can only issue a retraction if something is wrong. In our electronic archive, which reflects exactly what was printed, we would refuse to change anything that was factual and correct, though we might add a note if a record had been expunged.

History is history, though, and facts are facts. And when people start trying to rewrite history, that should send up a red flag.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Kansas Senate faces big workload

The 2012 legislative session is under way and will probably be controversial. We will begin the session by setting new boundaries for all House, Senate and congressional districts.

Chairman Tim Owens said hearings on each chambers’ districts would begin weekly starting Friday. I remain confident that we will retain as many western Kansas seats as possible.

We should not have lost a Senate district during the last reapportionment, and I will do my best to preserve representation. This all needs to be done in a timely manner to meet the June filing deadline.

A few other important issues that will require a lot of discussion:

- Major adjustment of the state’s retirement fund.
- Medicaid reform.
- Overhaul of school finance.
- Which departments get cuts restored from increased revenues.
- Tax reform.



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

• Water policies.

It won’t be long before we will be doing town hall tours. I always enjoy the feedback on these issues.

The Kansas Restaurant and Hospitality Association had their annual food bar set up at the Ramada Inn, and I could not help noticing some interesting statistics. The association says it represented 9 percent of the total jobs in Kansas in 2011 and generated \$3.6 billion in projected sales in 2011.

Every dollar spent in Kansas restaurants generates an additional \$1.01 in sales for other industries in the state. Each \$1 million spent

in Kansas eating and drinking places generates 28.8 jobs in Kansas.

The governor’s State of the State address presented his outline on directives for getting our fiscal house in order. I’m concerned with his education proposal but realize this will get fair hearings in both chambers and the final outcome will serve the needs of my districts.

The governor has made some really bold proposals, and I am not sure this will be the year he will get all of it done. I do support Gov. Brownback, and I will give him the attention he needs as long as rural Kansas isn’t penalized.

If you are a student age 12 to 17 who would like to be a page this session, call my office and schedule a Monday.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

Law forces cyber students on military

Despite data that show graduates from virtual high schools perform worse, Congress has placed language into a bill that requires the armed forces to end their quota on cyber students.

According to the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, the House Armed Services Committee inserted the requirement into the 2012 Defense Budget that President Obama signed into law last Saturday.

Along with General Educational Development certificate holders, graduates of cyber schools had been placed in a second tier of military applicants, with the maximum quota for Tier 2 students being ten percent for the Army, five percent for the Navy and one percent for the Air Force.

And the armed forces have good reasons for limiting the number of students they accept who study online under the “anytime, anywhere” regime. According to Pentagon spokeswoman Eileen Lainez: “Years of research and experience show recruits with a traditional high school diploma are more likely to complete their initial three years of service.”

She has the data to back up the military’s concern. Recruitment records going back to the advent of computers and the internet show



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

that 28 percent of traditional school graduates leave the military before completing their terms of service, while 39 percent of the Tier 2 students default.

As cyber students attempt doctoral study in college, similar weaknesses have likewise appeared as university graduate schools gain experience with virtual school students. Each month, more university professional programs at the doctoral level are likewise denying transfer credit for online courses.

Despite the fact that cyber students have a worse track record and are substantially more likely to not complete their terms of service and thereby cost the military more, our politicians appear eager to ignore military policies based on their direct experience with cyber kids and their poor track record.

Following the “No Child Left Behind” disaster, it is not surprising that our legislators

in Washington continue to pass laws that ignore the realities in education. Perhaps they will also consider repealing the law of gravity, rounding off the value of pi to 3.00, and outlawing tornadoes.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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