



Other Viewpoints

Safety net shrinks for child in poverty

Good for Gov. Sam Brownback for creating a task force to combat childhood poverty. But if he really wants to help struggling Kansans, he also should reverse some of his administration's policies that have made their lives harder.

Poverty is a growing problem in Kansas. According to 2010 data, 18.1 percent of the state's children live below the poverty level (which is \$23,050 for a family of four). That's a 53 percent increase since 1970.

The childhood-poverty rate in Sedgwick County is even higher – 20.4 percent. And a new analysis by Kansas State University researchers of various factors influencing family status ranks Sedgwick County 92nd for the well-being of children out of the state's 105 counties. In other words, near the bottom.

Wichita also had a 50 percent increase in child poverty between 2005 and 2011 – the fourth-highest rate increase among the nation's 50 largest cities, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Center.

"All too often in our state, children who are living in poverty today become tomorrow's poor parents," Brownback said in a statement, adding that "we need concrete ideas on how to change this pattern."

The makeup of the task force seems skewed to social conservatism. Likely as a result, a focus of its first meeting this week was on issues such as unwed mothers and stressing the importance of religious faith in the development of healthy marriages.

Though these can be key risk factors for poverty – particularly single parenthood and education level – the task force and Brownback also need to consider the impact of some of the policy decisions of the Kansas Department for Children and Families.

For example, the 2012 Kids Count report shows that the numbers of Kansas children enrolled in Medicaid and receiving food stamps have increased while the numbers receiving cash and child-care subsidies have dropped.

"Kansas has been dealing with some of the highest unemployment in the last 40 years, and yet the department's public assistance reports show a 31 percent decline in the number of people on TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) between July of 2011 and September of 2012," Paul Johnson, a former lobbyist for the Kansas Catholic Conference, told the Kansas Health Institute News Service. "At a time when families are struggling and those numbers should be going up – they're going down."

One reason is that the department reduced the lifetime cap for TANF benefits from 60 to 48 months. It also increased the work requirement to qualify for child-care subsidies – and is considering raising it again as part of a possible 10 percent cut to agency budgets next fiscal year.

Brownback also has tried to eliminate some tax credits that benefit low-income Kansans, and he wanted to make permanent the statewide sales-tax increase, which would disproportionately affect the poor.

It is good to talk about marriage and faith, but safety-net programs are crucial to helping kids in poverty. And in Kansas, that net is shrinking.

– The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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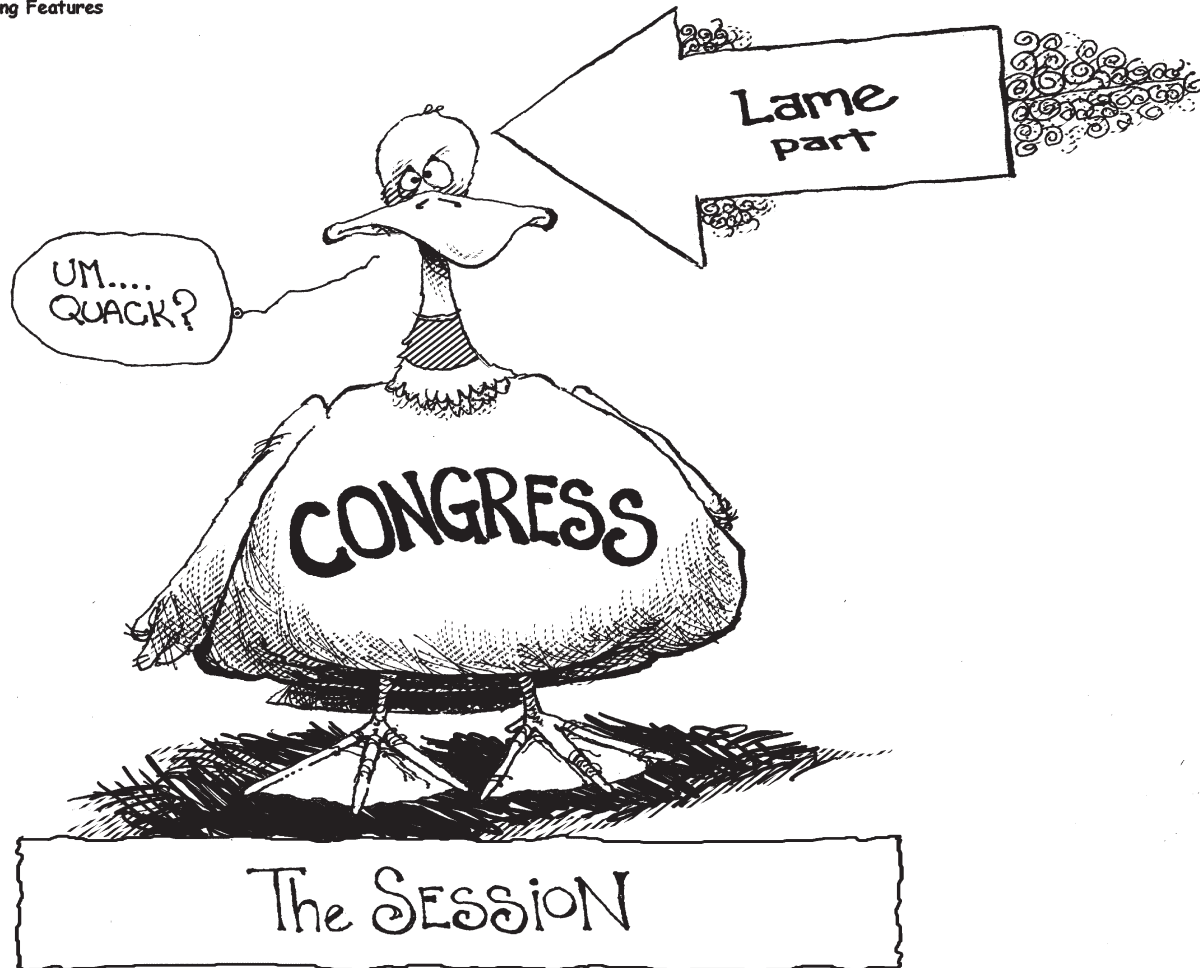
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Media adds to idolization of military

The sex scandal that brought down Gen. David Petraeus has exposed the media's predisposition toward toning down criticism and suspending objectivity when covering military-centric stories.

I'm no mind reader, but I suspect the motives underlying the military-friendly coverage are twofold: (a) The innate patriotism of reporters and; (b) the fear of dealing with the inevitable blowback that would come from criticizing the most venerated institution in America.

The Petraeus scandal embodies the media's skewed coverage of the military not so much by the way reporters have refrained from treating the scandal with the usual excitement that such salacious stories typically elicit – although they have been noticeably restrained in their criticism of Petraeus – but by illuminating the role the media played in mythologizing Petraeus in the first place. Despite serious questions about the nature of some of his policies, the press has largely ignored these issues, while helping to cultivate an image of a value-oriented, American hero without flaws; a sort of military Superman if you will. Michael Hastings, a reporter for *Rolling Stone* and *BuzzFeed*, has been one of the only reporters with the audacity to ask critical questions of Petraeus's alleged role in manipulating the White House into escalating the war in Afghanistan in September 2009.

The typical reaction to Petraeus's affair with his biographer has been tinged with sadness. For example, *Foreign Policy Magazine's* man-



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

aging editor Black Hounshell, in an article titled "The Tragedy of David Petraeus," wrote that "Petraeus's downfall is a huge loss for the United States," as "not only was he one of the country's top strategic thinkers, he was also one of the few public figures revered by all sides of the political spectrum for his dedication and good judgment." He added: "He salvaged two disastrous wars, for two very different presidents."

It's not so much the praise of Petraeus that is worrisome – I admire and respect Petraeus, too – it's the unwillingness of the press to exert the same level of energy toward scrutinizing the more controversial aspects of the general's legacy. Furthermore, the Petraeus coverage – before and after the affair – reflects a broadly accepted idea that all men and women in uniform should be seen as heroes.

I happen to agree with this assertion, but I think it's often distorted in a way that induces voluntary self-censorship and caged dissent. Given the widespread acceptance of the idea that all soldiers are heroes, many reason that this means it would be unpatriotic to challenge

the morality of U.S. wars because this, by extension, would imply that our heroes are complicit in morally-questionable acts.

This self-censorship – which stems from a fear of being unpatriotic – breeds a simplistic, non-thinking culture that accepts the fallacious assertion that all U.S. wars are waged to safeguard the lives and liberties of American citizens. This absurd narrative is embraced even when its supporters would privately admit that past wars in Vietnam, Grenada, Panama and arguably Iraq had little to do with protecting the lives of American citizens.

Personally, I don't consider those who fought in Iraq and Vietnam heroes or villains – although I do passionately, but respectfully disagree with those in uniform who honestly believe these wars were morally righteous – I consider them to be the victims of conflicts ordered by powerful men and women who should have known better. Soldiers are heroes not because of their actions in controversial foreign conflicts, but because of their willingness to sacrifice their own lives for others. There is simply no act worthy of more praise than the willingness to give up one's own life for the lives of complete strangers.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision.

America's debt no laughing matter

"Are you kidding me?"

That was all I could think to myself when I heard that U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said that the U.S. "absolutely" should get rid of the debt ceiling, which is the limit on federal government borrowing.

Having served in Congress for two years now, I thought that I had heard it all from the Obama administration, but it appears they have not run out of senseless ideas. At a time when America is more than \$16 trillion in debt – an amount about equivalent to the size of our entire economy – the last thing we need is to remove the cap on the government's credit card.

Two years before becoming president, then-Sen. Barack Obama declared it "unpatriotic" to raise the debt limit. It was probably one of the few times we have been or ever will be on the same page. Yet, as we come to the conclusion of his first term, present and future taxpayers are on the hook for \$6 trillion more debt and are likely to be responsible for at least \$4 trillion more come the end of his second term.

Despite the \$6 trillion more debt in his first term, the Obama administration will come to Congress in a matter of weeks and ask that we raise the debt limit. Or, apparently as Secretary Geithner has suggested, get rid of it altogether.



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

The unfortunate reality is that Congress will have to raise the debt limit. That is what happens when Washington borrows 40 percent of what it spends. But this time, the conditions have to be different.

Another deal like the one that was cut by Republicans and Democrats in August 2011 cannot be on the table. Sixteen months after that arrangement, Washington has almost exhausted all of the borrowing, but has not a single spending cut yet to show for it. The cuts are set to take place on Jan. 1, but the odds are high that lawmakers on both sides of the aisle will find a way to finagle out of them.

As it was 16 months ago, the problem in Washington is not that we do not take in enough money. The problem is still that we spend too much. Perhaps I sound like a broken record writing that month after month, but Congress and the President have yet to deal

with the out-of-control spending.

Voters may have sent mixed messages to Washington by re-electing a Democrat president with a slim 51-percent margin and a Republican-controlled House (where the Constitution prescribes all revenue bills must originate), but exit polls on Election Day show a pretty clear mandate on the policy direction of Washington: it is time to tackle spending.

Nearly two-thirds of voters said "no" to raising taxes to fix the deficit (meaning spending cuts are the way to go), and by an eight-point margin voters said "government is doing too many things better left to businesses and individuals" rather than "government should do more to solve problems." Americans are not looking for higher taxes and more government; they are looking for less of both.

If the next "debt deal" is anything like the last – guaranteed debt, uncertain spending cuts – I will again ask: "Are you kidding me?" After all, more debt and more spending is no laughing matter.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp, a Fowler Republican, represents the 1st District of Kansas. He serves on the House Agriculture, Budget, and Veterans' Affairs committees.

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