



Other Viewpoints

Rejecting D.C. a common refrain

The so-called "Common Core" educational standards that Kansas has adopted for its K-12 curriculum may have shortcomings, but simply because they were created at the national level isn't a reason on its own to junk them after barely two years.

But rejecting anything that comes out of Washington is a troubling trend in Kansas politics.

Common Core standards were the answer to what seemed to be nearly universal distaste for the Bush-era No Child Left Behind Act, and their adoption is a state's choice. Kansas chose to go to Common Core along with almost all other states in the country.

Now some legislators think they know what's best for public education and have introduced a bill to force the state Board of Education to scrap Common Core. Last week, they brought forth two supposed experts to testify to the wisdom of this — including one from Texas, which has become the model for everything good, by some Kansas leaders' estimation. Has anyone looked at Texas' educational success lately?

Wariness of the federal government was their common message. A former member of the Massachusetts State Board of Education said that Common Core downplayed the study of literature in favor of informational nonfiction texts, reducing the development of critical thinking skills. That might be a legitimate complaint, but then she went on to say: "I would never trust any bureaucrat in Washington."

What's not to trust here? No one much liked No Child, so states — including Kansas — developed Common Core, and Kansas voluntarily adopted it. As for other alleged deficiencies, those are addressed online at www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts.

That it came from Washington so it must be bad is a simplistic and foolish basis on which to make decisions. Lawmakers themselves should apply more critical thinking than that.

— *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

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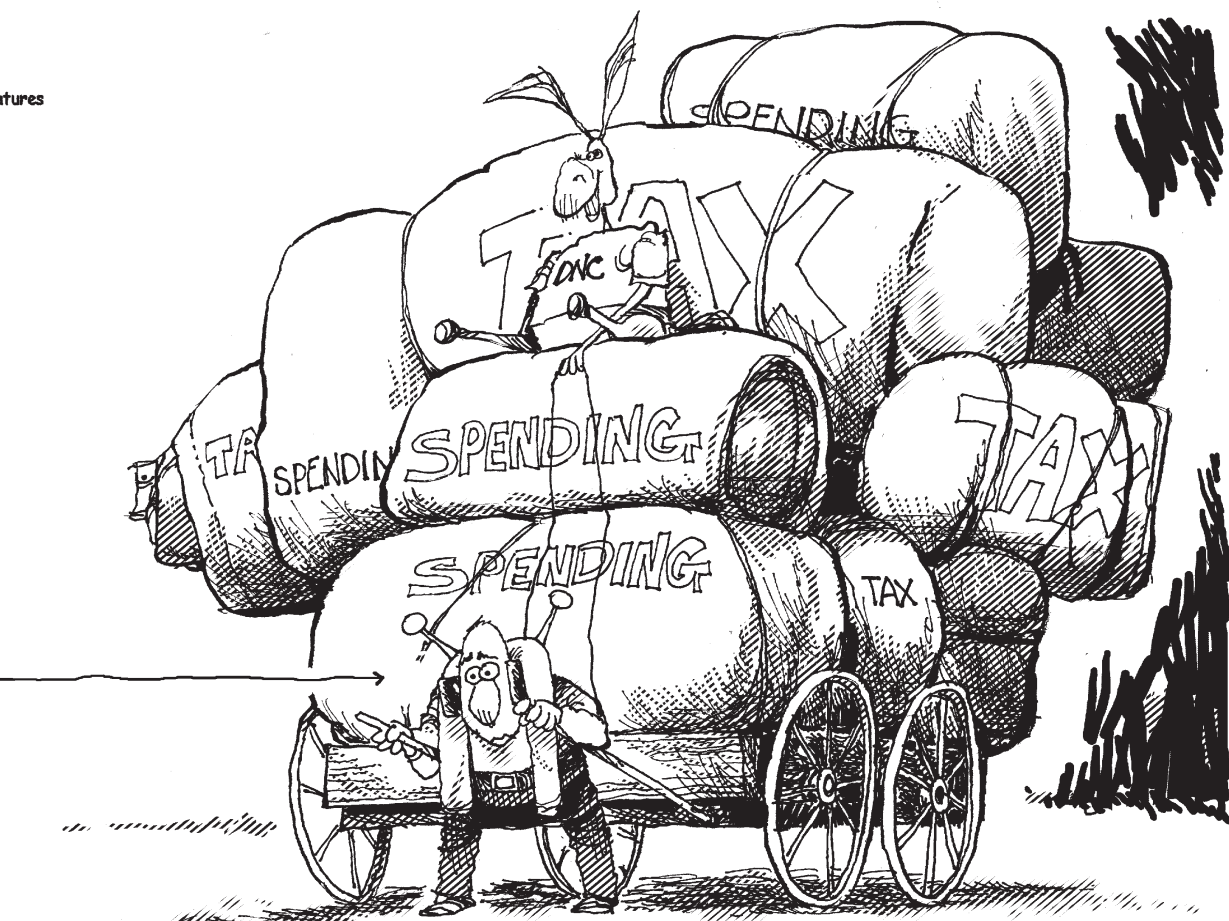
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YOU



HOW OBAMALISM WORKS

Science and regulation not the enemy

When I drive by cars festooned with bumper stickers all hot for the Ron Paul revolution, I usually just chuckle and shake my head.

Crazy rascals, let them have their fun, I think with a smile. But every once in a while government officials get filled with the same free-market euphoria as Paul's followers, and innocent people get swept up by the forces unleashed by their ideological fervor. This particular example revolves around how much soot — yes, I said soot — should be allowed in the air. It turns out that whether or not this fine particulate matter is regulated can be a life or death issue for many Americans.

On Jan. 15, the Environmental Protection Agency published a revision of its air pollution standard for soot that reduced the allowable amount in the air from 15 micrograms per cubic meter to 12. The revision has drawn the ire of the usual suspects: Republicans and industry officials.

But the complaints — it will cost jobs, slow economic growth, attract bears — from the people generally expected to complain about such matters pale in comparison to the consequences that resulted from this revision not being published years earlier. In 2006, agency Administrator Steven Johnson, a George W. Bush appointee, overruled both his own staff scientists and his scientific advisory committee to prevent the soot standard from being reduced, according to an article on the Union of Concerned Scientist's website. At the time, the agency was conducting a review of soot



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

standards under the Clean Air Act, something which is required every five years, using the best available science for the protection of human health.

Johnson cited disagreement within the agency's Clean Air Science Advisory Committee as the reason for his decision, but the chairman of that committee disputed that.

"There was nothing unclear in our recommendations," Rogene Henderson, a biochemist then at the Lovelace Respiratory Institute in Albuquerque, N.M., told the Union of Concerned Scientists. "We provided the EPA administrator a consensus opinion about the standard for fine particulate."

She was not the only one unsatisfied with Johnson's explanation. In February 2009, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that Johnson had violated the Clean Air Act by failing to provide sufficient reasoning for rejecting the advisory committee's science-based recommendations. Now that the new standard has been published, it will take effect in 2014, but the seven-year delay has caused irreversible damage.

A *Christian Science Monitor* article reported that the EPA's own analysis had found that a lower soot standard recommended by scientific advisers could have prevented 2,000 premature deaths. A report by Earthjustice, an environmental law firm, based on a new analysis prepared by the firm in partnership with the American Lung Association and the Clean Air Task Force, estimated that if the EPA would adopt an annual standard of 11 micrograms per cubic meters and a daily standard of 25 micrograms per cubic meter — and if these standards are met — the result would be 35,700 fewer premature deaths a year.

Many government officials, particularly Republicans, have treated environmental regulations as some kind of big-government bogeyman even when they are based on the best science available. While I don't agree with all environmental regulations, some of these laws are of inestimable worth to human health. Examples like the soot debacle are proof of the dangerous consequences that can occur when political ideology is allowed to trump science. So, forgive me, but I'll skip the Ron Paul revolution.

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.

Successful KanCare takes cooperation

By Lt. Gov. Jeff Colyer and House Minority Leader Paul Davis

It may be a surprise to see our names together in an opinion piece. As Democrats and Republicans, we don't always agree on issues like taxes or the budget.

But where we do agree is that we want to make sure our state Medicaid program, now known as KanCare, is compassionate and effective. Poor and disabled Kansans rely on Medicaid for medical care, nursing homes, home health and long-term care. Most importantly, if Kansans have issues navigating the program, we want to make sure their questions are answered quickly, so that they get the care they need.

For years, these programs have been confusing and hard to navigate for thousands of Kansans. It was often hard to know who to call when you had a problem, so most times the issue went unresolved. Or other times, the only way they could get resolved was to call your legislator or the governor's office.

We want to fix that. On Jan. 1, Kansas Medicaid became KanCare, affecting nearly 370,000 Kansans. Under KanCare, every Kansan who qualifies for Medicaid will have the choice of three insurers — Amerigroup, Sunflower and United.

A transition this big is tough, and there will be challenges. We want to make sure patients are protected and providers continue to see those they serve. After eight weeks, the transition has gone smoother than either of us expected, and we are dedicated to continuing this accountable transition.

To make sure Medicaid patients are protected, people can change their insurer until April

4 and again at the end of this year. Each KanCare insurer offers a different benefit plan, so one may be better for you than the others. Each of the health plans can be reached through their websites and assistance lines: Amerigroup, (800) 600-4441; Sunflower, (877) 644-4623; and United, (877) 542-9238. So far, 99 percent of consumer inquiries have been resolved within two business days.

The state also has expanded its access lines. Consumers can get their questions answered any time of day by calling the consumer assistance line at (866) 305-5147.

If providers like doctors and hospitals need help, they should call (800) 933-6593. So far, 1.1 million provider payments totaling more than \$200 million have been paid across the state.

Another avenue for public input is a twice-weekly operator-assisted conference call where consumers, their families and caregivers, as well as providers, can engage state officials and the leaders of the health plans. They can call in at 9 a.m. Mondays and Thursdays through next week to discuss their issues at (877) 247-8650 and use ID code 79687456. Issues and resolutions are posted on the Kansas Department of Health and Environment website, www.kdheks.gov.

Another way to resolve issues is to call our new KanCare ombudsman, James Bart, who can be reached at (855) 643-8180. Mr. Bart's primary focus is on individuals participating in HCBS waiver program or other long-term care services.

We want to make sure there is accountability and people are heard on every level. We support bills to provide oversight of KanCare by the Kansas Legislature. The Health Depart-

ment has an advisory panel of citizens, providers and stakeholders. Each insurer implemented a similar advisory panel. And the federal government is involved at every level.

And as always, we encourage citizens to contact their legislators or either one of our offices with KanCare related questions at www.Kansas.gov.

Not only do these access points enhance person-centered care, they enable the state and the three health plans to address issues head-on. By creating a Medicaid program that is consumer and provider driven, we want a program that is responsive. We don't want the same problems to recur year after year.

As we transition nearly 370,000 Kansans into KanCare, we hope that you engage the process through and not assume that no one is there to help. No one expects such a sizable transition to be issue-free, so we must work together to get the job done — because in Kansas, that is what we do.

Write us

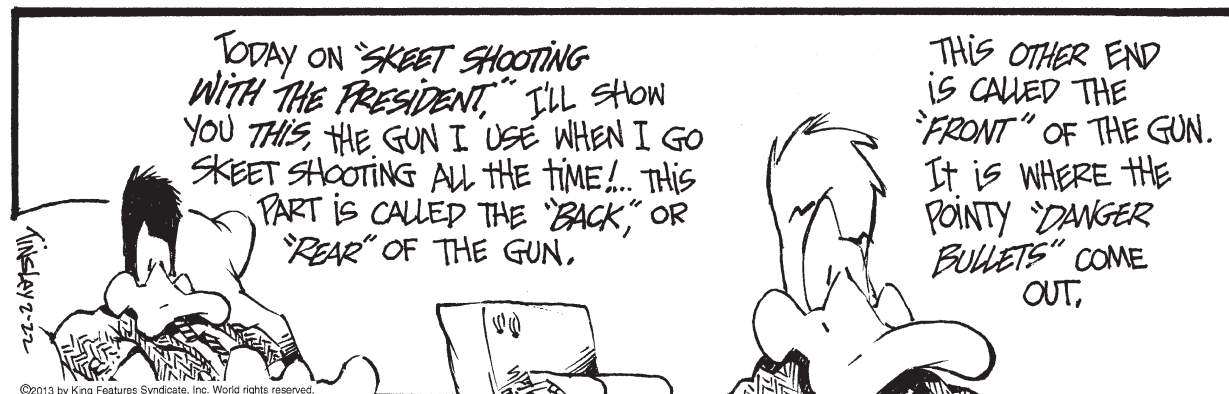
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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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