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commentary

from other pens...

Cuts in senior services cause more than pain

The Topeka Capital-Journal on funding senior citizens:

We grouse a lot about alleged perks of being a legislator. But there may be even more maddening aspects to the job than there are perquisites—especially this year, with the state being some \$725 million short of what it needs for the coming year.

It doesn't get much more maddening than this, either: Sometimes when you cut money out of the budget, it ends up costing the state more in the long run.

Take the Senior Care Act, for example. ...

The program provides seniors with home-based services that ... help keep seniors in their homes longer and out of nursing homes as much as possible.

As contemplated by the governor's initial balanced budget, the Senior Care Act would lose 55 percent of its funding in fiscal year 2003.

The Senate Ways and Means committee is working to restore the funding. It should do so, and the rest of the Senate and House should quickly follow suit.

It's bad enough such a massive cut would endanger the health and vitality of thousands of seniors across the state. ...

But to compound the problem, the fiscal effect of causing all this pain might actually be negative. ...

There may never be a better example of being penny wise and pound foolish. ...

Lawmakers have their work cut out for them sorting through the budget shortfall. But this decision is a no-brainer. Cutting the Senior Care Act funding can only hurt everyone involved. Don't do it.

The Garden City Telegram on sales tax exemptions:

Edward Hammond doesn't have the solutions, but does tender a prediction—Fort Hays State University will lose up to 1,000 students if the state's financial outlook doesn't improve.

The FHSU president ... notes that his university would have to trim about \$4.59 million from next year's budget if legislation passed out of the House and now in the Senate is enacted.

To meet the budget, Hammond says, would require a 60 percent increase in tuition, and that would eliminate about 1,000 students. ... Other options include trimming about 100 teacher positions. ...

Hammond does offer a carrot—Kansas lawmakers could consider eliminating many of the sales-tax exemptions now on the books. Others have suggested the same thing. According to Hammond's figures, Kansas could reduce the sales-tax rate in half and generate the same revenue if the exemptions were lifted.

That would be a tough sell in a business-cozy Legislature, but it's an idea that deserves attention.

This legislative session won't be remembered for achieving a balanced budget. Each session does that.

It's in achieving that goal this Legislature will make known its priorities.

It doesn't take a business degree to know that the state's application of sales tax could be more fair. It doesn't take a degree to know that education is the ticket to a brighter future.

where to write

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Holy sanctuary or terrorist shield?

A visit to Jerusalem's Temple Mount in the fall of 2000 by Ariel Sharon was enough to kick off this second Palestinian war of terror on Israel known as the Intifada. Or so the legend goes. In fact, as even Palestinian Authority spokesman Imad Al-Faluji has stated on more than one occasion, Palestinian military action against the Jewish state was planned long before Sharon's "provocative visit" to Judaism's most holy site, which adjoins a site revered by Muslims as Haram-as-Sharif.

But imagine: If a mere day trip by Sharon into the vicinity of an Islamic holy site—which, frankly, as Islamic sites go, ranks way below your Meccas and your Medinas—could be considered reason enough to go to war, what about the armed Palestinian occupation, now into its second week, of one of Christianity's most sacred sites, the Church of the Nativity?

Needless to say, the seizure of the 1,677-year-old church by 250 guerrillas affiliated with Islamist terror factions has hardly roused the armies of Christendom. Crusades, Christian-soldiering and all that went out in the last millennium. Still, it's a shock to realize that this desecration of the ancient church built over what's believed to be the birthplace of Jesus Christ has brought down neither Christian wrath nor international pressure on the desecrators to lay down their arms and leave. The closest thing to a meaningful call for action out of Rome, for instance, comes from Father David Jaeger, a Catholic spokesman, who said this week, "We appeal to the world to condemn this act and stop this behavior from continuing."

Father Jaeger's statement would be a good start—only he was referring to the Israeli troops who have encircled the church, not the terrorists who have occupied it. Church officials, meanwhile, insist on styling the latter "refuge" seekers, but you



diana west

• commentary

could say only heaven knows why. They also insist that the Franciscan friars and nuns inside the church are not, emphatically not (perhaps too emphatically not), hostages. This line is starting to wear thin as contradictory stories leak out of Bethlehem, including a Thursday report by UPI of a cell phone call made to German journalists from "a German" inside the church who said, "The Palestinians use us like human shields."

Occupier or guest, this band of sanctuary-seekers doesn't exactly call to mind a hunted herd of panting Bambis. According to the Israeli government, among those inside the church are notorious killers from Yasser Arafat's Fatah, Tanzim and Hamas rosters. They include Ibrahim Musa Salem Abayat and Ismail Musa Muhammad Hamdan, two leading Tanzim operatives responsible for—among multiple terrorist attacks—the kidnapping and murder on Jan. 15 of Avi Boaz, a 72-year-old American citizen. Also inside are Nidal Ahmad Isa Abu Gali'if and Muhammad Sa'id Attallah Salem, a pair of henchmen thought to be in on the March 29 suicide bombing at an Israeli supermarket that killed, among others, a 17-year-old girl out shopping for a Passover meal. There's a Fatah general secretary named Kamel Hassan Hamid, who reports to the Palestinian Authority's Marwan Barghouti, and is said to be responsible for distributing funds to terrorist agents. Hamas is also represented by such operatives as Ibrahim Muhammad

Salem Abyat, a chief organizer of the faction's terror operations.

In other words, Sunday school it ain't. No wonder Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told the Israeli parliament he would "expect the international community to demand that they (the terrorists) lay down their arms and leave the holy place." But no. A strange hush hangs over the world, including the still-mainly Christian West. From the European Union to the Holy See, from the resolution-happy United Nations to the newly "involved" United States of America, no official of church or state has demanded that Yasser Arafat order the Palestinians holed up over Christ's birthplace to drop their arms and leave the church ASAP.

Very politely, Israel this week rejected the Vatican's idea of a solution, one that would have guaranteed all 250 terrorists safe passage to Gaza Strip, where they would only rearm and regroup—and re-attack. As Israeli President Moshe Katsav wrote the Pope, "Under the circumstances, I regret with all respect and consideration we have for Christian Holy Places, we have no alternative but to prevent armed Palestinian terrorists, who have murdered innocent Jews, from escaping and continuing their acts of bloodshed." Katsav might have also mentioned that the Vatican's solution would have turned sacred religious sites into sure-fire escape hatches, all but guaranteeing future seizures.

And so the standoff continues, with surrender being the only solution to avoid a pitched battle. Whose surrender will it be—terrorism's or civilization's? You would think—you would hope—that the world wouldn't want to stay quiet on this one.

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War fever



chris matthews

• commentary

WASHINGTON—The American people are being herded into war.

According to a Gallup Poll, an astounding 81 percent of us now believe it "likely" that U.S. troops will be sent into the Middle East.

Yet when the same Americans are asked if President Bush has a "well-thought-out" Mideast policy, the answer comes back almost split, with 48 percent saying he does and 47 percent saying he doesn't.

"Oh, it's one, two, three, what are we fightin' for? I don't give a damn, next stop is ..."

OK, what is that next stop?

Do we expect to have our sons and daughters standing on the "green line" separating Israel from the occupied Arab West Bank?

How could that be? How could we be going to fight somewhere when we don't have a "well-thought-out" idea of why or whom we're fighting? Will U.S. forces be sent to protect Arabs from the Israeli tanks, or to protect Israel's pizza parlors and busses from Palestinian suicide bombers?

I can't imagine which would be the dumber, more dangerous assignment. Can you imagine some guy from Arkansas trying to tell the tough-as-nails Israeli Defense Force not to protect its country? Can you imagine some kid from the Bronx trying to figure which Palestinian might have suicide in mind? I think they'd have a hard time with that mission even if they knew Hebrew and Arabic both.

Here's another disturbing Gallup number: 59 percent of Americans favor sending U.S. troops to invade Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power.

At the very time the United States faces global Islamic hostility for our support of Israel, a strong majority of Americans want to invade an Arab country. They would be willing to send hundreds of thousands of our troops to Baghdad, thereby establishing a second East-West front. With Israeli tanks rolling through the streets of the West Bank, killing Arabs, American tanks would be rolling through the streets of Baghdad, killing Arabs.

Does anyone seriously think anything good would come of this two-front war but more Arab hostility, more anti-Zionist zealotry, more nationalism, or more hatred of our country?

Put more bluntly, are the American people seriously thinking?

Are we looking at the consequences of a two-front war in Arabia: Ariel Sharon smashing Palestinian resistance, America smashing through the gates of Baghdad? Has anyone imagined what those dueling TV pictures will do to the Arab "street" or to the governments in Cairo, Amman, Tripoli and Damascus that must rule those streets? The only winners in such a scenario are those who dream of a final, all-out conflict between East and West. If Osama bin Laden is still alive, this is his dream. More than the promised 72 virgins he tells followers to expect at death, he imagines an earthly nirvana. He wants to see the entire Islamic war engaged in a death struggle with the "Crusaders." What a perfect recipe for igniting the revolution he has long sought against the Saudi royal family, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdullah.

There would be other winners here at home: those neo-conservative hawks who have been consistently beating the drums for war against the Arabs and Persians. For months, the Op-Ed pages of this country's major newspapers have been occupied daily with their relentless rants for war

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"Phase Two" or "Regime Change" in Iraq—or Iran or Syria or Libya or Saudi Arabia or Egypt.

Unable to say a single good word about an Arab country, certainly nothing in print, they got Bush to include "North Korea" in their global hit list.

This is meant to suggest, I can only assume, that they are not driven entirely by anti-Arab hostility. They also hate some countries in Asia, including China, countries we should get around to fighting once we have overrun and occupied all of Arabia and Persia.

If you don't think it's this bad, you haven't been reading the papers.

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

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