

from our viewpoint...

As the year passes what did it bring?

In the words of the carol, "fast away the old year passes."

So what has the old year brought us?

In Washington, it's all about the election, believe us. Gridlock dominates as tea-party Republicans force the House farther to the right, and liberal Dems and a few Republican friends pursue a big-spending agenda.

The president has proposed another increase in the debt ceiling – by \$1.2 trillion up to \$16.4 trillion this time. Congress may refuse it, but the president apparently can veto the refusal. That's a neat trick, since the Republicans can claim to have fought the increase, but the government won't shut down.

Score one there for the GOP.

Meantime, Mr. Obama won points for pushing a two-month extension on the Social Security tax cut and extended unemployment benefits, giving Congress time to stall for another two months before coming up with some last-minute compromise.

He comes off as the champion of the middle class and the working man, trying to make things work, while Congress looks like the one holding up the works. Score that one for Obama.

While the economy is not great, it's slowly getting better. There's even talk that unemployment might slip below 8 percent by fall. That would be good news for Obama, since no president in recent times has been re-elected with unemployment above that level.

Voters may look at the economy next fall and, if it's improving, feel good about the president even though they suffered during his recession. His policies have hampered the recovery and helped keep employment down, but in politics, it's all about "what have you done for me lately."

The Republican candidates have jostled all year without anyone emerging as a strong contender. You might have thought Gov. Rick Perry of Texas would show some charisma, some leadership, but he fell flat on his face.

Former Speaker Newt Gingrich? Can you see women voting for someone who filed for divorce while his wife was fighting cancer?

Gov. Mitt Romney seems the solid candidate, the survivor, but solid is not very sexy. He's not viewed as much of a conservative and won't fire up the tea party wing. He's no great speaker. He's, well, solid.

Will that carry the day against the president with the million-dollar grin? (And don't ask what that man is smiling about!)

He may be part and parcel of the old Chicago machine, but Mr. Obama knows how to polish his image. He's got that electrifying something that makes for excitement in politics – and the Republicans don't have a Ronald Reagan to trot out against him.

At midyear, remember, Washington commentator Charlie Cook said the Republicans couldn't miss IF they found an electable candidate. So far, everyone who steps forward falls out, except Mr. Romney.

And he's about as exciting as his father, George, a very nice man who never snared the nomination.

What will the new year bring? More of the same, or a savior for the GOP?

From here, the race looks like even money, but the year ought to be a little better than the last anyway. Stay tuned, as they say. – Steve Haynes



Early childhood learning: States lead the way

Democrats and Republicans don't agree on much these days. But there is one thing on which they do see eye to eye: the value of early childhood education.

Once an afterthought of America's education system, early learning now is front and center as educators, governors and legislators grapple with ways to better prepare children for a lifetime of success.

The Obama administration recently announced nine states – California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington – will receive grants under the federal Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, a \$500 million project intended to jump-start programs to educate our youngest learners. These states are led by Republican, Democratic and Independent governors.

In fact, more than two-thirds of the nation's governors – 17 Republicans and 18 Democrats – applied for federal money to develop early learning programs. They represented states large and small and scattered throughout every region of the country, from Maine to Hawaii, Washington to Florida.

While only a handful of states won grants, one thing is clear: There is a strong, bipartisan, national movement to establish and improve early childhood education. And it's not going away.

Just look at what this competition already accomplished. The 35 states (plus Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia) that applied for grants first had to examine their own approaches to early childhood education and make sure they had policies in place to improve quality, build connections and support children and families. That work alone increased awareness of and appreciation for the importance of early learning and gave new momentum to the issue within state capitols.

Leaders in all those states and more now realize we must start long before kindergarten to give children the tools they need to flourish



from other pens

• commentary

during their school years and throughout their lives. This is exactly what funders, advocates, practitioners and experts intended when they began to lay the groundwork for change more than a decade ago.

States have been leading the way. The BUILD Initiative, created by philanthropies through the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative, has worked with nine states – Arizona, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Washington – to develop early learning systems supporting the National Education Goal, "all children start school ready to learn." These states have been pioneers in creating a comprehensive approach to early childhood policies responding to child health, nutrition, mental health, family support and early care and education needs for young children and their families.

Even the states that did not win grants are making progress. They now have detailed plans on how to improve early learning opportunities and the support of a burgeoning movement including parents, philanthropists, business leaders and high-ranking government officials. It is a movement led by states and fueled by private-sector energy and philanthropic resources – historically a potent combination for bringing about social change.

The movement will grow because states will learn from each other. The BUILD Initiative and the First Five Years Fund, leaders in strengthening the connection between early childhood and the K-12 community, have formed the Early Learning Challenge Collaborative to tap into this collective expertise from the states. The collaborative will continue to

share with all states the best thinking for improving the quality and effectiveness of early learning programs.

Education in general and early learning in particular is one of the smartest investments America can make, not only for our children, but for our country's economic well being. Success in the workplace begins with success in the early grades.

State leaders understand, and have taken steps to give children a strong start by educating them from the moment they are born.

Research by Nobel Laureate economist James Heckman bears out the impact of early learning on the economy. He found investing in early childhood education closes the achievement gap, reduces the need for special education, increases the likelihood of healthier lifestyles, lowers the crime rate, and reduces overall social costs. Heckman estimates for every dollar invested in early childhood education, there is a 10 percent per year return on investment.

For the last decade, the nine BUILD states and others have developed early learning systems to put Heckman's theory into action. These states have worked to improve early childhood education because they know children are born learning, and nurturing their early development and the ability of their families to support them strengthens their chances for long-term success.

Isn't that what we all want for our children?

Gerrit Westervelt is Executive Director of the BUILD Initiative, a national project created by the Early Childhood Funders Collaborative to help states improve and align policies and services for young children.

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guest columnist

• ken klemm

Recently I was in Arizona about 90 miles north of the Mexican border on a huge, old family ranch at the owner's invitation. As we stood in his corrals talking business, a helicopter arrived ½ mile away and began to hover about 100 feet from the ground. I inquired of my host what that was all about.

He informed me it was a Border Patrol helicopter and it appeared they had located a group of illegals and were keeping track of them until the ground units could arrive. He said it is estimated many thousands cross his ranch each night. Reminder: We are 90 miles NORTH of the border.

He then shared his personal experience of marrying a local girl and taking over the long held family ranch. The family no longer lives on the ranch since it is not safe. With the setting sun, they all go to their town houses for safety. The old family home near the corrals was a shambles from the many break-ins and abuse by passing illegals.

He said he doesn't worry too much about the illegals but has grave concerns about the professional smugglers (of drug, people and otherwise). He said he hadn't been running the ranch for long when he was stopped by armed men who told him if he continued to assist the Border Patrol there would be serious problems for him.

While it shook him up, he was of good courage and decided to still do his part and assist the Border Patrol when requested. Soon thereafter, he was again stopped by armed men while alone in a remote area. They dragged him out of his vehicle and showed him pictures of his wife and his wife's family. With automatic weapons

in hand, they informed him if he continued to assist the border patrol they would kill his wife, his wife's family and then him.

This young rancher told me he was sure at this very moment there were cartel scouts on the peaks surrounding the corrals watching his actions and the ongoing event with the Border Patrol. He assured us we needn't worry as he had not had any contact with the Border Patrol since the last threatening episode.

About then, a Border Patrol vehicle arrived thru a nearby pasture gate and our host became visibly concerned. The four heavily armed Border Patrol agents wanted directions on how best to drive to the spot where the helicopter was. Our host bravely obliged their wishes.

After looking at my wife and children who had accompanied me on this excursion, I thought now might be a good time to leave. Our host advised me it may be better to wait a while as this event would likely move in the direction we were headed.

Here I was, with my dear family, in a remote, semi-war zone. We had flown to Arizona and thanks to the ridiculous security theater at the airport I found myself without even so much as a pocket knife. I related this to my host and he said we were in fact prepared as he always carried two fully automatic rifles behind the seat of his truck. My assurance I was well

acquainted with firearms seemed to be of comfort to him.

Such is the situation in Arizona. If we here in the Heartland were facing similar threats and the Federal government continued to shirk their responsibility and instead found it in their best interest to use the situation as a political football, wouldn't we too be forced to resort to whatever means available to protect our citizens?

The Arizona immigration law is like all government interventions – a blunt tool. Absent a functioning Federal government, this tool gives police reasonable authority to help protect citizens. The problem with the Arizona immigration law is not the law itself but that Arizonian's are suffering from criminal neglect by our Federal government.

Ken Klemm is a local buffalo rancher concerned with restoring Constitutional principles of liberty. He can be reached at (785) 899-5804 or by e-mail ken@thebuffaloguys.com

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