



## Other Viewpoints

### Schools efficient, could stretch more

There were no big solutions in a report released this week by Gov. Sam Brownback's school efficiency task force – a reflection that public schools are already relatively efficient, especially given all the demands and restrictions they face. But there were some ideas worth considering on how districts might stretch their funding further. And every little bit helps.

School officials have been understandably skeptical of the task force, particularly when Brownback initially didn't appoint any school professionals to it. And some of its recommendations seem more focused on saving the state money or fighting ideological battles than on helping local schools.

For example, the report recommends re-evaluating the state's obligation to help pay for school bond projects. That would help the state but hurt poorer school districts – and could go against past court rulings requiring equity in school funding.

The task force also recommended revisiting collective-bargaining rights of teachers and such issues as teacher tenure. It would be more productive to work with teacher unions than to treat them like the enemy.

But the report also had some suggestions that could help districts better plan for the future. For example, it recommended a two-year state budget cycle and ensuring the timely payment of state aid (though, as districts learned in recent years, the state can always renege on its promises, so there is no guarantee).

The report also recommended granting districts more flexibility in transferring money out of certain funds, looking at ways to streamline educational reporting, and removing possible barriers to efficiency at the Kansas State Department of Education.

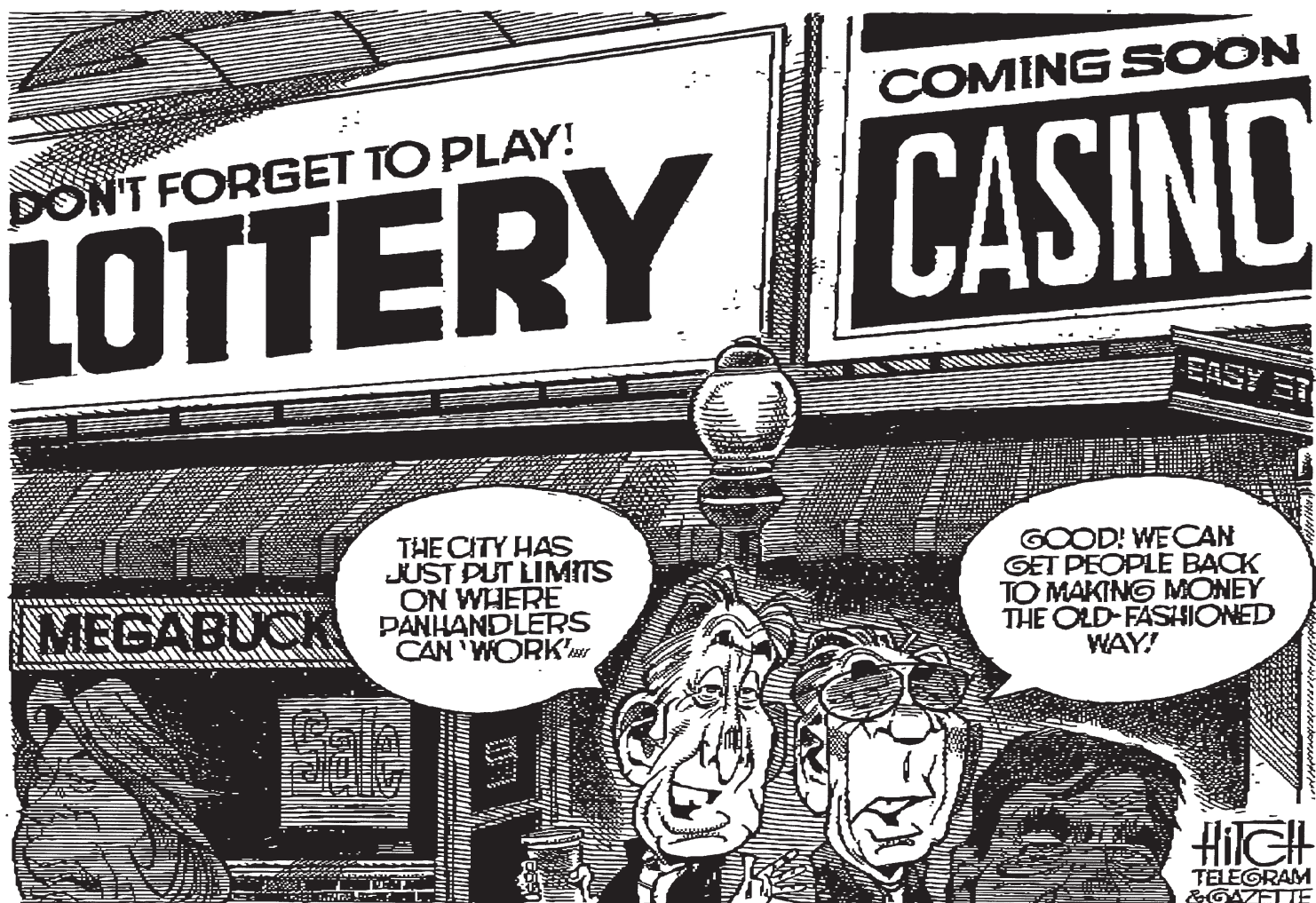
It also included a list of best practices such as cooperative purchasing and privatized food services. Many districts already have such practices, but there might be opportunities for more savings.

The idea that likely has the biggest potential for savings is consolidating school administrations. Brownback has said the isn't interested in pursuing school district consolidation (though that could save considerable money), but the task force wisely recommended that the state study administration structures and positions, including regionalizing administrations.

The task force also recommended the formation of another group to review the policy goal of having districts spend 65 percent of their funding "in the classroom." The focus on this one-size-fits-all measure is misguided, as different districts have different circumstances and needs. Also, there is no good research linking the 65 percent threshold to improved educational outcomes.

Nonetheless, Brownback has been citing this made-up measure as evidence that schools aren't efficient. But as the task force report noted, there needs to be a better definition of what counts as "instruction." And as its modest recommendations indicate, there aren't major inefficiencies.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



### Kansas is your customer, farmers

While food safety will always be the cornerstone of our food production process, allegiance is making inroads into why and where consumers buy their products.

Sure, the majority of today's shoppers enjoys and often takes for granted the expanded menu in supermarkets. They look forward to shopping in a meat case filled with dozens of new cuts, pre-packaged, oven-ready, custom portioned, "natural" and pre-cooked products. They can't wait to get their mitts on the marinades, dry rubs, cooking bags and other specialty items designed for time-strapped, two-income families.

There's another, growing group of consumers who are purchasing products based on trust and nostalgia. This notion of nostalgia harkens back to the good old days – a time when events and lives were perceived as simpler, more wholesome, just downright better.

Many in this new group of consumers want to share in the story behind the product they are buying. They wish to establish a direct link and cultivate a relationship with the producer who provides them with tomatoes, asparagus, corn or their leg of lamb for the upcoming holiday.

There are a fair number of shoppers who yearn to develop a trust with producers who they believe will provide them with a quality, consistent wholesome product.

Tapping into this ever-changing consumer



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

landscape, today's food producer – especially those located near large-population, urban areas – must not miss the opportunity to reach the hearts, minds and stomachs of consumers who feel strongly about their food.

Some consumer-savvy food growers are already homed in on this concept. They've retooled their farming operation from a conventional, commodities-only business to one that includes pick-your-own sweet corn, pumpkins, asparagus, tomatoes and strawberries. They're giving people what they want.

Others now provide home deliveries of fresh produce and sell their produce at local farmers' markets. Still others have added a corn maze, day-on-the-farm activities, ice-cream socials and chuck-wagon cookouts for everyone from school-aged kids to wedding rehearsal parties.

This new direction in farming is being driven by farmers and ranchers who are attempting to be less dependent on cheap land and vast acreage. These pioneers are tapping into the population surge and wealth of consumers

who shop online, drive a couple cars, including a sports utility vehicle, and don't mind paying a premium for the food they feed their families.

Another common element of this non-traditional farmer is the belief that this shift in production style may not make them rich, but will keep them out in the open spaces, running their own business and doing what they enjoy. A large percentage of those willing to try something new are younger farmers. In many cases, a young farmer is often considered someone who has yet to reach the half-century mark.

For some, traditional farming became too expensive. Others decided traditional farming was no longer worth the effort. Whatever the reason, any farmer will tell you that farming is a challenging vocation. Still most would agree they are glad they bought their land, and glad they're doing what they enjoy.

No doubt, more and more farmers will be looking at new strategies. Those who are determined to stay in this business of agriculture will have to find innovative ways to farm.

*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.*

### Second Amendment attack joins parade

To the Editor:

I'll get directly to the point: gun control.

Folks, our rights are being violated. Our First Amendment (freedom of speech) is under attack. The Fourth Amendment is being attacked with threats of unlimited jail time and no speedy trial. Our 10th Amendment was grossly violated by the passage of Obamacare. And now with Obama threatening to sign an executive order to ban certain guns and ammo, our Second Amendment is under sure attack.

Wake up! This is exactly how Hitler controlled the German population before the start of World War II. People couldn't meet in large groups, couldn't speak out about the government, their guns had to be turned in. Christian believers are not being taken seriously or are viciously attacked (in Germany it was Jewish believers, and 6 million were put to death). Our president has lied to us over and over again. How much more are we going to put up with? America right now, under this current president, is not the America I grew up in.

Our national news media is not America's watchdog anymore. Instead of vetting and critiquing the president, his cabinet and the actions of the entire government, the national



#### Free Press

• Our readers

media is their lapdog and cheerleader. Only a select few news reporters are doing their jobs.

The radicals on the far left want to ban guns across America in response to the Sandy Hook school massacre. Did anyone in the national media mention the fact that some of the most recent gun crimes have been committed in towns and cities that have banned gun ownership completely? No? Not surprising at all. Chicago is a gun-free area, yet they have had over 500 gun murders in the last year. Aurora, Colo., site of the theater massacre, and Sandy Hook, Conn., are also gun-free areas. Was Columbine a gun-free town?

Farmers and cattlemen, what are you going to do when a coyote or feral dog pack starts killing at calving and lambing time? How about a badger or rattlesnake in your yard or henhouse? How about a rabid skunk or rac-

coon in your barn or hayloft? How about a thief or a squatter in your winter-dormant out-buildings? What are you going to do to protect your property? How are you going to protect anything you own, if you have nothing to protect it with? How will you protect yourself?

The "assault" weapons won't be the only thing government bans. An assault weapon can be any gun or any object such as a crowbar, tire iron – even a pitchfork – used by someone not intending a good outcome in any situation. There is already a law on the books banning certain guns, the Brady law, passed in the 1980s after President Reagan was shot by an attention-seeking man with a gun. Government can't control everything so they have to control as much as they can as fast as they can and that's called fascist, socialist, communist and is illegal according to our Constitution. Get involved. Get informed. Get prepared.

Only an idiot, ignorant of the Constitution, or a person drunk with power would try to ban guns nationwide. It's obvious this president will stop at nothing.

Thank you for reading.

Jari Skiles, Colby

#### Where to write, call

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roberts.senate.gov/public/

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**U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp**, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

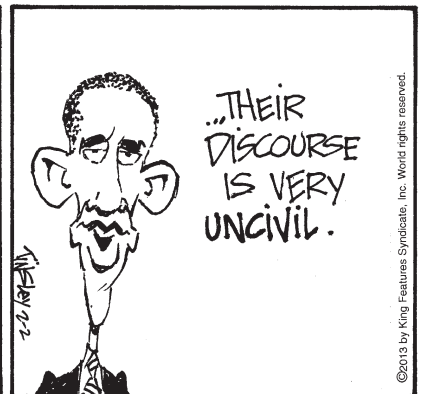
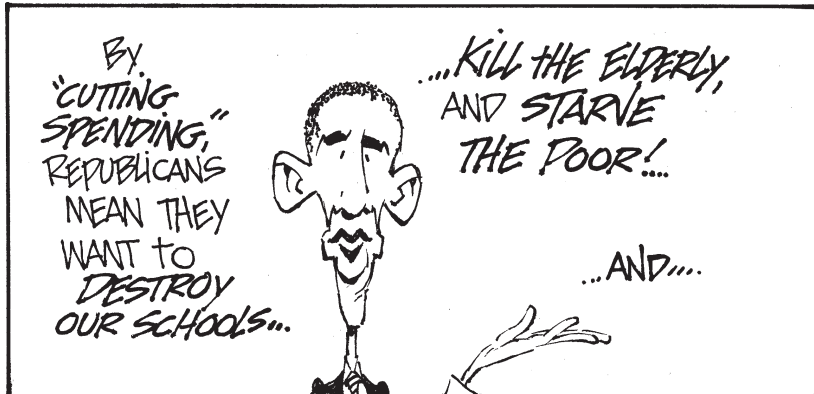
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