

# commentary

from other pens...

## Farmers caught in middle of squeeze

By Jerry Moran *U.S Representative, 1st District*

The signs at the gas stations and the co-ops tell the story. Gas is \$1.93 a gallon; corn is \$1.81 a bushel.

We have suffered through some tough times in farm country, but I can't remember a time that you couldn't buy a gallon of gas for a bushel of corn.

The crisis continues to grow and affects everyone living in rural America. We are facing an economic one-two punch.

The price of the principal product we sell - grain - is at an all-time low, while the price of the principal products we use to grow that grain - fuel and fuel-derived inputs - are at an all-time high.

You don't have to be an accountant to know that we cannot continue in this economic environment for much longer.

Over the Memorial Day recess, I hosted nine of the 66-county town hall meetings that I conduct each summer across western and central Kansas. The question was the same at every stop: "How can we make a living with \$1.93 gas and \$1.81 corn?"

Since coming to Congress in 1997, my priority has remained the same. I want to preserve the way of life that we enjoy in rural Kansas, so that it is available for the next generation. The current economic situation puts rural communities and the family farm in jeopardy.

In the long term, all Americans will suffer if we ignore America's agricultural producers.

High gas prices today are the result of a failed energy policy. At the height of the so-called energy crisis in the 1970's, we were importing nearly 30% of our oil. Today we import over 60%.

In Kansas, we lost a lot of our oil production and related jobs because it was easier to buy foreign oil than support domestic producers.

Now, our energy policy essentially amounts to using the U.S. military to protect our foreign sources and begging them for mercy when they meet to set prices.

Ironically, we run the risk of repeating the same mistakes in agriculture. If we do not act to save our farm infrastructure today, we will be dependent on others for our food tomorrow.

For several years, Kansas producers have been able to survive low prices with high yields. However, a drought last year and poor growing conditions this year have left most farmers with few options of where to turn.

One of the suggestions I often heard, while holding my town hall meetings, was that we should do more for ethanol.

It just makes good sense to Kansans that when corn prices are low and gas prices high, we should do all we can to encourage the production and use of this corn derivative.

By promoting ethanol use, we can help the producer, reduce our reliance on foreign oil, and even help protect the environment.

I have sponsored legislation aimed at promoting the use of this renewable fuel. Few of the difficult problems we face in agriculture or energy have solutions ready to implement.

However, ethanol stands ready as a valuable solution, offering real benefits and real results.

These issues are of importance to us all. Our rural energy and agriculture producers are vital to the prosperity of this country.

Congress must act to sustain the way of life in rural America and to ensure a prosperous, self-sufficient America tomorrow.

As we develop a sound national energy policy and the next farm bill, I encourage my colleagues to consider the concerns of Kansans: \$1.93 gas, and \$1.81 corn.



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## Sovereign bonds not farm surpluses!

Would anyone care if their pension and mutual funds bought sovereign bonds (a piece of paper) from the Peoples Republic of China?

Lets see here China sold 600,000 tonnes of corn for a pretty good price and now the Peoples Republic of China wants the American pension funds to loan it money too. Wonder if Jiang needs the money to buy South American soybeans. Yep thats what grain traders say.

The Peoples Republic of China doesn't act like there was a world grain glut. It wants to line up their supply of soybeans before its all been planted in the US. If there was a world grain glut why would Jiang sign into a deal for South American soybeans at premium prices of \$5.13-\$5.27 a bushel.

So now we know what Jiang was doing in South America, he was buying the other guy's soybeans, but it was for cash money too!

Jiang is right Americans are confused and it would be ironic that American pension and mutual funds was underwriting his grain buying spree.

What no US satellites?

Maybe Jiang is confused too. While he makes off like a car thief, s chop shop on the downed EP-3E Lockheed Aries II, he wants to sell \$1.5 billion



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sovereign bonds to the senior citizens of America.

You know that sounds like a central bank in crisis. Remember the stagflation of the 1980s? The Paul Volcker Federal Reserve floated more government bonds than a North Korean communal farm.

So look out when China wants to sell their sovereign bonds. THAT would be riskier than a privatized Social Security.

Even if the Peoples Republic of China converted it's yuam (currency) into soybeans a Chinese central banks bond is still a piece of paper. And one election year show horse talked about a risky scheme?

The rub is that the Peoples Republic of China not only likes our secrets from the Los Alamos Nuclear labs in New Mexico it also likes the secrecy of the Securities and Exchange Commission loop hole

called Rule 144

This rule permits the Peoples Republic of China to offer sovereign bonds without full disclosures.

Whoa! Its just not enough to say trust me when someone says Tiananmen Square never happened and a EP-3E was a spy plane. Furthermore its entirely possible that American pension and mutual funds will find themselves the Peoples Republic of China, s pigeon...as soon as this summer.

Even after the Securities and Exchange Commission adopted new disclosure requirements the Peoples Republic of China can use a bait-and-switch scheme, by sending money by the way of the EU to off shore banks in the Caribbean. Then after a 40-day seasoning (laundering) period, it can be sold in the U.S.

If there is anything that chaps farmers its that the export of money isn't like the export of grain. It may have been a good idea when Ivan was buying up our farm surpluses to have the licensing of agricultural exports.

But the Peoples Republic of China doesn't need an export license to sell its fiat money to some little old lady's pension fund.

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## How to make public schools work

I've been visiting and writing about schools for some 40 years. Once in a while, I find someone who has reinvented the wheel and discovered how to get all children to learn, regardless of the income or education of their parents, and regardless of whether the children have only one parent at home.

A current reinventor of the wheel of learning is Dr. Gregory Hodge, the principal of the Frederick Douglass Academy in central Harlem, a predominantly black and Hispanic area of New York City.

I was not surprised when I read a story about his school earlier this year in The New York Times because I once wrote a book — "Does Anybody Give a Damn: Nat Hentoff on Education" (Knopf, 1977) — about schools in "disadvantaged" neighborhoods that also expected all of their students to learn. And they did learn.

Of the 1,100 students at the Frederick Douglass Academy, a public school, 80 percent are black and 19 percent are Hispanic. Some come from homes far below the poverty line. In a few of those homes, one or both parents are drug addicts. Seventy-two percent of the students are eligible for free lunch.

The dropout rate is 0.3 percent. If a student doesn't show up at a tutoring session, his teacher calls his mother, father, or other caregiver. Every student is expected to go to college.

As The New York Times reported, "In June of last year, 114 students graduated and 113 attended colleges, some going to Ivy League or comparable schools." The 114th student was accepted by the Naval Academy.

During the Great Depression, I went to a similar public school. All of us were expected to go to college. Most of us were poor.

At the Boston Latin School, as at the Frederick Douglas Academy, there was firm, but not abusive, discipline. And we had three hours of homework a night. There were no excuses for not turn-



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ing in the work. At the Frederick Douglass Academy, the students have four hours of homework a night.

The students there take Japanese and Latin in middle school and can switch to French or Spanish in high school. At Boston Latin, we had to take Latin and Greek as well as American history. The kids at Frederick Douglass can take advanced placement courses not only in American history, but also in calculus and physics. I flunked beginning physics.

Moreover, the students at Frederick Douglass mentor elementary-school children at the public school next door. "The idea," Dr. Hodge told The New York Times, "is to show students that they have responsibilities to the Harlem community. And they are expected to be leaders and help Harlem grow."

Near Boston Latin Schools, there were elementary school kids who, without mentoring, didn't have much of a chance to believe that they could someday go to college. But our Boston Latin principal didn't send us out to be part of a larger responsibility.

So how come Frederick Douglass Academy does what a public school is supposed to do — lift all boats? The principal, who reads every one of the 1,100 report cards, demands that his teachers expect each child to learn. The school works, he says, because it has committed teachers. "They come in early and stay late. The teachers go with them to colleges. Some have gone in their own pockets for supplies. ... Teachers here will do everything they can to make sure kids are suc-

cessful."

A senior who had been in a high school outside New York City explained the success of the school — and his own success there — succinctly: "They want you to learn here."

I have been in schools at which principals are seldom seen because they don't want to take responsibility for problems that arise. And I know teachers who have enabled kids to learn in their classrooms, but worry about sending the students on to teachers who are convinced that children from mean streets and homes without books can learn only so much.

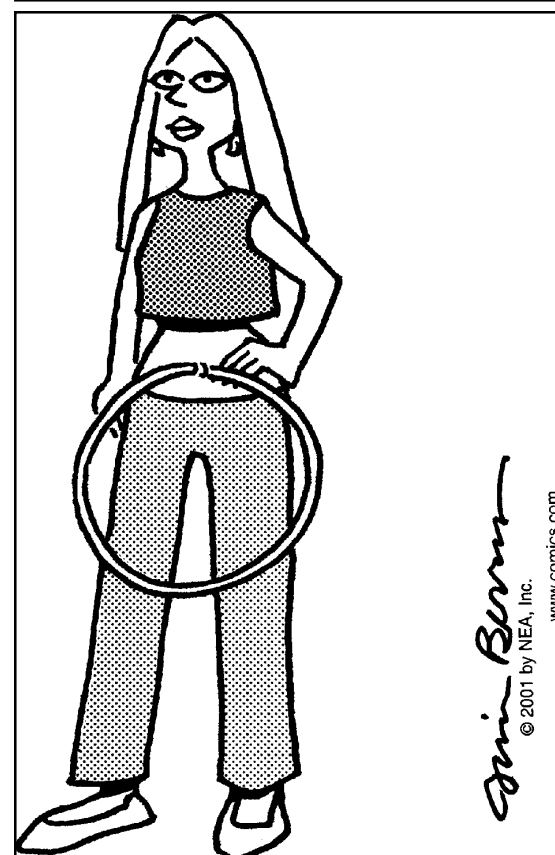
And I remember a president named Clinton who spent a lot of time focusing on affirmative action to get minority kids into college. For the most part, he ignored the students who never get close to going to college because of principals, teachers and school boards who do not expect all kids to learn, and so do not demand that they do.

At a New York City school board meeting years ago, I heard a black parent accuse the silent officials: "When you fail, when everybody fails my child, what happens? Nothing. Nobody gets fired. Nothing happens to nobody, except my child."

He was torn between grief and rage. So are many American parents these days. At the Frederick Douglass Academy, parents see their children grow in every way. And it is a public school.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

## berry's world



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