

# OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON  
**NEWS**

## Editorial Board

JOHN D. MONTGOMERY / EDITOR-PUBLISHER  
MARY RINTOUL / MANAGING EDITOR  
JASON PROBST / NEWS EDITOR  
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### EDITORIALS

## Budget time

Residents served with input on city budget discussions

Hutchinson City Manager John Deardoff introduced a proposed budget to the city council last week that outlines a 2.5-mill increase in property taxes and spending for specific projects such as road work and improvements to city-owned facilities.

And if this year's budget discussion follows its normal track, the ongoing discussion will happen without much input from Hutchinson residents, only to be followed by complaints and groans of displeasure from people who couldn't be bothered to offer their thoughts beforehand.

Deardoff explained that the property tax increase would raise \$745,000.

The budget includes \$400,000 more to cover the growing expense of repairing city streets, \$400,000 to install new bleachers at Fun Valley, a pay increase for city workers, \$663,000 for continued development of Rivers Banks Orchard Park and a variety of other city expenses.

Deardoff also explained to the council that the budget was preliminary and that "there will plenty of opportunity for your input and public input."

Few people, however, take the time to become part of the discussion about the city budget.

Instead, they tend to sit on the sidelines and then grouse later, once the city council has completed its work to whittle and hone the budget.

Yet the city's budget in large part is an extension of what the city's residents view as important.

Without meaningful input

### HUTCHINSON CITY COUNCIL

**Councilmember Bob Bush**  
Northeast District  
620-662-6271  
bobb@hutchgov.com

**Mayor Cindy Proett**  
Southeast District  
620-662-5605  
cindyp@hutchgov.com

**Vice – Mayor Jade Piro de Carvalho**  
City at Large  
620-200-1167  
jadep@hutchgov.com

**Councilmember Jon Daveline**  
Northwest District  
620-664-2111  
jond@hutchgov.com

**Councilmember Nancy Soldner**  
Southwest District  
620-665-5823  
nancycs@hutchgov.com

from the public, the council can only rely on its members' experiences and the advice of city staff to direct its decision-making.

Should the city spend \$400,000 to upgrade Fun Valley? Should it set aside less money to demolish dilapidated houses?

These are the questions the city council will need to ask itself in the coming weeks, beginning with a study session at 8 a.m. Tuesday.

Their decisions can be aided by useful input and insight from the people who live and pay taxes in Hutchinson.

pay more in interest for financing large projects – an absolute waste of taxpayer money.

Meanwhile, those ballyhooed tax cuts the governor and his legislative minions go on and on about did not land on the middle class or the poor; they are largely enjoyed by businesses and the wealthy while the elderly and the poor have watched their tax liability increase and money-saving credits disappear.

Furthermore, it's just plain embarrassing that Kansas is now being held up as an example of how to do everything wrong.

Other states that considered cutting their income taxes are now standing on the sidelines

waiting to see just how badly Kansas implodes under the weight of its wrongheaded, yet pious, belief that eliminating taxes, particularly for the wealthy, is the key to economic prosperity.

And what about that shot of adrenaline the governor promised us all at the beginning of all this?

Turns out that hasn't happened either.

In fact, recent numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that Kansas is one of five states that has lost jobs in the past six months. And the governor's own economic council has pointed out that Kansas is lagging where our neighbors and the country are prospering.

While the rest of the nation powers ahead with an economic recovery, Kansas is fiddling with an old leaky steam engine, and the governor is trying to convince us all that this antiquated technology is newest and the best way to get ahead.

As economist and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman wrote this week, the real takeaway in Brownback's tax cut experiment is the "enduring power of bad ideas, as long as those ideas serve the right people."

Brownback's tax cut is a bad idea that's borne on the backs of the retired, the poor, the working class and every city and county government across the state, especially those in rural areas.

Yet, it makes the right people happy, and that's seemingly the only reason Brownback and Company can believe there's good news to be found when his policies have been so clearly bad for everyone else in Kansas.



### COLUMNISTS

## Mom completes memorable journey

She was cool, a word you don't often associate with a 92-year-old.

She was brilliant, teaching school in a one-room schoolhouse for six years.

She was a KU Jayhawk basketball fan who lived for the beginning of the season and was irritated when the 'Hawks were on a cable channel that only those who paid extra received. She loved the KC Chiefs and Royals and was quick to point out when a particular Royals player just lollygagged to first base.

She saw the Depression through the eyes of a child, World War II as a young adult and the moon landing surrounded by her husband and six children, knowing history was playing out in front of her on television.

And she was a Democrat, who watched all the 2008 presidential debates with three of her four daughters because she clearly understood the historical significance if Barack Obama was elected. She did not wear her Democrat leanings on her sleeve, though, because she was cognizant of being in the minority at Wesley Towers. But she managed to find a handful of like-minded compatriots.

Life dealt her a strange hand, but it made her more accepting of

### Basically speaking



Mary Rintoul

others. If they didn't share her love for sports, so be it. She saw their other qualities and honed in on those. They knew and felt her support.

She wasn't perfect. She had little tolerance for people who lacked a competitive spirit and expected life to be handed to them on a silver platter.

She liked her newspaper puzzles, Scrabble and games that required some critical thinking, such as bridge, which would be her definition of heaven.

She was a voracious journal writer. And the meticulously kept journals have uncovered things not known about her: Her journals compete for attention with the neatly organized photo albums she kept to document vacations, her children growing into adulthood and, of course, her grandchildren.

She used her wry sense of humor to her advantage. And she

was my mom.

Surrounded by her six children a son-in-law whom she adored and a handful of other relatives, we buried mom on Tuesday, which would have been her 93rd birthday, beside my dad in a Garden City cemetery.

By the end of that long day, the finality of the burial, of realizing I couldn't talk to mom any longer, was overwhelming.

I thought that day that her daughters in Hutch were attentive to mom's needs, but five staff members at Wesley made mom's life a happy one in the last seven to eight months. So this one is for you Cody, Jesse, Ro, Mary and Amy.

I wrote about my mom around Christmas time because I was so amazed by her resilience, her ability to bounce back no matter the situation. I expected the same on the afternoon of June 21, but instead, as my sister wrote, mom decided her earthly journey was over.

And what a journey it was and how grateful her children are for the memories and the laughter she left behind.

Mary Rintoul is news director and managing editor of The Hutchinson News. Email: mrintoul@hutchnews.com.

## Gold digger

Gov looks for a nugget of good news in his failed experiment

Not too long ago, Gov. Sam Brownback lit into reporters in Topeka – when the state realized it needed to borrow money from itself to pay this year's bills – asking them to pay a little attention to some of the positive economic news in Kansas.

That's a tall order when there's such scant good economic news on which to report.

For at least the third month in a row, Kansas has missed its own downgraded projections on tax collections, ending the fiscal year \$726 million lower than last year and missing the Kansas Department of Revenue's adjusted estimates by \$338 million.

And before we throw up the worn-out cheers that more taxpayers have more money in their pockets and government doesn't know how to spend tax money anyway, it's worth considering what this sizable shortage really means for Kansans.

First, it means higher property taxes at the local level. As Professor Ed Flentje pointed out in a column last week, property taxes have increased more than 10 percent in 71 of the state's 105 counties, and 28 counties saw a property tax increase of 20 percent or higher.

So while the governor and his allies champion the discredited ideas of quasi-economist Arthur Laffer, it's becoming painfully clear that Brownback's version of trickle-down economics simply means setting a steady stream of higher cost and responsibility to local communities.

These policies also mean a marked reduction in the state's ability to meet its obligations to Kansans, as they likely will force additional cuts to state services well into the future.

And if you think that's not a big deal, remember that the next time you're waiting days or weeks for a response from a state agency, spending hours at the Department of Motor Vehicles or wasting half your day at the county tag office, which is still dealing with a deplorable computer system and is grossly understaffed because your county can't afford to hire more people.

It's already resulted in a downgrade of the state's credit rating, which means Kansas will



BROWNBACK

## Our actions – or inactions – show who we are

The psychological explanation for what happened to Catherine Ferreira is neat and tidy and sounds like reason.

"The bystander effect," explains Psychology Today on its website, "occurs when the presence of others hinders an individual from intervening in an emergency situation." While people are more apt to step in if they are the only ones available to do so, the magazine says that when gathered in groups, they tend to hold back and look to one another for cues on what to do.

It is a definition that manages to explain everything without explaining anything, to clear things up without remotely satisfying. Certainly, it doesn't make it any easier to watch the online video as Ferreira, 27, is attacked by another woman, a McDonald's co-worker, on a walkway behind the restaurant, as she is savagely beaten, kicked and cursed while a crowd of about a dozen people gathers, watches, and does absolutely nothing.

Well, no, that's not entirely fair. They do take out their cellphones and record the action. You can hear one guy give an appreciative "ooh" when an especially vicious blow is struck. Only one bystander has the manhood to do the right thing, and that is Ferreira's son, who is two. He yells and kicks at the woman in a futile attempt to get her off his mom.

In response, the woman tells Ferreira she better get her son back before "I kick him in the



Leonard Pitts

(expletive) face, too." Walking off, she spits on Ferreira, who is lying on the ground. No one on the scene called police, who didn't learn of the crime until she got to her apartment complex and a security guard made the call.

The sterling credit to humanity who did all this has been identified by police in Salem, N.J., as 25-year-old Latia Harris. After almost a week on the run, she turned herself in last Monday and at this writing is behind bars for want of \$20,000 bail. Authorities say she was angry Ferreira had gossiped about her.

While Harris' alleged crime is inarguably execrable, I find myself even more appalled by what those onlookers did – or more, accurately, did not do. That was also a crime, even if it appears in no criminal code.

Almost 20 years ago in this space, I celebrated a teenage girl named Keshia Thomas. Thomas, who is African-American, saw an angry mob of counter-demonstrators at a Ku Klux Klan rally beating and stomping a white man wearing a Confederate flag T-shirt and an SS tattoo.

She separated herself from the mob and threw her body on top of his to shield him. With

every reason to leave him to his fate, she instead saved that man from injury or even death.

Her physical courage was remarkable, but it was her moral courage that truly inspired. Too often, we bear witness instead to moral cowardice, to ethical imbecility that welds us to the unthinking mob like cows in a herd.

Think Kitty Genovese, raped and stabbed to death in New York 50 years ago and the cries for help her neighbors heard, but ignored. Think a group of adults watching and cheering in 2003 as 31 Chicago area teenagers brutally beat a smaller group of girls, then slathered their faces with feces, mud and vomit. Think Catherine Ferreira absorbing savage blows as cameras record and some guy says, "Ooh."

We know that sort of thing isn't predestined, isn't hardwired into us. Keshia Thomas tells us so. She speaks to what we can be. But that crowd with the cameras speaks to what we too often are: indifferent, desensitized, estranged from our own humanity.

Sometimes, there comes a moment of deciding: are you the crowd, or the woman? Are you the mob, or the man? That moment may tell you more about yourself than you ever wanted to know. And it is an admonition to parents that the songwriter gave good advice:

Teach your children well. Leonard Pitts is a columnist for The Miami Herald. Email: lpitts@miamiherald.com.

### WESTERN FRONT

## Senators lauded

A June 27 Associated Press story carried an observation on the primary Senate race between Pat Roberts and Milton Wolf. Wolf is a tea party candidate from Leawood.

Wolf's campaign proves that he is truly a political novice who has never run for office before. I quote Wolf's rambunctious campaign talk: "I am going to Washington to kick down the doors, tear down the

drapes and auction off the silver and china." This is truly a huff-puff statement of inexperience.

To my mind, Wolf wants to overshadow his past crazy history of posting graphic X-ray images of gunshot wounds with comments on his personal Facebook page. Wolf needs to remember that with history you are stuck with the point.

Roberts' executive campaign manager,

Leroy Towns, had it right with his observation about Wolf. Said Towns: "Nationally, he (Wolf) continues to try to raise the financial support he has not been able to find in Kansas, and his attack on Sen. (Jerry) Moran is just the latest version of that effort."

Perhaps an adequate observation of Wolf's attack on our two U.S. senators is to use one of Abraham Lincoln's metaphors. Lincoln

sometimes categorized those without experience as "greenhorns." The dictionary's definition of "greenhorn" is "an inexperienced person."

Personally, I appreciate the history of Kansas' two U.S. senators. They are not "huff-puff wannabes" who brag big about what they will do. They already have pretty good records of success.

HOMER KRUCKENBERG  
Great Bend