

OPINION

THE HUTCHINSON NEWS

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EDITORIAL

Save the children

Kansas needs to make sure its children don't ever go hungry

Kansas prides itself in its food production and farming and its reputation as the bread basket of the world. Too bad that reputation is in danger, because it can't feed its most vulnerable and dependent citizens.

Truth is, children are going hungry in this agriculturally rich state.

Schools provide free and reduced lunches for about half of the students in the state who qualify, because they live in poverty. But what happens when school lets out in the summer?

Kansas ranks a shameful 50th out of all U.S. states and the District of Columbia. Only Oklahoma has fewer summer meal programs.

Hutchinson does a good job taking care of its children during the summer, offering five locations for free meals, coordinated by USD 308. They provided more than 22,000 meals last summer.

But throughout the better part of Kansas, many go without. Of the 35 Kansas counties that have no meal programs, the vast majority are in central and western Kansas.

It's not about cost. The federal government provides funds to reimburse the cost of providing meals. Some programs even

benefit from donated fresh fruits and vegetables.

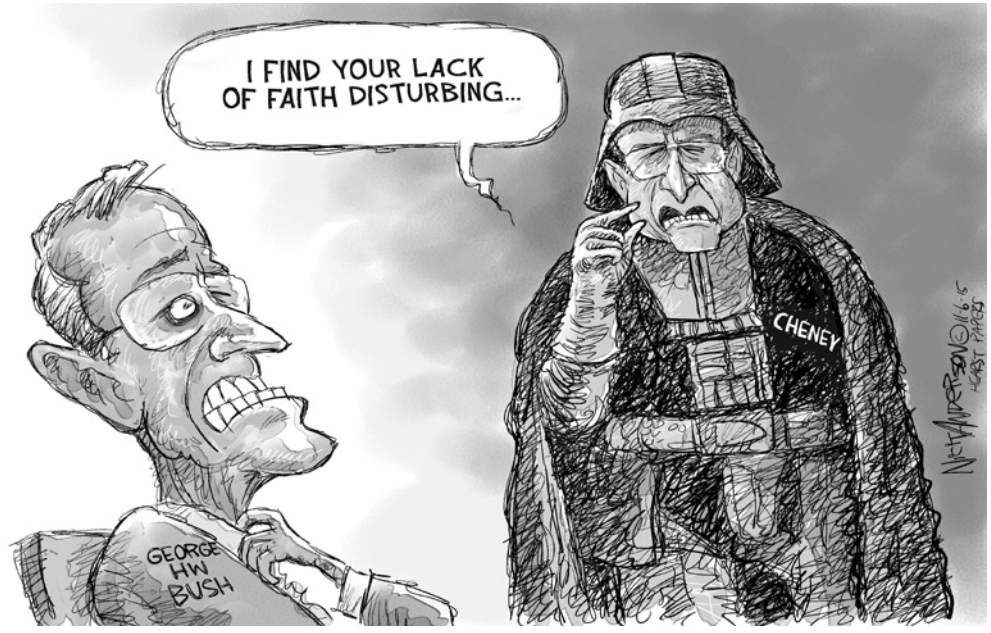
Part of the fault lies with our state's leadership, an ultra-conservative contingent who espouse family values while cutting programs that help families, so the wealthiest can go without paying state income taxes. Kansas leaders are busy trying to protect children before they're born, but they seem to have little energy left to take care of them afterwards. They constantly preach that taking federal money is bad, well, except when their party is in charge.

The Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice is trying to take up the slack. The Topeka-based nonprofit law group is going around the state spreading the word about how communities can start these summer meal programs.

It's proven that hunger affects not only health but academic achievement and the potential for economic prosperity. Continuing to do nothing threatens the future of our children, and by extension, our state.

School has started. But summer will be here again in six months. Here's hoping more communities will take advantage of money that's there for the taking to help feed our children.

Our children's very lives are at stake.



COLUMNISTS

Lessons learned from a 1-year-old girl

On Oct. 24, my granddaughter Lila turned 1 year old, and her family and friends gathered to celebrate this young life. There were snacks and decorations, a mountain of presents and a cake set aside for Lila to tear apart and smear all over her face.

My daughter, who has grown into an amazing mother, approached the party with the ferocious precision of Martha Stewart. She made a story board that showed all of Lila's favorite things and her growth in the past year. She made all the treats from scratch, and crafted a cute birthday outfit for her daughter.

Nearly every grandparent I've met has told me how much I'd love being a grandfather. "It's different," they'd say. "It's more fun and less stressful than raising your own kids. You love them more than you could have ever imagined." It's true. Without the daily strain of raising a child, and perhaps aided by age, being a grandparent provides a different point of view.

What I didn't expect, and what no one really told me, was just how much I would learn from Lila, a child who knows so little of the world. She can't teach me any of the things we spend our life learning - but she has taught me many of the things it seems we spend our life forgetting. An infant hasn't yet fallen victim to the world's expectations. Their training has just begun. We haven't installed in them ideas about what is normal, what success means, how they should behave, who they should like, what they should believe or their expected place in the world. We haven't taught infants a thing about faith, yet they have faith that the world they were born into will care for them.

When I look at Lila, I see God in the purest form - because there's a spirit inside of her that drives her actions, compelled her to walk, to feed herself, to laugh, to explore - that hasn't yet been tainted by humanity. She simply lives, and that is an amazing thing. Here's what I've picked up, courtesy of the wisdom of Lila Mae, age 1.

You are born with the knowledge of what to do. The instant you were born, you knew how to



Jason Probst

suckle. You later figured out how to balance upright and walk. You learned to wrap your fingers around a piece of food and put it in your mouth. You knew how



Courtesy photo by Reghan O'Neal
Lila and grandpa

to chew. There's little reason to doubt that driving force inside you doesn't know how to navigate the rest of life.

Falling down is normal. Sometimes you face-plant, but most of the time you don't. Yet, the more you get back up, the less often you fall.

When you do face-plant, feel bad, or when you need something, cry. Someone who loves you will come and pick you up, and things will get better.

Everything is interesting. That scrap of paper under the couch? Yes! The underside of your dinner plate? Absolutely! Everything in the world can be touched, grabbed, climbed over or under, sat on, or

held. If you have a question about any object, put it in your mouth. You'll quickly learn if it's bad or good. If you can't reach it, point at it until someone helps you.

Just because someone designed a toy to be played with in a certain way DOES NOT mean you have to play with it that way. Turn that toy car upside down and play with the wheels if you want. Stick a stuffed animal in your play oven. You are not bound by another's ideas. It's your world and your toys - make them whatever you want them to be.

Dancing is completely normal. You hear music, your head starts bobbing. Your legs start bouncing. You should be smiling. And you should dance. I don't know what happens over the years to make most of us self-conscious about dancing - but babies don't question whether they should dance. They dance - and look puzzled if you aren't dancing too.

Your world should get progressively bigger, not smaller. When you were born, you were confined and immobile. Then you learned to crawl, and the world expanded. You learned to walk, and it got bigger still. You walked around the house, then the yard, and then down the street. There's little point in learning, in gaining skills, if you'll not use them to enrich and enlarge your world.

When you're surrounded by people who love you - as Lila was while opening presents at her party - notice it, soak it all in and respond in kind. At one point, Lila realized everyone was clapping and smiling for her. She paused, shared the world's biggest laugh and clapped her hands in excitement. Her eyes shined brighter as she looked at the crowd. Maybe she was just enjoying the attention. But I'd like to think in that moment, she felt the full range of love that enveloped her - from parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great grandparents, aunts, uncles and long time family friends - and with the words unavailable to her, used her joyfulness to say "Thanks. I love all of you, too."

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

COLUMNIST

Would we tolerate it?

"The United States is being sucked into a new Middle East war," says The New York Times. And the Times has it exactly right.

Despite repeated pledges not to put "boots on the ground" in Syria, President Obama is inserting 50 U.S. special ops troops into that country, with more to follow.

U.S. A-10 "warthog" attack planes have been moved into Incirlik Air Base in Turkey, close to Syria.

Hillary Clinton, who has called for arming Syrian rebels to bring down Bashar Assad, is urging Obama to establish a no-fly zone inside Syria.

Citing Clinton and Gen. David Petraeus, John McCain is calling for a no-fly zone and a safe zone in Syria policed by U.S. air power.

"How many men, women and children," McCain asks, "are we willing to watch being slaughtered by the Russians and Bashar al-Assad?"

Yet, if we put U.S. forces onto sovereign Syrian territory, against the will and resistance of that government, that is an act of war.

Would we tolerate Mexican troops in Texas to protect their citizens inside our country? Would we, in the Cold War, have tolerated Russians in Cuba telling us they were establishing a no-fly zone for all U.S. warplanes over the Florida Strait and Florida Keys?

Obama has begun an escalation into Syria's civil war, and not only against ISIS and the al-Nusra Front, but against Syria's armed forces.

Mission creep has begun. The tripwire is being put down. Yet, who authorized Obama to take us into this war? The Russians and Iranians are in Syria at the invitation of the government. But Obama has no authorization from Congress to put troops into Syria.

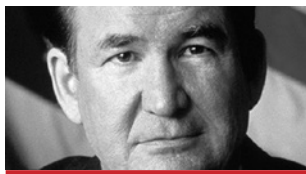
Neither the al-Nusra Front nor ISIS has an air force. Against whom is this Clinton-McCain no fly-zone directed, if not Syrian and Russian warplanes and helicopters?

Is America really prepared to order the shooting down of Russian warplanes and the killing of Russian pilots operating inside Syria with the approval of the Syrian government?

In deepening America's involvement and risking a clash with Syrian, Russian and Iranian forces, Obama is contemptuously ignoring a Congress that has never authorized the use of military force against the Damascus regime.

Congress' meek acquiescence in being stripped of its war powers is astonishing. Weren't these the Republicans who were going to Washington to "stand up to Obama"?

Coming after Congress voted for "fast track," i.e., to surrender its constitutional right to amend trade treaties, the capitulations of 1985 rank as milestones in the long decline into irrelevance of the U.S. Congress. Yet in the Constitution, Congress is still the first branch of the U.S. government.



Patrick J. Buchanan

Has anyone thought through to where this U.S. intervention can lead?

This weekend, the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan regained full control of the parliament in a "khaki election" it called after renewing its war on the Kurdish PKK in southeastern Turkey and northern Iraq.

Erdogan regards the PKK as a terror group. As do we. But Erdogan also considers Syria's Kurdish fighters, the YPG, to be terrorists. And Ankara has warned that if the YPG occupies more territory along the Syrian-Turkish border, west of the Euphrates, Turkey will attack.

Why should this concern us?

Not only do we not regard the YPG as terrorists, they are the fighting allies we assisted in the recapture of Kobani. And the U.S. hopes Syria's Kurds will serve as the spear point of the campaign to retake Raqqa, the ISIS capital in Syria, which is only a few dozen miles south of YPG lines.

Should the YPG help to defeat ISIS and become the dominant power in northern Syria, the more dangerous they will appear to Erdogan, and the more problems that will create between the Turkish president and his NATO ally, the United States.

Not only does a Congressional debate on an authorization to use military force appear constitutionally mandated before we intervene in Syria, but the debate itself on an AUMF might induce a measure of caution before we plunge into yet another Middle East quagmire.

When Saddam fell, we got civil war, ISIS in Anbar, and a fractured and failed state with hundreds dying every week.

And no one knows with certitude who rises if Assad falls.

The leading candidates are Jabhat al-Nusra, the front for an al-Qaida that brought down the twin towers, and the butchers of ISIS, who captured another town on the Damascus road this weekend.

Monday, The Wall Street Journal wrote that Erdogan's regrettable victory is "a reminder of what happens when America's refusal to act to stop chaos in places like Syria frightens allies into making unpalatable choices."

Now there's an argument for America's plunging into Syria: Send our troops to fight and die in multisided civil war that has cost 250,000 lives, so Turks will feel reassured enough they won't vote for "strongmen" like Erdogan.

America needs an America First movement.

Patrick J. Buchanan is a columnist for the Creators Syndicate.

Out of touch

Insight Kansas



Ed Flentje

The far-right Republicans who have commandeered the Kansas Republican Party and taken control of the executive and legislative branches of state government are strikingly out of touch with the vast majority of Kansans, including members of their own party, according to the recent annual survey conducted by the Docking Institute of Public Affairs, Ft. Hays State University.

The survey indicates that this partisan faction has advanced policies over the past five years that are out of sync with the preferences of Kansans on a broad range of issues, such as block grants for schools, guns on college campuses, Medicaid expansion, same-sex marriage, immigration policy, and election fraud, among others.

However, these partisans are most dramatically insulated from Kansans' views on what they claim as their signature achievement, their actions to eliminate the state income tax. According to the survey, Kansans express opposition to this radical tax policy on a number of fronts.

For starters, 61 percent of survey respondents say that this tax policy has been a failure in terms of economic growth; 30 percent say it has been "a tremendous failure." Only one in nine Republicans surveyed said that the tax policy has been a success.

Those surveyed also do not believe their tax burden has been reduced. When asked to consider sales, property and state income taxes, 74 percent say their tax

performance has ballooned to 69 percent, up from 31 percent during his first year in office. Over half of Republicans surveyed express dissatisfaction with Brownback.

Positive appraisal of Brownback has fallen every year since the tax cuts first passed in 2012, to the point that only 18 percent of the respondents in this year's survey express satisfaction with his performance. A meager 30 percent of the Republicans surveyed expressed satisfaction with Brownback's performance.

What is going on here? Kansas voters elected and reelected these right-wing lawmakers to office in 2010, 2012 and 2014. What explains this chasm between what Kansans say they want and the actions of their elected representative? Several factors are in play.

Interest group funding of thousands of campaign postcards attacking challengers aided these incumbent officeholders. The \$17 million in undisclosed, outside money that flooded the 2014 U.S. Senate race and demonized the opposition swayed uncertain voters. Some voters were more motivated by social issues such as abortion than state taxes. Primary elections and restrictions on election access also gave advantage to an energized minority. And too many eligible voters simply did not vote.

Only Kansas voters can bridge this gulf between the governed and those governing.

H. Edward Flentje is professor emeritus at Wichita State University.