

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIALS

Medicaid pain

Expansion, not rhetoric, should be considered by state leaders

The decision to participate in a federal expansion of Medicaid should be easy for members of the Kansas Legislature.

Kansans' tax dollars will be collected, and used, to pay for the federally funded program.

Joining the majority of other states who have opted for the expansion would keep Kansas at least on track with its neighbors and the country.

Accepting 100-percent federal funding for the next three years, and 90 percent until 2020, to insure upwards of 200,000 Kansans makes fiscal sense. It makes business sense to use that money to pay for healthy care, while diverting people away from emergency rooms as a source of primary care.

But this is Kansas – the same Kansas that kicked moderate Republicans to the curb – not because they supported the dreaded ObamaCare, but because they didn't protest it loudly enough.

In this modern version of our state, all things federal are to be feared, and all government, by its nature, is bad – unless it is imposing through law its moral will on deviants.

Beyond the rhetoric and fear,

however, lies a very simple truth: Rejecting the Medicaid expansion will hurt Kansas residents, hospitals and ultimately our ability to compete with other states for business and talented employees.

If the expansion is rejected, rural hospitals will miss out on payments for patients they treat – instead, they'll continue to treat the uninsured at their emergency rooms and write off the expensive care. Eventually, they may not be able to operate in the face of continued cuts to Medicare and a state that refused to accept a program to insure more people. At some point, Kansas will be labeled as a state that doesn't care for its residents, and a place where people don't want to – or won't live.

Our neighbors will get sicker, and their care will cost more than it would have if the state's leaders had possessed the courage to do what is right, instead of what is popular.

A resolution waits for the House, which expresses opposition to the Medicaid expansion and instructs the governor to reject the federal government's offer. When the matter is discussed and voted on, Kansans will learn whether politics and spite mean more than the general welfare of its residents.

Hutch airport

Gambling trips one good thing as tower closure dulls prospects

There is little good to report, despite the shiny face the city of Hutchinson and airport officials attempt to put on news that the airport tower will shut down after May 5.

The closure is a federally-mandated budget-cutting move and affects six airports in Kansas, including Hutchinson.

Aside from controllers losing their jobs, companies potentially will lose contracts and others will see financial losses.

A military contingent that flies out of Enid, Okla., practices touch-and-gos and buys fuel from Wells Aircraft no longer would use the airport because of the tower closing.

Wells possibly will lose its Cirrus student aircraft maintenance program and Cirrus' student flying school. That's quite a financial hit for Wells if any or all contracts are affected.

The Airport Steakhouse restaurant likely will notice just a few monetary losses because it draws a good local crowd, but it will see some drops in revenue with the loss of students and military personnel.

Officials repeatedly say Hutchinson residents likely will notice activity at the airport after the May 5 tower closing. There will be activity – people boarding planes for gambling trips to Laughlin, Nev.

Airport manager Pieter Miller put a shiny face on that.

"If Facebook is any indicator, I think we could easily fill 60 or 70 seats alone," said Miller, who noted a company approached management regarding the Laughlin trips.

Initially, only a handful of trips would be planned annually.

One hopes a Hutch resident comes home armed with enough slot machine winnings – and bright shiny face – to reopen the airport tower.



(* ACTUAL QUOTE, MARCH 21, 2013)

COLUMNISTS

Kansas 1861-2013



Jason Probst

TOPEKA – The Great State of Kansas passed away on March 31, 2013, after a long and difficult battle with extremism that became markedly more aggressive in 2010. The struggle left the state so weakened it could no longer fight against the relentless attacks by the fatal disease.

Kansas was born on Jan. 29, 1861. The state is preceded in death by fair taxation, good highways, strong education, family farms, a good public parks and wildlife system, open government, neighborliness and belief in helping each other out, freely elected public servants, and political moderation.

Kansas is survived by widespread poverty, low-wage jobs, high property taxes, pollution, poorly educated children, outmigration and rural depopulation, foreign land and farm ownership, lobbyist-funded legislators, chronic mistreatment of the disabled, a maniacal hatred of government and children who dream of living anywhere else.

During its early years, Kansas played a pivotal role in the Civil War by staking out a strong progressive stand against slavery. Despite repeated raids from border ruffians, Kansas held firm to the belief of free men and free soil.

Throughout its life, Kansas often aligned with leading progressive causes. William Allen White, one of the state's most notable residents, once wrote that "if it's going to happen, it happens first in Kansas." That once was true. Kansas was the first state to ban the Klu Klux Klan, and the first to elect women to public office – one as mayor and another as sheriff.

It was the birthplace of the populist movement, rising as farmers and ordinary people grew weary of the Gilded Age politics of the late 1800s and early 1900s that favored investment interests over those of landowners and laborers.

Kansas was a leader in public education, with one-room school houses dotting the plains. A full 12 years before it was a national concern, Kansas established child labor laws that restricted employment of children in potentially dangerous industries.

In the 1950s, Kansas laid the path to civil rights for African-Americans with the historic Brown vs. Board of Education case – the first in the country to rule against a policy of segregation in public schools.

Despite its compassionate nature, Kansas proved to be a state teeming with inventiveness, ingenuity, determination and a savvy sense of business.

Cessna, Beech and Stearman helped establish Kansas as a center of the aviation industry. Coleman launched an international company from Wichita that became a household name. Pizza Hut and White Castle – two iconic eateries – both got their start in Kansas, and the man who helped establish the American automobile industry called Kansas home.

Kansas' history is filled with vibrant, dynamic people. Settlers who claimed land once described as a desert and turned it into the world's garden; immigrants who came by the train-load and brought with them the hard winter wheat that germinated the state's prosperity. Throughout the years, Kansans endured drought, grasshopper plagues, depression and fierce weather; yet its people worked to hold tight to their land and the belief that there was goodness in Kansas.

In spite of those hardships, the state produced world-renowned artists, writers, inventors, business leaders, astronauts, even a president.

Kansas was a strong-willed state whose hands were calloused enough to turn up the hardest sod and tender enough to calm a crying child.

Despite its strength and vitality, Kansas couldn't survive the influences of outside political machines that sought to use this fertile ground and its people as a test plot for an ambitious political experiment.

The elections of 2010 and 2012 brought the poisoned pill that would bring about Kansas' untimely end. The first election seated a governor who tossed aside Kansas' storied history and replaced it with a vision of his own design. In 2012, record setting campaign contributions from out-of-state donors financed the defeat of those moderate Republicans who had spent the last of their political careers keeping Kansas alive.

One by one, the things Kansas had spent a lifetime building were dismantled, until the state was rendered as empty and uninviting as it had been in those early days when the first settlers eyed its endless expanse.

Along the way, the state's defenders – the farmer, the laborer, the property owner and the shop keeper – stood mute and passive, hoping for a day when the state would spark back to life, as it had always done before.

They remained silent too long. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, the Kansas Policy Institute, or Americans for Prosperity all in care of Gov. Sam Brownback, Office of the Governor, Capital 300 SW 10th Ave. Ste 241S, Topeka, KS 66612-1590.

Jason Probst is news editor at The Hutchinson News. Email: jprobst@hutchinsonnews.com.



Father, forgive us; for we know not what we do

Jonylah Watkins died on a Tuesday.

She was with her father, who was sitting in a minivan in Chicago on the night of March 11 when someone opened fire. Doctors worked 17 hours trying to repair what a bullet had done to her body, but to no avail. She died the next morning. Her funeral was about two weeks ago. She was 6 months old.

Antonio Santiago was 7 months older when his mother put him in a stroller and took him for a walk in their Brunswick, Ga., neighborhood. Sherry West says they were accosted by two teenagers demanding money. She told them she didn't have any. West says they shot Antonio in the face and killed him. This happened two days after Jonylah's funeral.

An Associated Press reporter was on hand a day later as the boy's father tried to comfort his child's mother. "He's all right" Luis Santiago told her, smiling for her benefit. "He's potty training upstairs in heaven."

Which is, of course, the very foundation of faith, the belief that even tragedy will work ultimately for the good, that in the end, the bitterest tears transmute to the greatest joy. That is, in essence, what is commemorated this Easter week. It marks the morning when, we Christians believe, a carpenter turned itinerant rabbi overcame death itself, rolled a stone aside and walked out of his own tomb.

In the King James Bible, in the



Leonard Pitts

book of Matthew, the rabbi – Jesus – is quoted as saying, "Suffer little children and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

When I was a kid, that always confused me. I wondered why children were commanded to suffer. But, as later translations confirm, the word was used in its old English sense, meaning: to permit or allow. Let the children come to me, He is saying, for they are the essence of grace. Love the children.

Two thousand years later, a singer named Marvin Gaye turned that command into a stark plea: Save the children.

As a nation, as a people, we have failed at both.

Nearly 100,000 people will be shot this year according to the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. Seventeen thousand will be younger than 19. So almost 5,000 kids have been shot since the Newtown massacre in December, the one that was supposed make us finally get serious about gun violence.

That toll speaks unflattering volumes about our seriousness. As does a Politico report that support is softening for laws that would expand

background checks and impose other common-sense restrictions on gun ownership. A Florida state legislative panel just voted to support a bill allowing teachers to bring guns to school. Once again, the nation endorses the Orwellian logic which would "solve" the problem of too many guns by adding more guns.

How do you suppose we would explain that to Jonylah or Antonio? Which of the gun lobby's inane platitudes would we use to justify our failure to keep them safe? Jonylah, guns don't kill people; people kill people. Antonio, the only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun ...

Sigh. This year as every year, foes of abortion publicly mourn the loss of babies who could have been. But they – we – remain silent on the loss of babies who actually were, who died because we could not get our act together, because ours is a nation that does not simply enable private gun ownership, but that worships and fetishizes it to the point where sensible restriction – even sensible conversation – seems impossible.

As a result, we are a nation where what happened to Jonylah and Antonio has become grimly, sadly ... routine. That fact alone starkly illustrates the insanity to which we have devolved, and the challenge that faces faith this Easter week.

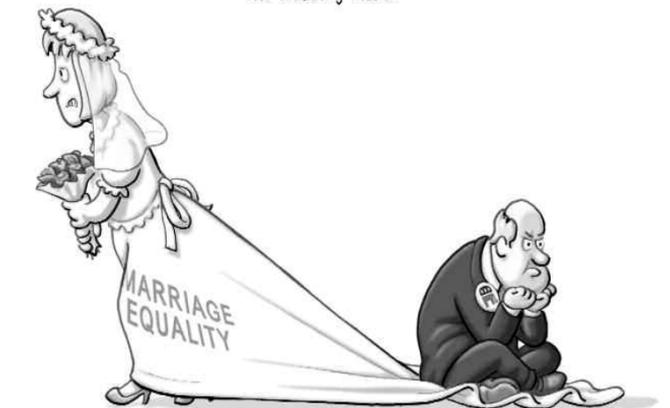
We keep crying the bitter tears. We are still waiting for the joy. Email Leonard Pitts at lpitts@miamiherald.com.



File photo

Budget cut moves have led to the scheduled May 5 closing of the Hutchinson Municipal Airport's tower.

The Wedding March



Chattanooga Times Free Press Bennett