



Other Viewpoints

Sense is needed on guns in schools

School districts have cause to keep guns at a distance. Give local school officials credit for using common sense when it comes to guns in schools.

The Garden City Schools' administration recently presented the Board of Education with a proposed policy that would prohibit district employees with concealed-carry permits from bringing guns to school or school activities.

The proposal was needed due to gun-friendly legislation out of the Kansas Statehouse that in part would let school districts decide whether to allow employees to bring firearms to work.

Supporters of opening the door to guns in schools believe teachers and staff members packing heat would have a better chance of defending themselves and protecting others in the midst of a shooting incident. They also claim would-be shooters wouldn't target a school if they believe others in the building have guns.

Thankfully, not everyone buys into such suspect theories when it comes to firearms in schools and other public places.

With schools in particular, safety always is paramount. School officials have long been vigilant about pursuing sensible, proven security features – without a need for teachers to tote guns.

Another issue for school boards: The insurance firm used by most school districts in Kansas reportedly will not insure districts allowing employees to be armed in schools.

The Iowa-based company no doubt acknowledged how encouraging guns in schools only would increase the risk of shootings on school property, accidental or otherwise. The insurer noted on-site security on school grounds instead should be provided by qualified law enforcement officers.

Kansas lawmakers failed to consider all possible angles as they set out to expand gun rights, even as other states were considering ways to tighten gun policies – the latter being the more logical response to a horrific school shooting that left 20 elementary school children and six adult staff members dead in Newtown, Conn., and other mass shootings.

Clearly, insurance would be just one potential problem in any school district eager to bring guns into schools.

With that in mind, Garden City's school board should find it easy to endorse a plan to prohibit employees from bringing their guns to school.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

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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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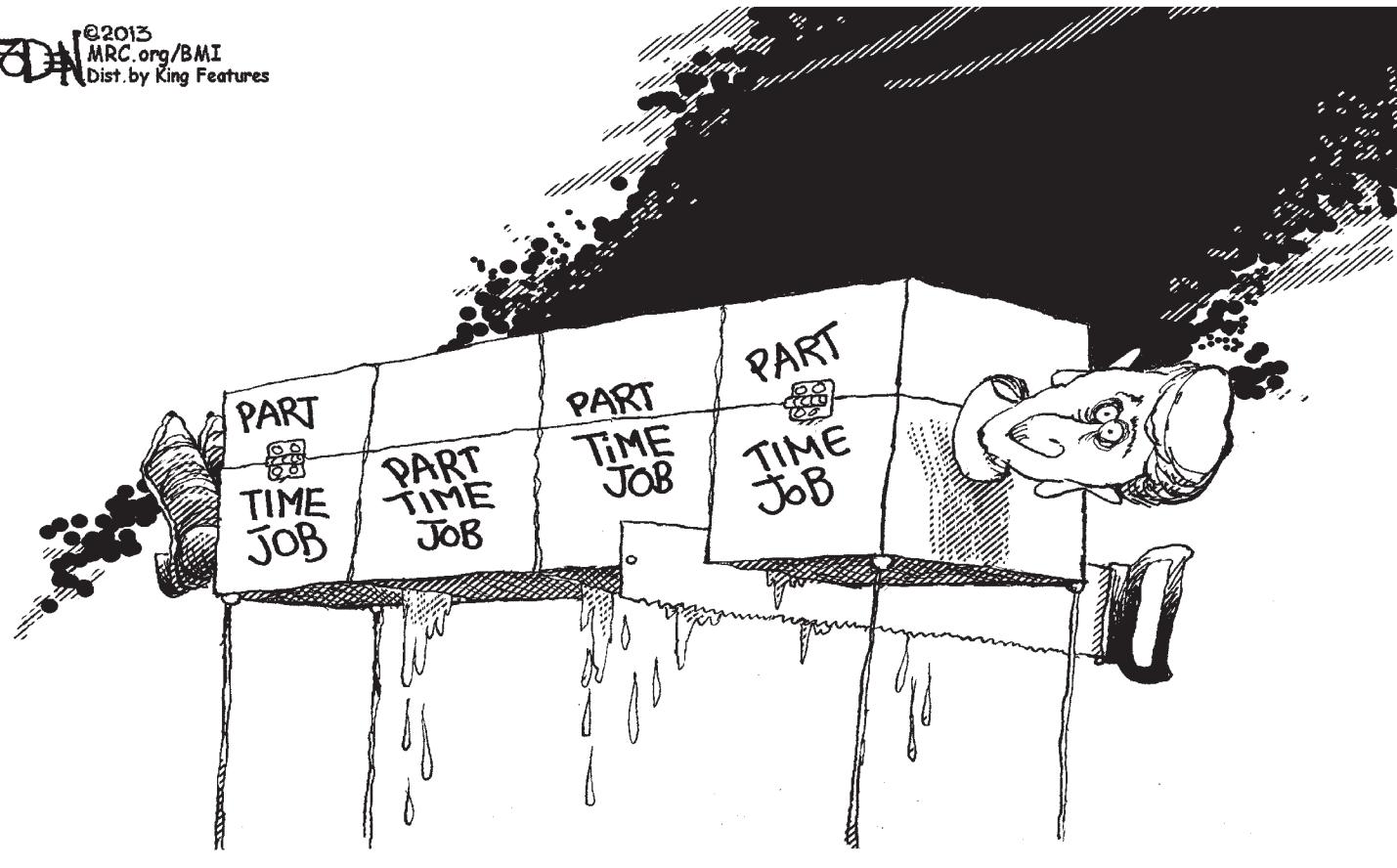
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JOB CREATION and the MAGIC of OBAMACARE

Forest fires die down, but risk remains

The fires are all but out now. The summer monsoons have begun in the Rockies, replacing hot winds with cool rains. More rain is expected in the coming days.

The two "type 1" incident command teams fighting the fires east and west of the Continental Divide around South Fork and Creede, Colo., gave way to a single replacement team, and that team stood down on Sunday, giving way to a smaller "type 3" command team.

There are still plenty of fire fighters on the scene, but nothing compared to the 1,500 men and women mobilized as of two weeks ago. By Sunday, the crew included two "hand crews," 14 fire engines (peaked at 102), two water tenders and 136 "overhead personnel," with the desk pounders likely outnumbering the field personnel.

Crews had hauled back all the sprinklers, hose lines and other fire-suppression equipment so carefully placed around cabins and lodges just days ago. Two helicopters remained at the Creede Airport to douse hotspots and run errands.

The command team noted that people could expect to see smoke in the burn area into the fall. Crews were working to cut down "snags," dead or burned trees that might fall onto a road or a trail, to make it safe for people to re-enter the forest. Much of the area remains closed to public use.

So, barring a return of hot, dry winds, this fire is over, having burned 109,000 acres. (Compare that to 7,000 acres burned in Decatur County's largest fire last year.)



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

The fires this summer in Colorado may be only the beginning, however, since much of the state west of Denver is covered with the same standing dead spruce trees that proved so flammable this summer.

Why? Blame Smoky Bear. Blame the environmental movement and Woodsy Owl. Blame mankind's naive belief that we are in charge.

For nearly a century, we've suppressed nearly every fire that erupted in the West. Smoky taught us to be careful with campfires and matches. Our culture demanded that we protect the forest.

The environmental movement came along, and with it, a premium value placed on wilderness tracts and "old-growth" forests. Logging was suppressed, along with fire. Woodsy told us to protect the forest.

And while experts said it was good sometimes for natural fires to be allowed to burn, in practice, most fires in the lower 48 states threatened enough property that allowing them to burn was out of the question.

What that got us was a huge swath of over-mature forest, ripe for a blowdown, insect in-

festation – or fire. Trees just don't live forever, anymore than we do. And nature's way of re-newing a forest tends to the dramatic.

If the forest couldn't burn, then either the trees would blow over or bugs and disease would kill them. Or, in the nastiest possible combination, first the insects would kill the trees, destroying the beauty of the forest, then fire would clean up after them.

A standing dead spruce is a 100-foot tower of kindling waiting for a match. The needles die and drop off, then the bark sheds, loosened by insects and the predators that prey on grubs. What's left is a combustible combination of dry twigs and branches. When one flares up, it's spectacular; when the winds come up, they all burn at the same time.

There was nothing fire crews could do to stop this fire until nature – terrain and weather – got in the way. There will be more, until we learn to let nature stay in balance and stop trying to preserve a forest state that was not meant to be.

The forest will survive and recover, but it could be a century or more before it is anything like what we have known.

And as long as we believe that we can "manage" nature and preserve things in the wild the way we like them, we are setting ourselves up for disaster after disaster.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Higher ed funding needs perspective

Teaching critical thinking skills is one of the most important functions of higher education. There is no substitution for "...the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action" (Michael Scriven and Richard Paul, 1987, www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766i).

Unfortunately, reaction to the Legislature's funding of Regents universities for the next two years has been driven by too much emotion. University officials and some legislators say that a 1.5 percent reduction in state aid for each of the next two years will be "devastating" and have "dire consequences."

No organization wants reduced resources, but the responsible reaction is to conduct a full assessment of all options with a focus on avoiding negative impact on customers (in this case, students).

First of all, the reduction in resources is less than it appears. State aid comprises only 48 percent of universities' general use expenditures, so a 1.5 percent reduction in state aid is really a 0.7 percent reduction in resources.

Data published by the Kansas Board of Regents show expenditure increases of 2.4 percent for 2011 and 5.6 percent for 2012 (2013 is not yet available). Expenditures grew nicely over the last 10 years, even adjusting for inflation and enrollment changes. Per-pupil expenditures for the six state-funded universities grew by 38 percent, while inflation was only 25 percent.

A small resource reduction on the heels of

Other Opinions

- Dave Trabert
Kansas Policy Inst.

real spending gains is quite manageable, especially since Kansas universities have used some of their tuition and tax dollars to build up considerable cash reserves. As noted in "A Historical Perspective of State Aid, Tuition and Spending for State Universities in Kansas" that we published in April, each university has the capacity to offset the small reduction in state aid by using a portion of their cash reserves.

Universities also have multiple options to operate more efficiently; administrative costs alone increased 79 percent over the last ten years.

The facts reveal no indication that a 0.7 percent reduction in general fund resources will have "dire" or "disastrous" consequences. (Frankly, any management team that put an organization in such a position should be dismissed for gross mismanagement.) To the contrary, the facts indicate that university officials have multiple options to avoid such impact. Any "disastrous" consequences would be a clear choice on their part.

The tendency to measure support for education (and other government functions) based on the amount of money spent is one of the greatest barriers to economic and educational freedom. "Show me you love me by spending

more" is about institutions and the adults in the system; it has nothing to do with improving outputs.

By the way, Kansas is spending a considerable portion of its budget on higher education. Data from the National Association of State Budget Officers shows that Kansas allocated 12.1 percent of the general fund to higher education in 2012 as compared to the national average of 10 percent. Kansas also has a much greater portion of total expenditures devoted to higher education, at 16.7 percent versus the national average of 9.9 percent.

It costs a lot of money to fund public schools and higher education but it's how the money is spent that matters – not how much. It's time to move beyond the rhetoric and implement student-focused plans to make the best possible use of taxpayer-provided resources.

Dave Trabert is President of Kansas Policy Institute. He also serves on the Tax and Fiscal Policy Task Force for the American Legislative Exchange Council. He graduated from West Liberty State College with a degree in business administration.

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

