

from other viewpoints...

Public universities an answer to debt

A March 2012 study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press that found 84 percent of college graduates thought the expense of going to college was a good investment. As a university president, it is easy to feel reassured.

As the parent of one college student and another to follow, I also understand how 75 percent of adults in a Pew survey said that college is too expensive for most Americans to afford. This goes against what those of us in higher education want, and it certainly contradicts the open-to-all approach of land-grant universities like Kansas State.

When students and their families finance an education, many of them end up in debt. The Pew Center found that it's one out of five households. From the economic to the personal it's easy to identify the problems of our nation's recent graduates and families saddled with debt. What is harder to identify are ways to mitigate debt accumulation.

I believe that public higher education - our "state schools" - can be part of the solution. They offer a high-quality educational experience at a more reasonable price, in spite of the fact that state funding continues to dwindle.

Among Kansas State University students who accrue debt, on average they accrue \$22,308. To put that in perspective, that's about the cost of a new Volkswagen Beetle. While this amount is nothing to scoff at, it's also not the \$60,000 or \$80,000 or more that some graduates report in the media.

Helping students and their families pay for college isn't a one-time conversation. It's a process that spans a student's entire collegiate experience.

I am proud of some of the ways Kansas State University helps students and families. When a prospective student first sets foot on campus for a tour, he or she can meet with staff at our student financial assistance center to learn about scholarships and additional opportunities to help pay for college.

Once students are here, they have another resource: nationally-recognized Powercat Financial Counseling, a free service located in our student union. Financial counselors help students analyze loan options, prepare budgets, understand credit and credit scores, and more.

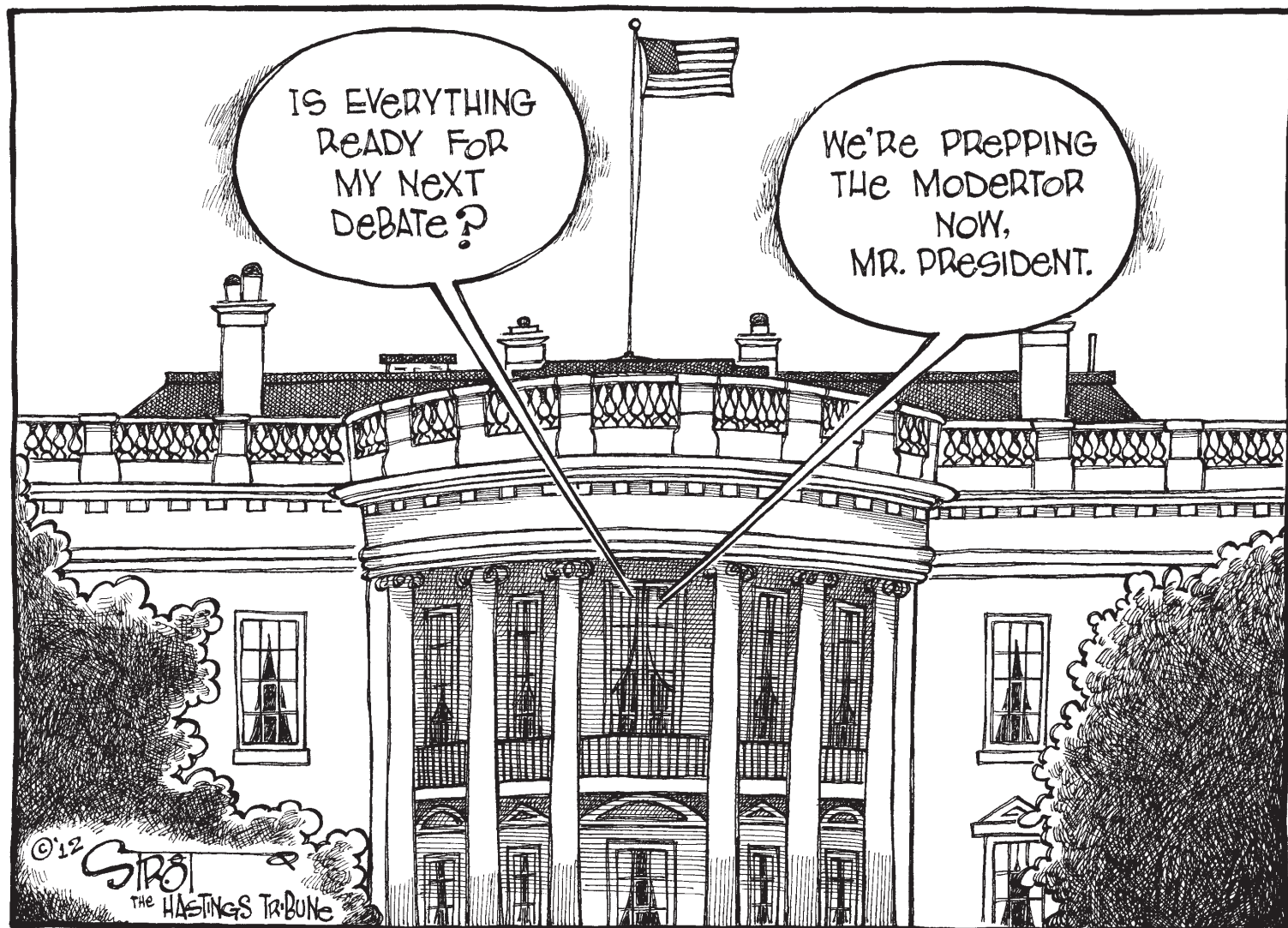
Moreover, each year Kansas State University awards \$18.5 million in scholarships, awarded more than \$200 million in student aid last year, and employs more than 7,000 students who earn a total of more than \$15 million each year.

When those students graduate, they have a lot to look forward to. The most recent survey showed 92 percent of responding graduates were employed or furthering their education within six months of graduation.

I know my counterparts at other public universities agree that students and families benefit from the affordable, high-quality education that state schools provide. Land-grant schools like Kansas State take special pride in our mission to make a college education accessible to as many eligible students as possible - something we've been doing for the past 150 years.

With student debt an ongoing issue, our land-grant mission will be even more significant in the next 150 years.

-Kirk Schulz, Kansas State University president



Reining in the cost of state government

During the last decade, the cost of state government in Kansas grew at an alarming rate. From Fiscal Year 2003 to Fiscal Year 2008, spending of state tax dollars grew by almost \$2 billion - an increase of nearly 50 percent in just six years.

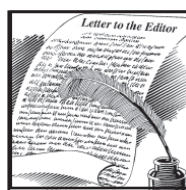
This led to an inevitable crash that started shortly thereafter, and a financial mess that needed sorting through. Kansas began Fiscal Year 2011 - just six months before I took office - with less than \$1,000 in the bank. In my first year as governor, the state faced a projected \$500 million budget deficit. Instead of raising taxes to cover the deficit, we cut spending. In fact, in Fiscal Year 2012, for the first time in 40 years, the state spent less than it had the year before.

To reign in the era of ever-expanding government, my administration focused not only on the big issues such as tax policy reform, but also on fixing the small things that can add up to big problems.

I directed members of my cabinet and staff to examine every process. A reorganization of agencies enabled consolidation of back-office services like human resources and reduced duplicative labor and red tape.

Immediately after my inauguration, we froze state spending, and within short order, we had eliminated more than 2,000 positions that had been open and unfilled for at least six months. We later initiated a voluntary buyout program that allowed more than a thousand state employees to retire with extra benefits and saved the state millions of dollars in the long term.

The savings quickly mounted and helped turn the \$500 million projected budget deficit



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into an almost \$500 million ending balance in just a little more than a year.

We aren't done. I believe that government has much to learn from the private sector in cutting costs, creating efficiencies and improving services. Leading private firms cut waste, compensate employees based on performance, eliminate inefficiencies, streamline processes and provide targeted money to areas that help them meet these goals. This is how they survive. And although government is different, Kansas is in a competition with its surrounding states, and if we want people to invest and live here, we need these efficiencies, too.

My administration is evaluating how we deliver the services Kansans require of their state government and targeting where we can improve delivery while we cut costs. For the first time in decades, state agencies are assessing utility costs for state office buildings in hopes of negotiating lower rates. We are implementing Medicaid reforms that will reduce costs by more than \$1 billion - and improve and expand health care for our most needy Kansans.

A new online tool that many companies find useful is now available to state government managers with a click of a mouse. Known as the Cost Management System or CMS, this system is helping state agencies become more effective and efficient without harming services and programs. It directly links agency

activities with cost data and tracks those costs over time by calculating department unit costs and per person costs every payroll period. These department unit costs are tracked on a graph so that trends and variances can be identified and analyzed. Any substantial increase or decrease will allow agencies to investigate its root cause.

American taxpayers expect their governments at all levels to use their hard-earned tax dollars well and to live within their means. All governors and state legislatures in our country should insist that every state tax dollar is spent efficiently and effectively in the delivery of services and programs to the citizens who need them.

In 2010, Missouri spent roughly \$2,300 in all state money per resident and Oklahoma spent about \$2,800. In Kansas, we spent more than \$3,200 per resident.

I believe Kansas taxpayers want their elected leaders to be responsive to their needs and responsible with their tax dollars. I believe that becoming a more efficient and effective state government does not mean essential core services and programs such as public schools, Medicaid and public safety services should suffer.

Rather, with state agencies able to more readily identify and analyze their costs, state government will be able to better target the use of taxpayers' dollars, cut costs through process improvements and streamline agency services and programs to better serve you and your family. And the best news is, the savings we generate will end up back in your pocket!

Congress ceding power to the president

There's a widespread sense, both in Washington and around the country, that Congress has just ended one of the most listless and unproductive sessions in memory.

When its members bolted town to go home and campaign, they left a long list of big issues unaddressed - immigration reform, "the fiscal cliff," climate change, entitlement reform, cybersecurity. Even worse, they ignored the basics: a new farm bill, a Postal Service that desperately needs restructuring, spending bills to keep the government operating beyond March, a budget.

So there's no mystery why Congress's standing is so low not just among the public at large, but also among the people who pay close attention to its behavior.

"An unsurpassed record of failure," is how USA Today characterized the session.

There are consequences to this fecklessness, most of them pretty obvious: the nation's many challenges are not being met, and everyone trying to plan ahead, from postal workers to farmers to federal contractors and most businesses in the country, is left in limbo. What is less appreciated is that when Congress fails to act, it unwittingly transfers even more power to the President.

You can see this dynamic in play right now on the issue of cybersecurity. A recent "denial of service" attack on six major U.S. banks - which caused Internet blackouts and online banking problems - illustrates why the issue has moved to the front burner in Washington.

Many experts believe that computer intrusions and network attacks have become the greatest threat to our national security. Yet Congress, despite the urgent efforts of several of its leading members, was unable to agree on an approach to the issue; it adjourned without producing a bill to protect the nation's digital infrastructure.

So the national security establishment has urged President Obama to act now, by issuing an executive order. I Even before Congress



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adjourned, such an order was being drafted; critics have labeled the move a power grab, but there's a widespread consensus that national security requires action now, not when Congress can get around to it.

There's a certain logic to this. The White House even has a slogan - "We Can't Wait" - for the long list of policies it has crafted, creating jobs for veterans, raising fuel-economy standards, halting the deportation of illegal immigrants who entered the U.S. when they were children, changing welfare policy to allow states to test new approaches to boosting employment, making it easier for students to repay their federal student loans and helping homeowners refinance their mortgages. You might argue that the White House has had the productive session that Congress ought to have had.

But let's not pretend that this is how things should be. Executive orders may put needed policies in place, but they are also a unilateral exercise of presidential power that turns away from the constitutional division of power between the president and Congress. By their nature, they cannot be as comprehensive and inclusive as laws passed by the time-honored, traditional legislative process.

There is a reason the framers of the Constitution invested the power to initiate legislation in Congress - that is where the American people have the greatest leverage. Small wonder the courts tend to give less deference to executive orders than they do to laws enacted by Congress.

When Congress becomes so tied up by partisanship that it cannot act, it hurts everyone. But its chief victim is Congress itself, as it foregoes its own constitutional role in our republic and hands more power to the president.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

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The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day; (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and

Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

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