

Lexxy Baietto
Lincoln High School

Kansas Budget Balancing Act

K-12 Education cuts are now striking bone. With a shortfall of \$380 million in Kansas, the options to quickly tunnel our way to the surface are becoming limited. The talk of revenue exempt and the promotion of small businesses were tossed in the air, but the principal option presented by Kansas Governor Mark Parkinson was a one-cent tax increase from 5.3 to 6.3 cents. This tax increase would take Kansas from 28th to 9th highest state tax in the nation. Derrick Sontag, Kansas Chapter of Americans for Prosperity claims, "Now is the time for our Governor and lawmakers to look in the mirror, not in the pockets of Kansas taxpayers when searching for answers." However, the one-cent tax increase would make up for \$300 million of the shortfall. Parkinson also proposed a 55-cent increase on cigarettes, raising the tax from 79 cents to \$1.34. This increase would make up for another \$70 million. Without this raise in taxes, cuts will be made to schools, social services, universities, and prisons. Many Kansas Republican Representatives objected the idea of a tax raise as well as the Kansas Chamber due to their anti-tax perspectives. House Majority Leader Ray Merrick said "...the Governor has abdicated his duty to the taxpayers of Kansas by refusing to offer a balanced budget and demanding the largest tax increase in Kansas history." Although the tax increase would be affecting the upper class more substantially than those in the middle and lower class, Kansas Representatives are in a shaky situation due to those who support them in the upper class.

Education cuts appear to be acceptable to expend as they make up 2/3 of the state tax money. After the budget was reduced last year, the state has returned to the 2006 education spending level. This has abated not only teachers, but in some Kansas districts such as Girard, the curriculum level as well. The Legislature's education finance system has proved to be "unconstitutional" by failing to provide equitable educational opportunities to the students of Kansas. Richard E. Levy, Smith a Professor at University of Kansas says, "It could violate both the Constitution and the Montoy vs. Kansas Supreme Court decision." As this system has been holding up for the 2009-2010 school year, the thought of even more cuts weakens education. Lobbyist Mark Tallman agreed, "We can go back to the system that we had five to ten years ago, but are you going to get the achievement results that we have been getting?"

Lincoln Jr. Sr. High School, in which I am currently enrolled, challenged its way around budget cuts by saving instead of cutting. The school encumbered buying new textbooks, new athletic uniforms, and general supplies in order to maintain money in the curriculum provided. Superintendent for USD298, Gary Nelson, also negotiated with the teachers about a previously signed contract of a 4% raise. The teachers of Lincoln agreed to receive no raise in order for that money to be used towards the student's education. "What upsets me as an educator is that we would do more for less money, because

it is what we do to better the students..." comments Established math teacher Christi Walter, "but the government and doesn't want to cut from themselves."

Lincoln Elementary School and Lincoln Jr. Sr. High School have reached standard of excellence in reading and mathematics the past five years. The Lincoln Elementary School was one out of three in the state of Kansas chosen as a no Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon school in the 2008-2009 school year. Parkinson strongly states, "We cannot afford a mediocre school system. Excellence is at risk, and we are drifting toward mediocrity, and mediocrity is unacceptable." The Lincoln Kansas schools as well as many other districts have proven to be those of high standards, but with upcoming budget cuts lingering, the education standards across the state are at jeopardy.

All the options to balance the state budget remain on the table for the Legislature, all with great deficit. Ray Merrick alleges, "There's not a budget in the world that can't be reduced more." All budgets can be reduced, but at what cost? Kansas Representative Tom Sloan disagrees with Merrick and wants to take the option of education cuts off the table. The cuts to K-12 are not just costing the state of Kansas money. Sloan refutes, "Our education system is the foundation of all our past successes and future prospects." Despite the crisis and controversy raised, Governor Parkinson remains optimistic in the state's future economic structure. "We have survived the greatest economic challenge that we have faced since the Great Depression. We're now at a time when the economy is starting to turn and we can start to recover from this and, hopefully, replenish some of these cuts that have been made," he said.