

Commentator warns against gridlock

Both political parties and the public at fault

By [Jim McLean](#)

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TOPEKA — A noted author, columnist and radio host on Thursday warned that political gridlock and a growing distrust of government are preventing the United States from addressing critical issues that threaten its future.

Matt Miller, a contributing writer to the New York Times, Fortune and the Washington Post, and the host of the national radio program “Left, Right and Center,” was the featured speaker at a luncheon celebrating the 30th anniversary of Kansas Action for Children, a nonprofit lobbying and policy group.

Speaking to more than 400 child advocates, business and nonprofit leaders and legislators, Miller said America’s political leaders and its people need to wake up to growing threats posed by the global economy, a wasteful health care system, under-performing schools and runaway federal spending before they grow beyond our ability to address them.

“Both political parties are failing us today in acknowledging and facing up to these challenges,” Miller said.



Matt Miller

Miller said China’s share of the global economy is expected to grow to 40 percent by 2030 while those of the U.S. and the European Union will shrink to 14 percent and 4 percent respectively. If that happens, he said, warnings such as the one recently issued by the Chinese government against President Obama meeting with the exiled Dalai Lama will take the form of more explicit threats.

“It would invite a Chinese version of, ‘That’s a nice little country you’ve got there America, it would be a shame if something unfortunate happened to it,’” Miller said, noting that China as the largest foreign purchaser of U.S. debt already has significant power over the American economy.

Miller, a self-described deficit hawk, said federal spending spurred by the growth in entitlement programs such as Medicare and Social Security – which together face a \$107 trillion unfunded liability – has institutionalized deficit spending.

He said continued growth in those programs –fueled by rising health care costs and retiring baby boomers – would soon cripple the nation’s ability to deal with problems in the educational system that are compromising the quality of the workforce. Continued growth in the public assistance programs would force an increase in federal taxes, he said.

“There is no leadership, either from the White House or the Republicans about how to get serious about all of this,” Miller said, charging that political leaders in both parties have placed winning elections above solving the nation’s problems.

But politicians aren’t the only ones at fault, Miller said. The voting public and special interest groups must also share some of the blame for punishing elected officials who dare to stray from their talking points.

“We are going to have to fix the dialogue that is at the heart of our democracy, because it is broken,” he said.

Kansas Senate Majority Leader Derek Schmidt, R-Independence, was among the legislators who attended the KAC event. He said he agreed that the ability of special interest groups on both sides of the political spectrum to “punish individual thought” makes it more difficult for elected officials to address tough issues.

“Neither side has a monopoly on that, but we have to get beyond it,” he said.

Schmidt, a candidate for the GOP nomination for Kansas Attorney General, said the nation’s history of “reinventing itself” when times demand it makes him optimistic Americans will ultimately face up to the problems that threaten the nation’s future prosperity and security.

“It is fundamental to how our system works,” he said.