

from our viewpoint...

## Remove marriage from government

The president's slightly abrupt announcement last week that he supported the idea of allowing same-sex marriage has caused a lot of consternation across the country.

Let's not kid ourselves, the decision is a political one. The old saying goes "there are only two things that ever stop anyone from doing something in Washington: money or politics." It doesn't cost anything monetarily to come out now in support of gay marriage, and the presidents advisors must have felt the political upsides outweighed the downsides.

The nation-wide numbers seem to support that idea. While only 3.5 percent of Americans identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, only 48 percent of Americans are opposed to same-sex marriage. That's down 20 percent from 1996. Poll numbers are gradually shifting to support of the idea. That doesn't make it a landslide, however, as 48 percent opposed is still a lot of people, and some are very passionate about the issue. That's likely to describe a good portion of Kansans.

That makes it a risky campaign move for the president, but it may turn out to be a good one. He got \$2 million in contributions during the 24 hours following the announcement.

Now, in all this what often gets lost is that a statement by the president supporting the legalization of same sex marriage doesn't mean anything is going to happen immediately.

The Defense of Marriage Act is still in place as well as the state-level bans. There has been no announcement of any actual initiatives, no bills in the Legislature. For the moment, it's just words. So we can't really tell much about what will come out of all this.

We can tell you one thing though. Love it or hate it, if gay marriage suddenly becomes legal, it's going to be a huge economic windfall.

CNN estimates there are more than 646,400 gay couples in the U.S. who have not gotten married. The average amount spent on a wedding is \$27,000. You can do the math. Florists, wedding planners, cake decorators, caterers, jewelers and more are all going to get a huge boost.

If our number one priority is the economy, shouldn't we be looking at every avenue? There's a good-sized group out there that would be buying from these businesses, but can't.

Still that's not what is at the heart of this issue. What is central is an argument over what should be the prevailing attitude of the country. Everyone is searching for a solution to these and all the other problems facing us, the problem is people sometimes forget the fundamental edicts this country was built on.

What are we about if not ensuring maximum personal and professional freedom for everyone? If that is so, then government should get out of the marriage business entirely. If it can't offer marriage to everyone, it shouldn't offer it to anyone.

The best solution would be to have anyone who wants to get hitched go sign the paperwork before a judge to get some kind of civil union so they can get their spousal benefits, then get "married" at the church, synagogue, mosque, casino, etc. of their choice. Government would not be able to deny a couple their benefits, but churches would be free to decide which marriage ceremonies they would or would not perform.

If we are for limited government, and maximum freedom for citizens, churches and organizations, this seems to be the best way to go. —Kevin Bottrell



## Wheat Tour a fun trip across state

Looking at Kansas wheat across the state during the first few days of May, members of the Wheat Quality Council labeled the crop in "pretty good shape."

While the wheat in the western third to half of the state needs a drink, the 100 participants of the council's 55th annual Wheat Tour agreed the crop is two to three weeks ahead of schedule and combines will begin rolling into the fields in May, which is unheard of.

After three days on the road, 63 participants estimated the 2012 wheat crop to yield 403.8 million bushels. This figures out to be roughly 45 bushels per acre on 9.5 million acres planted in Kansas.

The tour began April 30 in Manhattan and traveled west to Colby on the first day. Twenty-two vehicles following six different routes made up the convoy. The second day, the tour headed south and east, ending up in Wichita. The final day moved from Wichita to Kansas City.

Each vehicle made from 12 to 20 stops, and this year's tour tallied visits in 608 fields, said Mark Nelson, Kansas Farm Bureau commodities director.

"We used formulas provided by Kansas Ag Statistics to make our estimates," Nelson says. "While this nearly 404 million bushel estimate seems like a huge crop, we only have to go back to '97-'98 when Kansas farmers harvested 500 million-bushel crops. On the other hand, last year, we harvested a much smaller crop with 276 million bushels because of the extreme drought."

Nelson says that because the wheat crop is so far ahead of schedule and the crop insurance price is high, farmers will carry most of the acres all the way to harvest. Even in the poorer fields, he doesn't foresee much abandonment of wheat acres. He estimated only 3 percent of



### Insight this week

• john schlageck

the total crop will be given up this year.

Lincoln County farmer Steve Boor was on the tour for the first time this year. Unlike probably 50 percent of the participants; however, this wasn't Boor's maiden voyage into a wheat field. He recalled driving a Massey Harris Super 26 combine during wheat harvest when he was 16, more than 40 years ago.

The veteran farmer says participating in the tour was one of most fun things he's done.

"I had a blast," Boor says. "To rub shoulders with wheat breeders, importers, exporters, millers, bakers, agronomists and just about anyone else who has a hand in wheat was another worthwhile learning experience."

And while there were 100 participants on the tour, Boor was surprised that only nine wheat farmers made the trip. He noted that often estimates of the crop yield were higher than his.

"I'd look at other people's numbers and shake my head and tell them, 'It ain't going to make that,'" Boor said. "They laughed and told me I was figuring low on purpose to keep the price of wheat high."

Not so, the Lincoln County wheat grower told those on the tour.

"After 40 years of walking in and out of these fields," he said, "I can look at wheat and tell you if it's a 10-, 20-, 30-, 40- or 50-bushel crop. You feel it in your gut. I've been broken hearted by enough of these fields hoping to harvest 50 bushel wheat and it turned out to be 25 or 30 bushel wheat. It has a way of making

you humble."

Boor said many of the tour participants gravitated to the best-looking wheat in each field. He'd hang back and find a spot that was more representative of the average field. He added that he couldn't blame them for being attracted to the best-looking wheat.

While he admitted the wheat crop did look good in some regions, he noted that he didn't see any heads on this trip like he's seen in past years when there was talk of good, big crops.

"That's another reason I wasn't convinced the figures we came up with were something you could take all the way to the bank," Boor says.

When the Lincoln County farmer returned home after the tour, he looked at the local crop. In just four days, he said, he was amazed at how far the wheat had "backed up."

"I can guarantee you our wheat crop isn't going to make what our estimates on the tour showed," Boor says. "The hot temperatures and wind really took the starch out of the wheat crop."

Like all farmers, Boor knows the crop was as good as it could get the first week in May. At this stage of maturity, with ideal weather conditions, the crop can maintain, but if temperatures turn hot and the wind continues to blow, the crop can deteriorate quickly.

While he wouldn't be surprised if there is some 50- and 60- bushel wheat harvested in Kansas this year, Boor says he'd be thrilled with a crop that averages 40 bushels per acre.

"I'd guess we'll harvest about 390 million bushels in Kansas," the Lincoln County farmer said. "I'm a realist. Whatever it ends up when we haul the crop to the bin, that's what it'll be."

## Austerity, family and the economy

When the left takes a strident position on any given issue, that's a clear signal that the policy they dislike is gaining momentum.

Take the recent liberal apoplexy over reducing the size and scope of government is often summarized as "austerity." People in nations around the world, from Greece to Spain to the U.S., are bearing the brunt of massive over-spending by those they have elected. Reducing this spending and the dependency on government it has created – even by the most passive means, such as reducing the growth rate of government outflows – is giving liberal writers the vapors.

Joel Brinkley, formerly of the *New York Times* and now a journalism prof at Stanford, tells us that "imposing austerity now is utterly foolhardy -- in fact, just plain stupid."

Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman writes that while "Fortunately ... there was some 'passive' fiscal tightening as the Obama stimulus faded out, but no wholesale shift to austerity."

And former Secretary of Labor in the Clinton Administration, Robert Reich (now a professor of public policy at UC-Berkeley), calls for "rejecting austerity economics for now, while at the same time demanding that corporations and the rich pay their fair share of the cost of keeping everyone else afloat."

To summarize, in the words of Stanford economist John Taylor, "The proposals called 'austerity' are characterized (by the Left) as going back to the Stone Age, with the connotation of drastic, draconian, sharp, sudden reductions in spending."

Why these hysterical and near-panicked characterizations? Because Left-leaning economists recognize, as even Reich admits, "America has a long-term budget deficit that's scary. So does Europe." As a result, they know that policymakers and those who elect them are at last grappling with the hard choices needed



### from other pens

• rob schwarzwaldner

to rein-in Washington's spending.

The consequences of continued fiscal profligacy are profound. Michael Cembalest, Chairman of Market and Investment Strategy for J.P. Morgan Asset Management, wrote recently in *Forbes*, "Financial markets remain concerned about the ability and willingness of the US and Europe to tackle their respective fiscal challenges ... Downgrades, government shutdown rumors and political impasse on deficit reduction have not lost their ability to negatively affect equity markets, business activity and confidence."

In layman's language, this means that unless Western governments – led by our own – take steps to curb the growth rate of spending and reduce outlays in areas where calamitous over-spending is obvious (e.g., archaically-formulated entitlement programs), any nascent recovery will collapse.

Shawn Tully, a senior editor at large at *Fortune* magazine, argues that "lowering spending right now – as long as the downward slope is gradual – will do nothing to choke economic growth, and could even enhance it. And the anti-austerity solution, raising spending immediately, then reversing course at some future date, will not lift GDP, even temporarily, and threatens to further hobble deeply indebted nations."

Increasing federal spending and raising taxes on any person or business doing even modestly well is a sure-fire way of forestalling the growth America's economy and her families so urgently need.

To foster growth, we can lower the rate of

federal spending, modernize entitlement programs, provide appropriate tax incentives for firms to expand and hire, and liberate business from undue regulations. Most importantly, we can and must strengthen that single most significant engine of economic productivity, the family.

Family dissolution erodes economic growth, and the sharp decline in population growth has a negative affect on productivity. "Human capital and labor combined with physical capital each contribute roughly equal parts to growth," write Drs. Pat Fagan and Henry Potrykus of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute. "Increasingly it has been hoped by many that physical capital may substitute for any decline in population's and human capital's contribution to growth. However, this has not been attained historically."

Elsewhere, they have written, "Government revenues come from the taxation of our economy. Our economic growth is and will continue to be a fraction of that of the pre-1960's era because of the breakdown in marriage. All the while, more citizens are pushed into dependency on this government, again because of marriage breakdown."

Marriage. Children. Family. Economic growth. Fiscal discipline and spending reduction. All are indispensable ingredients to the professed goal of both Right and Left: Prosperity.

Rob Schwarzwaldner, executive vice president of the Family Research Council, has served as chief of staff for two members of Congress, a communications aide in both the House and Senate and as director of communications and senior writer at the National Association of Manufacturers. In 2001, President George W. Bush appointed him as senior speechwriter at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, where he wrote about the president's health-care agenda.

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e-mail: [star.news@nwkansas.com](mailto:star.news@nwkansas.com)

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[nwkansas.com](http://nwkansas.com)

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

([nt.betz@nwkansas.com](mailto:nt.betz@nwkansas.com))

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. ([support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com))

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