

It's all about roosting chickens

We had a student once that reported he was unable to complete his homework because the pencil fell out of his dad's truck on the way home. As teachers and as parents you would think we have heard every imaginable excuse and that's precisely why Governor Brownback's latest press comments ring so hollow.

Two years in a row, Brownback pushed discredited tax policies through his legislative allies in the House and Senate. Every analysis run by the fiscal staff at the time warned that the state would face serious revenue shortages in the out years. Economists from both ends of the political spectrum said this was bad tax policy. And yet Governor Brownback and his allies forged ahead.

Just a few weeks ago they continued to tout the great success of his great "experiment," telling us that jobs were growing and revenue was up thanks to the so-called "shot of adrenalin" Brownback's tax plans were giving to the Kansas economy.

Then yesterday happened.

The real revenue numbers for April are in and Kansas revenue collections are 45% lower than those of April 2013. So far this year, the state is down \$93 million from projections. And year to year we are showing a loss of \$480 million in revenue that could be used to fund schools, fix roads, protect the social service safety net, and provide for public safety.

This is what is commonly known as "having one's chickens come home to roost."

Unless, of course, you are Sam Brownback. In that case, just like the student whose dog ate his homework, it's someone else's fault. And Brownback falls back on his usual excuse. Obama. Yes, Sam Brownback wants us all to believe that his grand experiment is a failure because America elected Barack Obama.

It's not because the trickle-down economic theory has never worked and is not now working in Kansas. It's not because 190,000 businesses - large and small - no longer pay any income tax. It's Obama's fault.

Sorry, we're not buying it. Brownback's chickens have come home to roost. And things are only going to get worse.

More blame game

Our grandson is awfully fond of the Disney film "Rocket Man." There's a running gag in the film where astronaut Fred Randall refuses to take responsibility for his mistakes. From passing wind to using up all the gelled space food to paint, Fred's standard response is "It wasn't me."

And so the "blame game" in Kansas continues in an effort to explain away why the Governor's school finance bill will actually provide \$12 million less for schools than originally thought. There seems to be an effort to blame the State Department of Education rather than the process under which the bill was drafted and adopted.

It has often been said that the two things one does not want to watch being made are law and sausage. The 500 or so teachers, school administrators, and parents who spent the weekend of April 4th through 6th under the dome witnessed sausage being made.

Things were being tossed out and adopted willy-nilly through late night and early morning meetings in an attempt to do a session's worth of critical work in a weekend. Staff, working around the clock for 72 hours struggled to clearly understand what was being assembled. With each decision they were sent back to their offices with orders to rewrite and analyze what was happening. The final bill was rushed onto the floor the moment Speaker Ray Merrick knew he had 63 votes to pass it. We would be shocked if anyone - legislator, legislative staff member, or lobbyist - could describe exactly what was and wasn't in the final bill as it was being voted on.

And so a math mistake was made. The State Department quickly posted the new analysis - it was done before Governor Brownback had to sign the bill. But now that it is widely known that the bill doesn't quite fund what the Governor and the proponents thought it did, they are again looking for someone to blame.

The blame for this does not fall with the State Department of Education or the legislative research staff. Those folks work tirelessly and do amazing things under enormous stress and pressure. And the mistake was revealed BEFORE the bill was signed.

If there is something to blame, it is the abuse of the legislative process that happened

over that weekend. This was the most important piece of legislation to be considered this year. It was assembled slap-dash in a couple of non-stop days and rammed through the sausage grinder. After it was passed, it was incumbent upon the Governor and his staff to thoroughly analyze and review the bill before signing it. We can't tell you how many times the Governor told the press he hadn't yet read the bill in the days leading up to the signing.

It's time to stop looking for someone to blame and own up to the issue. The legislature had the opportunity to comply with the Supreme Court order but instead decided to focus their efforts on an opportunity to attack teachers and privatize public education. The funding bill had become simply a vehicle to which they could attach their anti-public school policy issues. The blame falls on the decision to abandon the deliberative and logical legislative process in order to score ideological points.

Welcome to the sausage mill.