

GOP putting extremism before Kansas taxpayers

BY JOHN CARLIN
Special to The Star

When I was governor of Kansas for much of the 1980s, both sides of the aisle focused on the success of our state. Sure, we had disagreements on how to attain success. But at the end of each day, I had no doubt our public servants were rooting for Kansas.

No longer do I have such confidence. I'm vastly disappointed in members of the current Republican Party in our state and their submission to extremism. They don't recognize their positions as an honor and privilege to serve. In fact, I don't

believe the word "service" is even in their vernacular. We can debate ideology till the cows come home. But there is one word central to so many of our policy disagreements: taxes. That word cuts across all political language.

We all pay taxes with the understanding that we're paying for services we may or may not use. We pay taxes so our police and firefighters are trained and ready to respond. We pay taxes for our children to get a good education and participate in our society so one day we can retire with things in good hands. We pay taxes so our roads are safe, and our parks func-

tion. Well, it seems we have a breakdown in the system. My local Democratic candidate for the Kansas House, Kim Zito, has rightfully and thoughtfully resurrected the fact that the state government is not upholding its fiduciary responsibility to the taxpayers.

This is an issue all Kansans who pay sales tax, who use roads and parks, and all Kansans who just received in the mail their 2022 notice of estimated ad valorem taxes must understand.

According to the League of Kansas Municipalities, local communities have lost at least \$3.2 billion since 2001 because the

government decided to stop funding demand transfers.

As Zito points out, the state's Local Ad Valorem Property Tax Reduction Fund is required by statute to transfer 3.63% of state sales tax revenue to counties and municipalities. In exchange, those local entities must reduce mill levies.

Without this transfer of monies to communities, residents and property owners must make up the shortfall in order to balance local budgets.

Take Manhattan, where my wife and I reside, for example. Our city's parks and recreation department is struggling to provide programs because of budget constrictions — this, despite the projected 7.4% hike in property taxes.

Zito is well aware of the ongoing challenges that parks and rec has been facing, as she has a 5-

year-old son who's ripe for the department's activities. Likewise, Zito understands the impact a property tax increase has on a household budget already under pressure, while income has remained flat.

Her tenacity to research the Kansas state government's obligations and subsequent deflection of duties should be noted by every single resident and voter in the state.

She rightly accuses the party that has had control of the state Legislature for 29 years — 16 of those while also holding the governor's office — of ignoring a statute that's been around since the 1930s.

This year marks the midterms, which usually see a dip in turnout. I urge all Kansans eligible to vote to be sure they're registered, and to commit to casting a ballot in this election Nov. 8 (with early

voting beginning Oct. 19). Brush away any partisan chips on your shoulders and take a true look at the issues facing your family, your household finances and the future for all generations on this planet.

There's one party desperately trying to help Kansas, but it is overwhelmingly outnumbered by the party that is desperately trying to deceive us with manufactured moral crises.

It's clear who deserves your votes.

John Carlin was Kansas' 40th governor from 1979 to 1987, and previously speaker of the Kansas House of Representatives. He served as the eighth United States Archivist for 10 years, and is now a visiting professor at Kansas State University.

Gorbachev saw the future in Missouri speech

BY SEAN N. KALIC
Special to The Star

By the time Mikhail Gorbachev ascended to the supreme leadership of the Soviet Union in 1985, the lifelong communist had become convinced that one-party rule, the suppression of the press and aggressive militarism in Afghanistan were threatening the survival of the superpower. He set about changing that in hopes of preserving the Soviet Union, proposing the perestroika and glasnost policies that would so radically transform life in and out of the empire.

When he died on Tuesday at age 91, Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union, was widely recognized as a central figure in the complex and dynamic history of the end of the Cold War. When viewed from the contemporary prism of Russia's current aggressive military action against Ukraine and President Vladimir Putin's tight control over Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Gorbachev's legacy stands in stark contrast.

Nowhere is that more clear than in the power message he shared right here in Missouri, just five months after dismantling the Soviet Union. The leadership at Westminster University and the National Churchill Museum in Fulton asked Gorbachev to speak at the 46th anniversary of Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech. Gorbachev presented his "River of Time and the Imperative of Action"

address, where he outlined Churchill's skills as a politician and spoke of the historic context of the Cold War.

As he concluded, Gorbachev established that he hoped the global community would remain committed to "acting in concert on the principles of democracy, equality of rights, balance of interests, common sense, freedom of choice, and willingness to cooperate." With these words, Gorbachev cemented his place as a historic figure in the history of the Cold War, and more importantly as a champion of democratic ideals.

In tandem with the economic reforms he championed, Gorbachev also believed that the government of the Soviet Union had to move beyond its oppressive and controlling past, by allowing more openness and participation in the political system. Glasnost and his demokratizatsiya policy served this objective, as Gorbachev championed the slow and deliberate relaxing of one-party rule and state control over the press. He believed his efforts were within the ideals of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which his generation of politicians believed had been corrupted and subverted since Stalin's rule.

Viewed from within, Gorbachev's actions appealed to a younger generation in the Soviet Union, as well as its satellite nations. From the outside, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and U.K. Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher supported Gorbachev's efforts at reform. They believed that his willingness to engage in frank and open discussion with the West on strategic, economic and social issues signaled a very different tone. Gorbachev's relationship with Western political leaders, specifically Reagan and Thatcher, produced a genuine friendship that transcended the ideology that had dominated the Cold War.

Though Gorbachev's efforts at reforms were welcomed by the West and by young people in the Soviet Union, he faced stiff opposition from hardliners within his own government. These traditionalists led an attempted coup in August 1991, in which they arrested and briefly detained Gorbachev in an attempt to make him resign. Gorbachev refused, and with assistance from Boris Yeltsin, he returned to Moscow. However, this internal struggle served to accelerate the demise of the withering Soviet Union, which Gorbachev dissolved in December 1991.

Hence, the memory of Gorbachev as a champion of democracy and freedom blossomed in the aftermath of the Soviet Union, as the world recognized that the last leader of the Soviet Union strove to initiate economic and political reforms to provide more open and favorable opportunities within the decaying Soviet system.

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SHORT TAKE: POOR PARENTS STEAL KIDS' LUNCHES?

From an Aug. 27 editorial in The St. Louis Post-Dispatch:

Missouri is alone among the 50 states in preventing low-income kids who participate in a federal summer meals program from taking the food off the distribution site premises. This kind of callous stinginess toward poor children says much about the hard-hearted attitudes of the state's current leadership.

The federal Summer Food Program is

meant to ensure that kids who rely on school lunches during the school year are able to get comparable meals when school is out. Low-income kids throughout the country used to be required to eat the meals on site, but during the pandemic, a "grab-and-go" option was added.

NBC News reports that just one state — Missouri — has declined to continue that program.

A spokesman for Missouri's Department of Health and Senior Serv-

ices told the network the concern is that "if the children aren't there (on premises), you can't always guarantee those kids are the ones getting the meals."

So they suspect, in other words, that the parents are using the kids to secure these modest meals so the adults can eat them?

That's nonsense. Missouri's poor are, as usual, the last people on the minds of Missouri's Republican leadership. But they can still vote.

OFF THE EASEL

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Water crisis in Jackson, Miss., a warning for all

BY LEONARD PITTS JR.
Miami Herald

There is no water in Jackson, Mississippi.

Not at this writing, at least. At this writing, the nearly 150,000 residents of the state capital have been advised that even if they are able to coax some of the precious liquid from their taps — water pressure is feeble — it is unsafe for drinking, bathing, or washing dishes. Note, please, that they were already under a boil-water order — the latest in a series. Then heavy rains and flooding overwhelmed the primary water treatment plant in a city where some of the pipes date to the days Model T's still trundled dirt roads and biplanes carved the skies.

Gov. Tate Reeves was unable to say in a Monday night briefing when the situation might be rectified.

So there is no water in Jackson.

And Mississippi should be embarrassed. But Mississippi should not be surprised. To the contrary, it has known for many years that the city's water infrastructure was too old and brittle to serve its needs. They saw the crisis coming, but they did not avert it.

Mind you, because he was concerned about

education that "aims to only humiliate and indoctrinate," the governor did sign a bill making it impossible to teach "critical race theory" in schools.

And because he wanted to "protect young girls," he did sign a bill barring transgender student athletes from participating in sports that correspond with their gender identity.

And because he grieved "63 million babies" aborted since 1973, he did sign a bill banning almost all abortions.

He acted to avert those "threats." But good luck getting a glass of water in Jackson.

All that said, this is not really a column about Jackson. Or, for that matter, water. It is, rather, a column about misplaced priorities. That seems a constant theme where people of color and poor people are concerned, so no one will be surprised to hear that eight in 10 Jacksonians are African American, while one in four is poor. Nor should it stun anyone to hear that experts say Jackson's woes grow from a sediment of white flight and malign neglect. When it came to making sure 150,000 people had water to drink, Mississippi had more important things to do. But then, poor and/or dark-skinned people are

often taken for granted. Poor and/or dark-skinned people are also the ones who often function as the proverbial canary in the coal mine.

Thus, it is worth noting that while white flight and malign neglect are the foundation of this disaster, its proximate cause is simpler: freakish weather broke a decrepit system.

And freakish weather, not to put too fine a point on it, is not limited to poor people. Black people, or Jackson, indeed, climate change having been allowed to reach a state of daily crisis, freakish weather is rapidly becoming normal weather for us all.

One wonders, then, how much longer we can continue misplacing priorities, embracing would-be "leaders" who focus on fighting culture wars, on offering the addictive sugar high of performative thrusts against despised Others — "Take that, critical race theory!" — even as pipes corrode, bridges age, the electrical grid fizzes, sewers clog, roads buckle and weather grows more freakish.

Here's an idea. How about if we required those who govern to actually govern, i.e., to protect and maintain basic services and quality of life? How about if we valued simple competence over sugar highs? How might that be?

See, there is no water in Jackson. And yes, that's an embarrassment for Mississippi.

But it's a warning for us all.