

Other Viewpoints

Spending cuts hurt our schools

Kansas recently found itself on the wrong end of a national ranking. Sadly, the unfortunate distinction focused on support for education. Or, more accurately, an unacceptable lack of adequate support.

According to a study from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities in Washington, Kansas cut funding to public schools more than all but two states since the recession of 2007-08. Only Alabama and Wisconsin reportedly cut more funding per pupil during that time.

Percentage-wise, Kansas lawmakers slashed education spending some 16.5 percent since 2008. Only three states cut more by percentage: Oklahoma, 22.8 percent; Alabama, 20.1 percent; and Arizona, 17.2 percent.

In Kansas, a state where the governor and his allies claim to be interested in job growth and economic development, it's difficult to see how undermining support for public schools would help accomplish those goals.

On the other hand, a Legislature controlled by ultraconservative Republicans had no problem shifting more of the burden of financial support for schools to local communities – a particularly troublesome prospect in smaller, rural districts.

The foolhardy handling of school finance also brought costly litigation.

Earlier this year, a court ruling said the Legislature failed to meet its school funding duty under the Kansas Constitution, and called for the state to boost annual aid to public schools by at least \$440 million to meet its constitutional responsibility to provide a suitable education for every child.

In its ruling, the court understandably challenged claims that the recession made state funding cuts to schools necessary in Kansas, especially as ultraconservative Republican Gov. Sam Brownback and lawmakers in his camp declared the state able to afford huge income-tax cuts that would reduce income.

Meanwhile, other states managed to step up their support for schools once the economy started to rebound. Not Kansas.

Rather than acknowledge the constitutional obligation regarding school funding, Brownback has worked to change court involvement in the process.

Such is the sad state of affairs for the Sunflower State. When it comes to education funding, the question is how far backward the state must go before Kansans demand change.

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

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College gets nice surprise in rating

Have you ever won a prize in a drawing you forgot you entered? Perhaps a supervisor singled you out for exemplary performance of which you weren't even aware?

We all enjoy a surprise every now and then. Even more, unexpected good news lifts spirits and creates renewed optimism in individuals and organizations.

As you likely have already seen in the newspaper or heard, Colby Community College was recently selected as a top 10 community college in the nation by Bankrate. This honor was bestowed due to an emphasis on quality instruction, accessibility and affordability.

It was a nice compliment to make the list but not wholly surprising. Colby has enjoyed one of the highest graduation rates – THE highest during the last reporting period – among community colleges in Kansas. Further, the financial aid support offered to our students through scholarships, grants and loans is envied by many colleges.

This recognition is meaningful to our faculty and staff but it should also be a point of satisfaction for all of the citizens of northwest Kansas, as we are your community college. Our success is your success.

I want to share information on some other college-related topics – and a personal one. So, here are a few news-worthy items about which folks have inquired or which might be of interest to you. I will attempt to cover these briefly, which is not my strong suit.

We do not yet have a final number on the fall enrollment; everyone wants to know if we are "up or down." What I can tell you is that it looks like the college will be down slightly from last fall. That is actually good news, though. At one time, we feared enrollment might be off significantly.

The news around the state is that most of the state institutions, with few exceptions, are down in enrollment, so we are not unusual. And since the prediction by analysts in the spring was that colleges across the nation would serve fewer students, we were not sur-



Steve Vacik

• From the president

prised. Further, we have an (almost) entirely new staff in our recruiting department and I am excited about their efforts.

Thank you to each of our alumni who have responded to the recent mailer and provided financial support for the college's Campaign for Change. We have received around \$10,000 from these gifts. Thanks also to the Endowment Foundation for the recent contribution of around \$55,000 from the spring auction. And thanks to all of the businesses and foundations who have given to the college. The five-year goal for the campaign – to rebuild financial reserves – was a minimum of \$2 million. So far we have raised more than \$300,000 in 16 months, with commitments for another \$100,000. Thanks! (Further contributions would be welcomed as well.)

I hope you were able to attend the college's Rodeo the weekend of Sept. 20 to 22. It was exciting as always and generated tremendous income for our local businesses. Thanks to all of those banks, companies and individuals who supported the rodeo.

In addition, our volleyball team continues to perform well. If you haven't yet seen a game, there is still time with home meets starting at 6:30 on Oct. 15, 17 and 24, all at the Community Building. Women's and men's basketball starts soon as well. Please come support your community college.

The college has a new addition to our Board of Trustees, Linda Vaughn. Along with welcoming Linda and thanking her for the willingness to serve, I would like to extend a special thanks to Nick Wells for his service to the board. These individuals who represent you

in the governance of the college give of their time and energy with little reward, except for personal satisfaction. I encourage you as opportunities arise to serve on local boards or advisory groups, give of your time and energy on behalf of others.

Last, not as a college employee but a neighbor, I encourage you to spend some time during the upcoming month in consideration of your spiritual health. Humans are complex organisms. We have a physical, mental and spiritual component to our being.

The physical represents what we are. We generally care enough to spend time staying in shape or at least monitoring our vital signs.

The mental represents how we are. Usually people spend some time in social and leisure activities to maintain a level of satisfaction with our everyday lives.

The spiritual represents why we are. Unfortunately, most folks do not pay much attention to this aspect of their personhood. I am convinced that without addressing the spiritual component of our nature, we lack balance in our lives. Without balance, there is no peace.

I am not trying to convert anyone to a particular point of view – at least at this time and in this venue. But it pains me to see so many people lacking peace. So, I would encourage you to do some soul-searching and work through the spiritual (as well as oldest) question of why. Whatever answer you discover, you will be better for having done so.

Don't forget the college's Homecoming events will be the week of Nov. 4 to 9 – more information to come. We will look forward to seeing you there. (And some said I couldn't get through a column without mentioning the two-time defending BCS National Champions, the University of Alabama – I showed them.)

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

Life is full of those annoying things

You know, sometimes little things can be so annoying.

Take, for example, the day I went to help an old friend. Winter was coming on, and he asked me to pack insulation underneath his trailer house, especially around the water pipes. The winter before had been very cold, and the water pipes under his house had frozen. I had spent many hours that winter running heaters under his trailer to thaw the pipes to get the water flowing again. We hoped to be able to get enough insulation tucked up underneath and around the pipes so that we wouldn't face the same problem in the upcoming winter.

So after work one evening, I started by trying to take off the trailer skirting on the front of the house. I loosened some and then reached a point where it went behind the stairs that led to the front door. I really didn't want to take the stairs off since I knew that would be a big job.

I tried to pry the stairs out just enough so that I could get the skirting off, but no matter how I tried I couldn't get it off with the stairs in the way. That was when I considered how annoying little things can be, and resigned myself to the fact that I had to remove the stairs.

It took a good hour to get them loose, but I was finally able to move them out about a

Other Opinions

• Daris Howard Life's Outtakes

foot. Again I tried to get the skirting off, but I still needed more room. I pulled and tugged and finally moved them out another foot. I still couldn't get the skirting off. Finally, in frustration, I dragged them out inch by inch until they were about six feet from the trailer. I knew they definitely couldn't be in the way there.

I got the skirting off and climbed under the trailer house. I was exasperated to find the pipe ran to the back of the trailer and that it was really the back skirting I needed to take off.

Sometimes little things can be so annoying. I started the same process on the back of the house and eventually had to move the back stairs. Finally, with everything clear, I was able to climb in to where I could tuck insulation up around the pipes. Carefully I put it all along underneath them, stapling it to the cross

beams as I went. It was filthy, hot work. By the time I finished with the insulation, I was itchy and sweaty, and the sun was going down fast.

My throat was parched and I desperately needed water, but it was almost impossible to get into the trailer to a faucet where I could get a drink. So I worked as fast as I could to get the back skirting in place. Once I had it where it needed to be, I tugged and pulled and pushed to get the back stairs against the trailer.

Just as the darkness settled in, they were nailed tightly into position, and I could get some water. I was feeling slightly dizzy as I made my way to the kitchen. I drank two full glasses of water and then slowly sipped a third.

My neighbor invited me to take a break and sit down for a visit. I filled one more glass of water and accepted. After we visited a while, I figured I should be getting home to my family.

It wasn't until I walked out the front door and face planted into the dirt that I remembered I had forgotten to put the front stairs back on.

Sometimes little things can be so annoying. Daris Howard, columnist, playwright, and author, can be contacted at daris@darishoward.com; or go to his website at www.darishoward.com.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

