

Following up on what's the matter with Kansas

Bob Hooper May 3, 2013

Hays citizen Milton Leiker's response to my last column inspired a follow-up. He said I "mocked" his religion. Let's start there.

* Ten Commandments. Fine -- just not on the courthouse wall. Formal prayers? Fine -- but not as part of public school curriculum. Government properly doesn't interfere with or promote any sectarian religion. It's separation of church and state.

* Abortion. The latest Gallup poll found only 18 percent of Americans think any and all abortions should be illegal. More and more believe women have the right to decide how many children they will bear. That involves the use of artificial birth control, but also recognizes some circumstances might justify a female's choice of abortion.

The current horror story in Philadelphia is being played up by both anti-abortionists and abortion rights advocates. But repealing Roe v. Wade would make things worse, not better. Both sides should agree the abortion providers need more oversight and regulation, not less. Abortions should be legal, safe, early as possible -- and rare.

* Gender identity. Through the years, now knowing gays and lesbians as children of friends, former students and relatives, I am convinced they are not evil but different genetically or hormonally. Whether called marriage or civil union, legalizing same-sex couples doesn't threaten heterosexual marriage -- not mine, anyway. Maybe Mr. Leiker's? Homosexuals seeking cover in heterosexual marriages (or in theoretically celibate religious orders) are bigger problems.

* Gun control. Mr. Leiker wants a no-limits Second Amendment. Reasonable limits on armaments and reliable background checks make sense. The need for citizen's militia rose from fear of standing armies. Today, we have not only such a standing army but the deadliest and best funded one in human history. Were that not true, a rootin' tootin' straight-shootin' citizens militia might be necessary. Of course, if the young men and women in public-funded camo and boots we honor for protecting our freedom actually are coming to get us (as the radical right obsesses), well then ... boo.

* Money/debt. Mr. Leiker is correct that, to a troubling degree, both main political parties are sold out to big bucks. That's tragic. A first step would be over-turning Citizens United, by which five conservative Supreme Court Justices declared corporations to be people. In fighting the plutocracy on behalf of we the people, I see a little hope from some Democrats; none from today's Republicans.

Debt accumulated under the Obama administration came mostly from Bush-era policies. That's two unfunded wars Leiker believes kept us safer. Let's see. How many wounded and dead, how many billions squandered? Then there was the Medicare Part D gift to drug companies ... and Bush tax cuts for fat-cats.

Last month, the very conservative Cato Institute reported from 2009 through proposed spending in 2014, Obama spending amounted to an increase of 4 percent annually. Says Cato, "That's far too much, but still substantially less than the 7.0 percent growth rate under Bush." (tinyurl.com/bsant8z Tinyurls are conveniently abbreviated website links) At the moment, however, deficit-hawk austerity -- paid for by cuts absorbed by everybody but the plutocrats -- is the wrong answer, as Europeans are discovering.

* Growing wealth gap. Mr. Leiker dismisses the relationship of tax rates, corporate regulatory favors and all-too-successful attacks on union membership to a declining middle class. He has every right to a wrong opinion. The Paul Ryan budget proposal would cut the top tax rate to 25 percent, like it was from 1926 to 1931. That was pre-Depression trickle-down. Leiker apparently wants that for today.

* Taxes. Lieker's apparent belief that taxes have increased during the last four years is disingenuous. A study by award-winning journalists at Politifact found the president "mostly correct" in claiming taxes for the middle-class are lower. True. The 2009 6.2 percent payroll tax cut (intended to put a few bucks into workers' pockets), then reduced to 4.2 percent, expires this year -- but it's not a tax increase. (tinyurl.com/cttrzp3)

* Inflation. Sorry, Mr. Leiker. Reviewing rates from 1914 through this year, I find 1.63 percent annually in the four years from 2009 to 2012 -- compared to 1.9 percent annually under George W. Bush. (tinyurl.com/yfmyqcs)

* Regulation. The Great Recession was not really about "anti-trust laws" as Mr. Leiker alleges. The big problem was failing to regulate banking speculation -- like thin-air credit default swaps, which by 2007 had grown to an ostensible \$62 trillion, collapsing to \$25 trillion by 2010.

* Agenda 21. A few weeks ago, Mr. Leiker wrote spookily about Agenda 21. That's a 1992 non-binding, voluntary U.N. Resolution signed in Rio de Janeiro by more than 170 world leaders including George H.W. Bush. It advocates sustainable use of resources. Somehow, Leiker believes that means the U.N. will become a "New World Order" dictatorship. Leiker has Glenn Beck's support. Beck's forecast for Agenda 21: "A violent and tyrannical government rules what was once known as America. The old, the ill and the defiant all quickly vanish. Babies belong to the state." Boo.

Well, with human population projected to grow from 7 billion today to 9 billion in the next 40 years, it does seem sensible to begin planning.

Yeah, I think the rank and file rabid right are homo sappy 'uns. No apologies.

Bob Hooper is a fourth-generation western Kansan who writes from his home in Bogue