



Other Viewpoints

Science standards should serve well

It's refreshing to learn that the debate over evolution and intelligent design didn't dominate the discussion leading to the Kansas Board of Education's approval of new science standards for public school students.

Not that the topic has completely gone away. It hasn't. But there was little support for creationism on a board controlled by moderate Republicans and Democrats; their vote on the standards was 8-2, according to the Associated Press and other accounts of the board's meeting.

That vote also affirmed the last board vote on science standards, which was in 2007. In both instances the standards treat evolution as an established scientific concept. That is as it should be. The board took up science standards again because the law requires that the standards be updated every seven years.

Also appropriate was the plan to regard climate change as a significant enough concept to be included in science lessons in all grades, not just as a separate scientific topic in high school.

Not surprisingly, Ken Willard, a conservative board member from Hutchinson, wasn't happy with the standards' handling of evolution or climate change. He said the subjects are "presented dogmatically." In voting against the standards, he said, "This nonobjective, unscientific approach to education standards amounts to little more than indoctrination in political correctness."

Also speaking out against the new standards was Rex Powell, a member of Citizens for Objective Public Education, which was formed to challenge the new standards. He went so far as to say that the new standards promote "an atheistic world view." He also described the standards as "standards for religious indoctrination rather than objective science education."

If the standards promote a world view, it's a secular world view, which is the proper approach in public school environments. Moreover, they reflect mainstream science regarding both evolution and climate change.

The latter is essential for the simple reason that our climate is changing and because evidence is overwhelming that humans have contributed to it and continue to do so. Our students deserve reliable information on a phenomenon whose impact is almost certain to increase in their lifetimes.

Also, despite the misconceptions over Common Core education standards for reading and math, a topic that drew plenty of attention again Tuesday, Kansas students stand to benefit from this state's early involvement in their development and their implementation in districts across the state.

- The Manhattan Mercury, via the Associated Press

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

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Jail construction needs feasibility study

To the Editor:

Prior to my being elected to represent the 3rd District on the Thomas County Commission, I attended a meeting in the courtroom at which a firm that specialized in jail construction made a presentation.

One of their recommendations was that a feasibility study and needs assessment be completed as the first steps in considering new jail construction. The commission, at that time, took no action.

When the Public Building Commission was formed by the county commission, I recommended that a feasibility study and needs assessment be completed. Again, no action was taken. The authority then authorized the issuance of \$2 million in revenue bonds to be used in the construction of a new jail.

The plans that were reviewed at that time were made with the idea of refurbishing the current jail. I opposed the plan, as I believe that the present facility needs to be replaced due to infrastructure insufficiencies and safety concerns. I still held that a needs assessment and feasibility study needed to be made.

After being elected to the county commission, I arranged for a presentation to the commission by a firm that specializes in jail construction. They offered a feasibility study at a cost of \$5,000. After hearing concerns that the money for such a study should be spent in the county, we contracted with Glenn Strait Associates in Colby to perform a basic feasibility study and formulate a basic structural plan. At the time, I asked Mr. Strait if he had experience in jail construction and he indicated that he had provided the architectural plan for a new correctional building at the Norton Correctional Facility.

Over the course of time, the plan for a new jail has grown to consideration of a new courthouse. I have said that we need a new jail facility but have also held that we need to complete a feasibility study and needs assessment prior to considering architectural plans.

There have been rumblings in the state Legislature about county consolidation, but as yet nothing has materialized. My thought was that if we worked toward the consolidation of some county services in a regional format, we would be taking a step in the right direction even if county consolidation was to become a reality. I proposed setting up working groups in four areas: regional 911 services, regional GPS coordination, regional jail and regional emergency management. That recommendation did not take root and only one area, 911 services, is being addressed.

As the discussions progressed, a plan was brought forth to not only build a new jail but a new courthouse. At that point, the abandonment or razing of the current courthouse was raised. In response, I stated at a commission meeting that I was definitely in favor of new jail construction and was comfortable with



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

the proposal of a judicial center housing both the jail and the courts, but at this time am opposed the abandonment or razing of our current courthouse

One of the insufficiencies in not having a true feasibility study and needs assessment completed is that not every avenue of addressing our need for a new jail or expanded facilities has been explored.

The current plan being circulated would require acquisition of land. We have not considered the possibility of relocating the county highway department and using land that the county already owns. If the plan for a new courthouse is undertaken, our current courthouse would either be abandoned or razed.

I am opposed to abandoning or razing our courthouse unless a study by an independent structural engineer shows correction of current structural problems with the courthouse would be either excessively expensive or that the building is unsafe. I realize that such a study would, in itself, be expensive, but I believe it to be necessary.

I also realize that a jail feasibility study and needs assessment would be expensive, but I still maintain that one should be undertaken. In my mind, the current process that we are reviewing is inadequate and really is being worked backwards. Even partial funding was authorized prior to understanding the needs and feasibilities.

In addressing the current courthouse, it reflects the cultural traditions valued by our long-term residents. It represented the tangible evidence of our history and culture that has formed Thomas County. We, as citizens, need physical representations of the past to define and make sense of our place in the county's cultural history and traditions.

Government and citizens must take action to ensure the preservation of the physical settings where past events and patterns of life have transpired so that these places may continue to be a part of daily life. Our county's image and characteristics have taken several generations to grow and develop and must be considered as we look to the future.

As regards the jail, if we made it a regional proposal, we might be able to make an equitable separation of construction costs from operational cost. Each participating county's contribution to the construction could be based on its individual cost of building a new facil-

ity. No county would pay more for their share than their cost of a new jail if built separately. Operational cost sharing could be calculated on a formula that includes detention days used by each county and travel cost and cost of a local lockup if needed, by the nonhost counties, and other costs that might be unique to any county.

If a regional jail concept is pursued, there would need to be resolution of the funding needed for the project and the commitment to provide the funds from each county, assuming a mutually agreed funding formula was developed.

A needs assessment and feasibility study could be patterned to investigate the possibility of the regional jail concept.

To date, comments I have received from constituents support the construction of a new jail and possibly a judicial center. I have received no support for any plan that would include the abandonment or razing of our current courthouse.

Of course, funding any project is a major consideration that has yet to be addressed. Property taxes are already a burden to most citizens and bringing a sales tax to the voters has only been suggested.

I support every effort in continuing to keep Thomas County the best place in Kansas to live. As one of your local government representatives, my concern is that our commission approach the future realistically and optimistically while being fiscally responsible in providing county government services.

I invite citizen comment to me either in person, by telephone at (785) 694-2278 or my cell, (785) 462-9061, by mail at Box 159, Brewster, Kan. 67732-0159, or e-mail at prairielawman@yahoo.com.

Mike Baughn, Brewster
3rd District county commissioner

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

