

Military aid helps finance ailing education fund

Entry #6

Children of active duty personnel grow accustomed to making new friends and participating in unique classes that are provided by school districts around the world. Military children in Kansas, however, have to familiarize themselves with the decreasing amounts of classes, teachers and supplies because of cuts to education funding.

“We’re looking for budget cuts that will put us in the 2006 funding level,” vice president of the Kansas Charter of Americans for Prosperity Alan Cobb said. “Cutting programs that are not working or getting rid of parts of programs will make [education cuts] more effective.”

Representative Eber Phelps believes differently.

“Some people feel that kindergarten through twelfth grade needs to feel the pain,” Phelps said. “I believe that we should ease that pain.”

Each military base receives “Impact Aid” to assist in the education of military dependents; though much of the aid is dispersed among other school districts within the state.

“[The Kansas Legislature] wants to have equal education for all school districts in Kansas,” USD 475 Coordinator of Finance Janet Christian said. “[Equalization of education funds] has a negative outcome because I think military areas have extra needs than the children that do not have to go through those types of situations.”

Representatives from Kansas agree, however, with Kansas’ equalization of education funds.

“I think that the public schools in Kansas belong to all of us,” Rep. Marti Crow said. “It is our state’s constitutional duty to ensure an equal education to all of its students.”

The Impact aid provides minor financial assistance to the Governor Mark Parkinson’s plan to balance the education funding.

“We are required to have a balanced budget,” Rep. Doug Wingate said. “We can’t spend more than what we’ve got.”

Gov. Parkinson’s multiple cuts to the state’s education funding were mandatory after the amount of debt that has built up; though he would prefer not to take money away from the fund.

“Gov. Parkinson is adamant that we are not going to spend below that two thousand dollar funding level of 2006,” First Lady Stacy Parkinson said.

The state of Kansas, one of three in the United States to distribute Impact Aid to other school districts, would not have been as dependent on the military's aid if the state had saved better.

“When [Kansas] had a good revenue in the 1990's, we did not pay off our debt,” Crow said. “Instead we made huge tax cuts and gave the tax payers more money instead of saving it for a rainy day.”

The “huge tax cuts” have left current tax paying instructors in an uncompromising position with its state government.

“There are fewer art teachers in towns such as Council Grove because the art programs were eliminated from those schools,” Kansas National Education Association (KNEA) President Blake West said.

KNEA has been fighting to ensure that the educational needs of both military and civilian students are protected from the recent cuts.

“If we all sat on our hands, then the folks will cut education funds more next year,” West said. “KNEA is joined by parents, school board members and students to restore the education funds to the way they were last year.”

Christian anticipates more cuts to come.

“I don't believe that the state of Kansas will change their mind because of the economic situation that we are currently in,” Christian said.

While the debate of whether to continue cutting taxes remains on the legislature's agenda, many government officials feel the need to continue with sustainable education.

“We need to keep and supply all aspects of education,” Sen. Roger Reitz said. “It costs money [to keep the programs] but I'm ready to supply it.”