

Other Viewpoints

Change takes time

Change is hard, and the sheer volume of change being thrown at Kansans this year is bound to make us uncomfortable. What would help, however, would be for Kansans to be confident that the elected and appointed public officials who are pushing these changes have a full understanding of their consequences.

The administration may have identified some problems that need to be addressed. However, as the state considers major overhauls in its tax system, its school finance system, its Medicaid system, its employee retirement system and other areas, it seems that officials too often fall back on phrases like "we need to do better" or "we have a plan for that" rather than being able to address the specific concerns of people who will be directly affected by these changes.

State officials say they have held many meetings across the state to gather input before formulating their plans, but they seem unprepared to address the issues that presumably would have been raised in such meetings. To whom were they talking? Were they listening to what was said? Their responses leave the impression that the officials don't fully understand the issues involved or simply aren't interested in changing their proposals to respond to constituent concerns.

The kind of major changes being proposed by Gov. Sam Brownback and his staff this year take time to develop and implement. The governor has only been back in the state for 14 months after 16 years in Washington, D.C. Members of his administration who are spearheading these changes have been in their current offices for 14 months – or less. Those who have come from out of state haven't had time to get to know Kansas or many of the key players who could offer sound perspectives and good advice on the changes that are being proposed.

That lack of context and study was apparent in last summer's decision to close Kansas Social and Rehabilitation Services offices in Lawrence and several other communities. Only after the closings were announced was there any discussion about how the closures would affect the communities and what mitigating steps might be considered.

Now, Kansans have other questions. How will a new school finance plan that freezes state funding after several years of large cuts and almost guarantees funding inequities among districts achieve the governor's goal of ending the cycle of lawsuits over education funding? How will private insurance companies provide better service to Medicaid recipients at a lower cost than the state while still making a profit? How will reducing or eliminating the Earned Income Tax Credit actually benefit low-income, working Kansans?

A representative of the American Legislative Exchange Council, a Washington, D.C.-based policy group, helped open legislative hearings on the governor's plan to reform the state tax code last week. He and controversial economist Arthur Laffer obviously think the plan is a good idea – at least in the theory – but that doesn't necessarily mean it's the best plan for Kansas.

Constituents aren't the only ones with important questions. In almost every committee hearing, both Republican and Democratic legislators are raising concerns about the proposals that are on the table. State legislators need more time to study these issues and talk to people around the state about their impact.

At this point, there seem to be far more questions than answers about major policy measures. The governor and state legislators need to make sure they take time to get the answers before making major changes that could move the state in the wrong direction.

– The Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

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.

Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor

colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Kylie Freeman - Office Manager
kfreeman@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Gary Meyer, Pressmen

Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear,

Tracy Traxel, Mailing

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

I'M SURE MANY CATHOLICS WOULD PREFER HEAVY-METAL GUITAR MASSES!!!

CHOCOLATE-FLAVORED COMMUNION WAFERS!!!

ASH THURSDAY!!! CONFESSIONS BY TWITTER!!!

AND THE TEN SUGGESTIONS!

WHY CAN'T BISHOPS BE MORE FLEXIBLE – LIKE US?!



Jackrabbit hunt takes a twist

When Jim (now my husband) and I were in high school, we often did things that a sensible adult would never do.

Like many teenagers today, we must have had a misguided feeling that we possessed some invisible shield that would protect us from all harm and that we would live forever. That is what led us to go out in a pasture in Jim's old 1941 Chevrolet coupe to hunt for jackrabbits and coyotes.

One of our best friends during that period was a hilarious teenager named Don Carter. Don had the loudest, craziest laugh I ever heard, or will ever hear again, because Don left this world several years ago to go entertain God in Heaven.

One Sunday when we were in high school, I invited Jim and Don to go with me to the old Colby Methodist Church. Thank goodness Jim insisted we set in the very last pew.

It so happened we had a visiting preacher that Sunday who was a rather exuberant speaker. At one point during his talk, he let out a loud outburst and his false teeth flew out into his hands. There were a few snickers, but for the most part people tried to wait quietly for him to put his teeth back in and continue.

Not Don. He started slapping his knees and letting out the loudest, craziest laugh he could come up with. Everyone turned around looking to see who was being so rude. I was so embarrassed I wanted to crawl under the seat.

After church I was quick to get out of there before anyone could ask any questions. Don, on the other hand, was still laughing as we exited the church.

Well, back to the story I started with. We began our hunting trip at sunset one warm fall day. Don was driving Jim's car and Jim was



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

sitting by the passenger door with his rifle in hand and ready in case he saw anything worth shooting. I sat in the middle.

I don't know if it's the same today, but in those days we could take a dead rabbit or a coyote to a place in a nearby town and they would pay us for it. The farmers were anxious to get rid of animals that were eating their crops and harming their cattle. We had also been warned many times about wild animals such as rabbits, coyotes, squirrels and ground squirrels being infected with rabies and other dangerous diseases, so we were always on the lookout for signs of disease.

After hunting for a while, we hadn't had much success. Finally, Jim decided he would get out on the fender so he could get up higher and have a better view.

OK, keep in mind now, we were going through a rough field full of holes, ridges and rocks with that crazy Don Carter driving and Jim on the front fender. By this time, the sun had gone down, so we had to turn on the car lights. Remember, I DO NOT RECOMMEND THIS.

It didn't take long before Jim shouted that he saw a jackrabbit. Don stopped the car and Jim jumped off and took a shot.

The next thing I knew, Jim was running along beside the car, going the opposite direc-

tion, and the jackrabbit was chasing him.

Don started laughing that maniacal laugh of his as he wildly turned the car around and took out driving over rocks, holes and ruts trying to catch up with Jim. I, on the other hand, without the benefit of a seat belt, was bouncing up and down like a jumping bean – hitting my head on the top of the car and biting my tongue.

When Jim finally stopped running long enough I was able to pull him into the car. Then he and Don were both laughing. Thinking about Jim running from a jackrabbit made me start laughing, too.

We didn't get any animals that day, but we did have a good story to tell at school. Yeah, we were a bunch of crazy kids.

After my last Snippet about the bowling alleys in Colby was published, Pat Young told me that I missed one of Colby's bowling alleys. She said it was in what is now the Colby American Legion building in the early 1960s. Jerry Messamore said it had eight or maybe even 12 lanes. Charlie Schwanke said it was managed by Bill Helus.

Messamore also said that the late Buss Wolf once operated a duck bowling alley in the building just east of the alley behind Bill Keck's Colby Furniture and Home Store. Schwanke said a duck pin is like a regular bowling pin but only eight inches tall and a little fatter. He said the balls are about five inches in diameter and have no holes. That was many years ago.

I guess Colby people are crazier about bowling than I thought.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Water proposals flowing fast

It's decision-making time on farms across Kansas. In approximately two months, the fields will be alive as farmers begin planting next fall's crops.

In preparation for this upcoming planting season grain farmers need to decide soon which crops they'll plant, fertility and herbicide programs, plant populations, plant varieties and equally important, how much water they'll have available to irrigate specific crops.

Another wrench in this production planning involves insurance companies who are hammering out how to implement their irrigated versus dryland policies. At the same time the deadline for sign-ups is fast approaching.

It goes without saying, Kansas crop producers have their plates full trying to make decisions impacting their bottom lines and their future livelihood in the agricultural industry.

Still, some producers like McPherson County farmer/stockman Derek Sawyer took time to travel to the Statehouse to tell this side of the story. Garnering the full attention of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Sawyer told these legislators just how important the proposed multi-year flex account would benefit his family's cropping operation.

Sawyer who operates a fourth-generation dry-land and irrigated corn, wheat, soybean and milo farm with wife, Katie, told the legislators, "... it is time for Kansas to look at new ways for producers to more efficiently utilize the natural resources it has available."

During the extremely dry conditions of 2011, Sawyer enrolled three of his irrigation



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

wells into emergency, two-year drought permits. Without the opportunity to increase his water usage, he would have suffered extreme yield declines or a complete crop failure in the fields serviced by these three wells.

With the specter of another drought looming, the McPherson County irrigator faces the prospects of another dry, hot summer with not enough water for crops he must soon plant.

Sawyer believes the multi-year flex permits will let him better utilize his water resources should another year or two of drought persist on his south-central Kansas farm.

"I will likely take advantage of this multi-year flex proposal on my three wells if it passes," Sawyer told the House committee. "I will need to know soon, because spring planting season is 60 days away and I have cropping choices, fertilizing and herbicide applications, plant population numbers and plant varieties to decide on."

All of these decisions will dramatically affect Sawyer's bottom line. A decrease in production because of a lack of irrigation could decrease his production and have a detrimental impact on his operation.

It appears the voices of Kansas farmers are being heard in Topeka. The Kansas legislature is wasting little time in moving proposed changes in water policy. Let's hope this important work gets done so this state's crop producers can continue with their plans and be ready to go this spring when soil temperatures warm up and corn, soybean and milo planting season arrives.

Stay tuned.

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.

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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

