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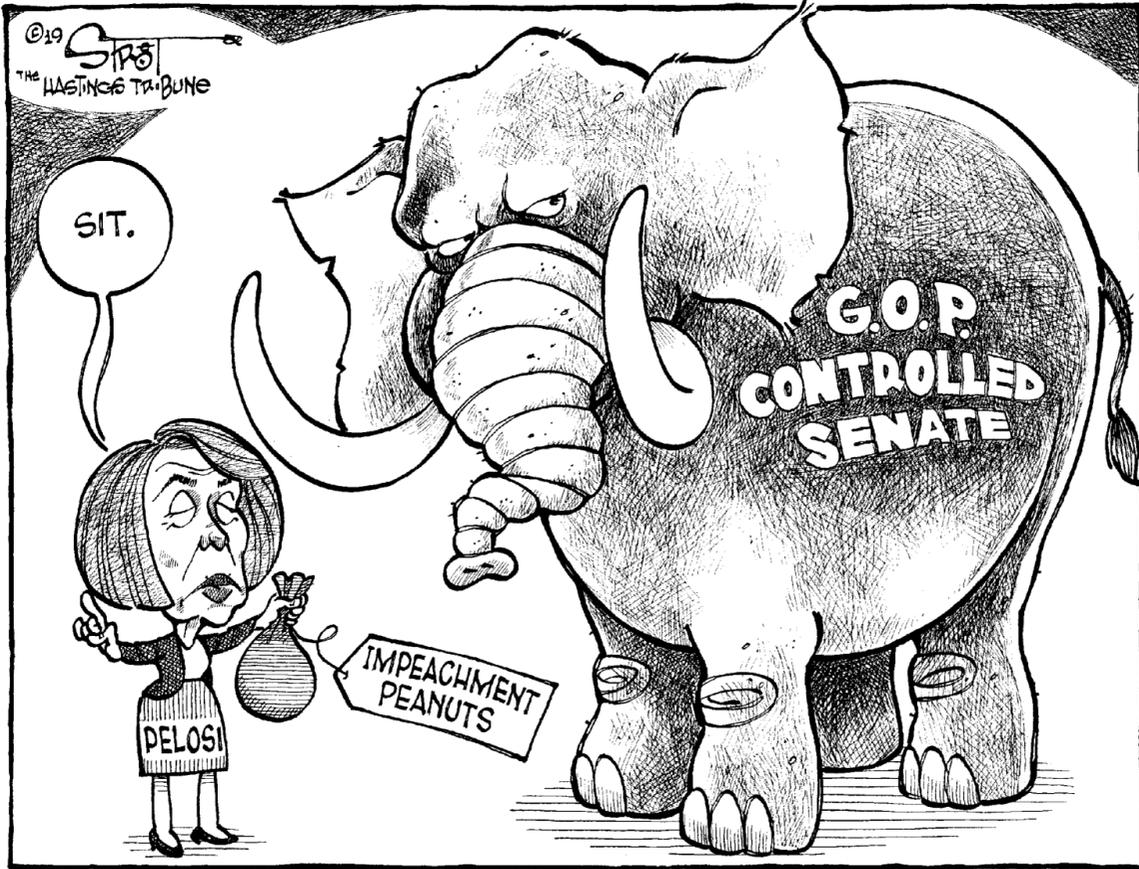
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2019 — The year in higher education

The outrageous inflation in public college tuition finally slowed in 2019. Facing inadequate state funding and charging whatever the market would bear, public universities loaded historical debt on both successful and unsuccessful students. Students loans are at a historical high and a major political talking point. The slowdown in tuition inflation is also due to fewer students enrolling in college. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, enrollment has dropped below 18 million for the first time in this decade. Overall post-secondary enrollment fell 1.3 percent — over 230,000 students—from the prior year.

Education Frontlines



John Schrock
Educator

This should not have been a surprise. High school graduation numbers have declined for a decade. Many colleges are now attempting to retrieve some of the 36 million adults with some college credits but no degree. Their marketing assumes everyone is college-able. Many could not afford to continue. Others were never college-able.

Therefore most states reduced requirements for college graduation. California eliminated algebra; it was seen as a “barrier to graduation” except for science and engineering fields requiring algebra. Some states reduced credit hours for college degrees, forcing universities to weaken programs in order to graduate more students in just 120 credit hours. Higher education governing bodies are clueless to the fact that over 60 percent of students change major at least once, requiring them to attend more than four years. Many states ended zero-credit remedial courses and put students in regular credit courses, further weakening the value of a degree.

Faculty voice in academic affairs is fading as many universities are hiring more adjunct faculty for financial flexibility. Adjuncts’ employment next semester depends on their remaining silent and giving high grades to maintain tuition-paying student “customers.” By replacing tenured faculty lines, the management of academics in higher education has shifted administrators’ main concerns to marketing.

New enrollment of international students at U.S. universities in 2018-19 declined by 10.4 percent, compared to 2015-16, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE) in its Open Doors publication. Higher education is a major American “export” through international student tuition. We have lost an estimated \$11.8 billion in income and 65,000 in jobs, according to NAFSA. Analyses point to one main factor: the anti-immigrant and anti-foreigner atmosphere created by President Trump’s statements, travel bans and visa restrictions.

Because our K-12 science education is weak, the U.S. now relies on international students joining the U.S. workforce after graduating. In 2017, a record 276,500 foreign graduate students received work permits through our Optional Practical Training (OPT), according to the Pew Research Center. Nearly 1.5 million foreign graduate students had received OPT work permits between 2004 and 2016. This rate of growth has now slowed dramatically.

Affirmative action at Harvard was held legal by the regional court decision but the very specific requirements of the earlier court decision on the University of Texas at Austin were maintained. A 2019 ballot initiative to restore affirmative action in the state of Washington failed under protests by Asian Americans whose students would be suppressed as “over-represented.”

The SAT announced its plan for providing an “adversity score” based on the average of two ratings for a student’s school neighborhood environment. The score would indicate obstacles a student faces, such as crime and poverty. The plan re-

ceived massive public pushback. Many universities are going “test optional,” no longer requiring students to provide an SAT or ACT score in their admissions application. After nearly 20 years of No Child Left Behind K-12 over-testing, many states are facing a testing backlash that extends to universities. In an effort likely to spread to other states, California faces a lawsuit claiming the SAT is biased against all minorities and economically poor students, despite Asian-American students scoring much higher than white students. But the SAT or ACT is provided to students free in many states. And private test-prep courses being relatively ineffective raising scores—these are aptitude tests.

In October, a federal judge held Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in contempt of court and fined the U.S.D.E. \$100,000 for violating an order to stop collecting loans from thousands of students who attended former for-profit colleges. On the positive side, the U.S.D.E. ended its support of competency-based education experiments. Over a dozen institutions had waivers to receive federal aid for these programs that consist of little more than take-a-test, get-course-credit. Competency-based just-take-a-test programs have not been widely accepted, with large scale programs limited to Western Governors and Southern New Hampshire.

A new report from the pro-tech Educate Center for Analysis and Research found that more than 70 percent of the 9,500 faculty members they surveyed favored teaching mostly or entirely face-to-face. In a prior Educate survey of over 40,000 undergraduates across 118 schools, over 70 percent of students preferred learning mostly or completely face-to-face. There has now been enough time for a generation of faculty and students to play with digital screen education and conclude what works. Will schools return to effective face-to-face teaching? Or will the ed-tech industrial complex ramp up their propaganda efforts? You know the answer.

Parallels exist between the two times. Politicians are human, and humans are fallible. Some people still yearn for normalcy, while others desire social and political change. Technology and the economy have points of great growth, but that will not last forever.

My takeaway is simple. Spirit not circumstance can define people. Times will be both better and worse in my future. Be thankful for your current blessings and live life gregariously and fully at all times.

—“Insight” is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state’s largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.

Roaring into the 20s

Almost 15 years ago, I gave what would be one of the most important speeches of my career at the National FFA Convention. I agonized over creating the right message in hopes of making a lasting impact.

Insight



Jackie Mundt
Kansas Farm Bureau

Years later, I watched another FFA member give the exact same speech. It had different stories, but the main points and overall message were the same. I was shocked because there was no way that this FFA member heard my speech. Their own life experiences must have led them to the same thoughts I had more than a decade prior.

Maybe it is a function of human nature or the product of a constant struggle to achieve the things we yearn for like success, love or the American Dream; ideas and lessons are rarely completely original or unique. Humans throughout history seem to live the same stories and plots repeatedly.

A few weeks ago, in my preoccupation with the too-short span between Thanksgiving and Christmas, I received invitations to multiple Roaring Twenties themed New Year’s Eve parties. What an original idea (at least to me), to celebrate a time that history books hailed as a time of whimsy, spectacle and entertainment.

Since then, this idea that history repeats itself and has been on my mind. What will the 2020s have in common with

the 1920s, and, more importantly, what can be learned from a decade that earned the moniker “roaring”?

This curiosity led me to a brief internet refresher because the attributes filling my mind were all the “Great Gatsby.” My search revealed interesting facts and similarities to modern life in this gap between World War I and the Great Depression.

Like today, there was a presidential election. Warren Harding’s successful campaign used the slogan “Return to Normalcy,” painting a nostalgic picture of life before World War I, which ended a year earlier. Harding called for politics that were, “not the dramatic, but the dispassionate” and for people to remember that “human ills are not curable by legislation ... excess of government offer(s) no substitute for quality of citizenship.” President Harding was popular until scandals came to light after his death in 1923.

The title roaring came from all of the excitement of the time. The economy was growing. New products like automobiles, moving pictures and radio brought “modernity” to the masses. Social change was prevalent with women winning the right to vote in many states and national debates taking place about prohibition, immigration, political corruption and industrialization. It was the age of Gatsby with jazz, art deco, flappers and speakeasys. The decade has a larger than life zeitgeist.

The Roaring Twenties had a definitive and halting end. All that prosperity and liveliness faded with the crash of the stock market in October of 1929 and a new

era of hardship and scarcity in the Great Depression.

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The Coffey County Republican welcomes submission of news items of interest to the community. All news items are subject to editing and will be published at the discretion of the newspaper, based on timeliness, newsworthiness and available space. The newspaper cannot guarantee publication or confirm publication dates of submitted news items.

Please submit news items by email to:
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Scrap continues

The decade-old scrap between the Kansas Legislature and the Judiciary, played out in the hallways and committees and budget bill votes, is now moving to ... the Judiciary.

At the Rail



Martin Hawver
Columnist

We keep hearing about that “three-legged stool” of tax apportionment. We need enough income, property and sales taxes to support the services that we want from our state government.

Well, there’s another stool out there, a bigger one that doesn’t deal just with taxes but with state government itself.

Here’s the fight. The Legislature’s leg of this stool keeps getting taller and some believe it’s to the point where the stool is so unlevel that you — or all us Kansans — can’t sit on it anymore. Oh, the other two legs? Judicial and Executive (governor).

Several judges and court employees have sued the Legislature for more money to operate the courts. Those Judiciary employees are seeking a budget with enough money to adequately, or at least comparatively with other states, pay its more than 260 judges and 1,600 non-judge employees higher salaries. About 90 percent of the court’s budget which is appropriated by the Legislature is for salaries. Now, the Judiciary budget isn’t all just legislative appropriations, there are some fees and such, but practically, do you want the courts to work on commission? Didn’t think so.

And, who makes that decision on an adequate budget for the Judiciary so that it can carry out its duties? Initially, it’s the Judiciary which figures out a budget and hands it to the governor, who generally — former Gov. Sam Brownback didn’t, Gov. Laura Kelly did — hand it off to the Legislature to pay. Simple. Get the budget, finance it, and lawmakers can turn their attention to fence law, gun bills, or maybe some other issue that they believe will get them re-elected.

But the Legislature the past few years has generally believed that the Judiciary hasn’t been good to the Legislature. Abortion rights, financing of public schools are the keys there, when the conservative-managed Legislature has felt at least ignored, if not actually whipped by the court over abortion rights and financing of public schools.

So ... the plaintiffs in the lawsuit have sued an entire branch of government — the Legislature — for not adequately financing the Judiciary that hasn’t done what the Legislature wants.

But ... there’s a possible trade here. If the Legislature — well, at least the Senate — got to approve or reject nominees to the Kansas Supreme Court, this fight might end. It’s practically that simple. Let the Republican-dominated Senate confirm or reject justices appointed by the Democrat governor, and chances are good the Judicial budget scrap will go away.

And a lawsuit that offers the Judiciary the right as a co-equal branch of state government to set its own budget and force the Legislature to appropriate the money to pay for it? Works out well for Judicial employees, no reason the Executive Branch should care much, and the Legislature loses its most powerful right ... to decide where and how state tax money is spent.

Now, it looks a little, well, uncomfortable that the Judiciary if it decided that the handful of plaintiff employees who have sued the Legislature is right will set its own budget and set its own salaries while the Legislature looks on from the cheap seats (and yes, legislators in Kansas are paid less than in almost every other state within driving distance).

But we’re waiting for this one. Say the Supreme Court rules that its plaintiffs are right, and the Legislature loses. Those courthouse employees won’t have to get a second or third job.

Then does the Senate win? And a constitutional amendment to allow it to confirm justices passes in the building and on next fall’s ballot?

Still sorting out who wins this one ...

—Syndicated by Hawver News Company LLC of Topeka; Martin Hawver is publisher of Hawver’s Capitol Report — to learn more about this nonpartisan statewide political news service, visit the website at www.hawvernews.com.