

## Banning cell phone texting while driving isn't answer

This week the Senate passed SB 351, an effort to ban texting on cell phones while driving.

The bill proposes a \$100 fine for the first time someone is caught texting. After that they would face a misdemeanor charge. Drivers who cause accidents while texting would also face misdemeanor charges.

It's a laudable goal. The U.S. Department of Transportation says 6,000 people died in distracted driver accidents in 2008, and those are the worst kind of accidents since they are usually preventable.

The Kansas Department of Transportation says there were 394 accidents and four people were killed in Kansas in 2008 because of cell phones. Young people are also statistically more likely to be a distracted driver.

Kansas already has a texting ban on the books for learners and intermediate license holders.

Unfortunately, if it passes and becomes law, we can't consider the problem solved.

The proposed law is not really a ban on texting while driving, it's just a harsher punishment if you're caught. The law doesn't disable the texting option while the phone is in a car. Sure, there are a lot of people who will take the law to heart and it will reduce the number of crashes, but it won't stop everyone. People can and will still text in the car.

You can't legislate common sense. We have speed limits in this country, and yet every year hundreds of thousands of people are pulled over for speeding. The National Transportation and Highways Safety Administration says half of all fatal accidents take place at 55 miles per hour or faster. We have seatbelt laws in many states, and yet in 2008, 215 people died in crashes in Kansas while not wearing their seat belts. We have laws against drunk driving. Of all the people who died in wrecks in the United States in 2007, one third died in wrecks where alcohol was a factor.

Simply put, people routinely violate just about every traffic law in this country.

Does this mean we should give up? No, but it does mean the message isn't getting through, which in turn means we need to change tactics.

Texting is just one of many kinds of distracted driving. Can we make laws against eating, changing music disks or just looking at the scenery. All three of these things have caused accidents. The fact is there are just too many of them to make laws against, so what we need to focus on is methods that actually do change behavior, which is community action.

One of the best ways to reach people is through local organizations. Rotary Clubs, Kiwanis, American Legion and many more could all have programs for young people and adults involving distracted driving. We have an excellent organization in our schools here in Colby called Students Against Destructive Decisions. This is right up their alley.

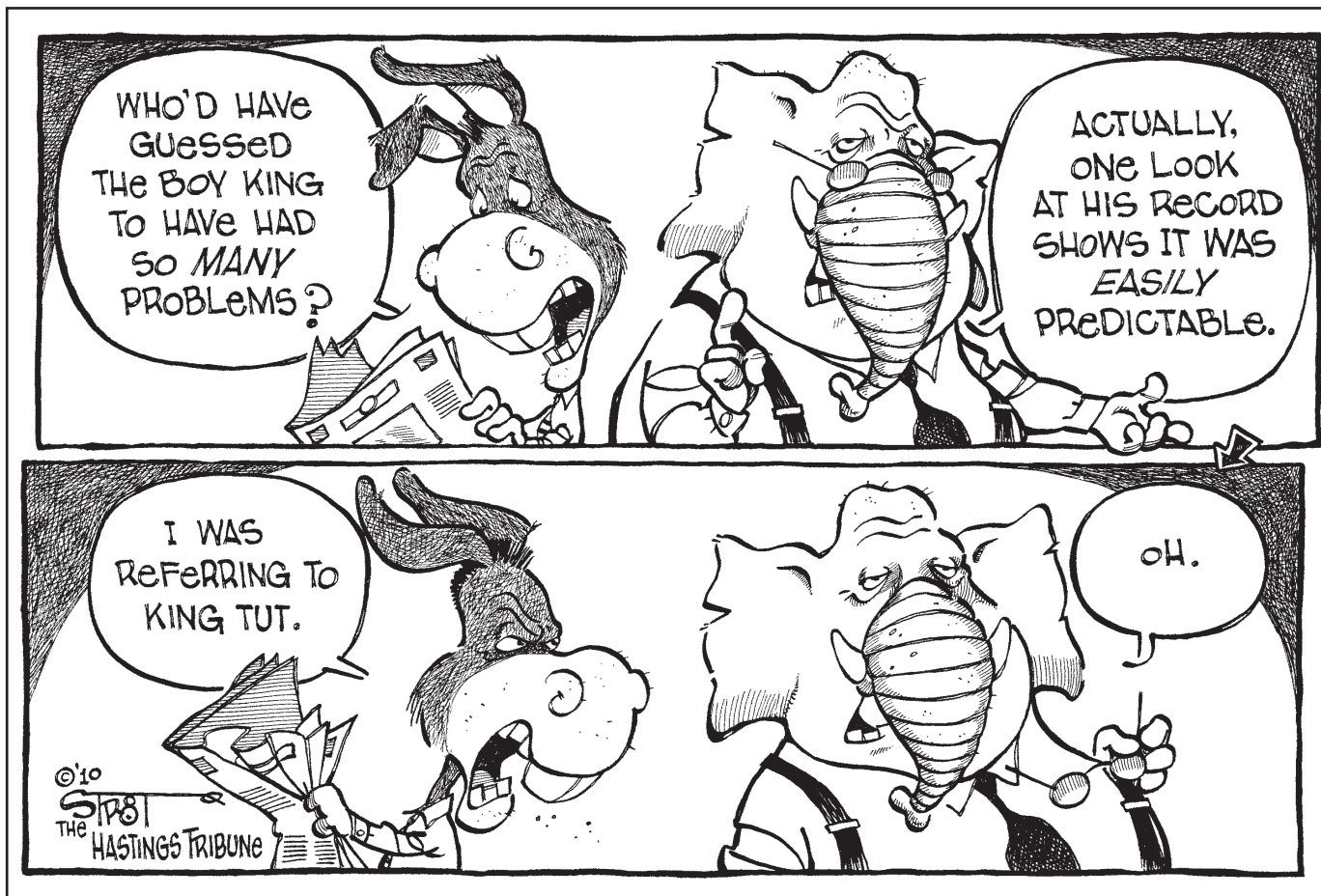
The U.S. Department of Transportation has a web site, [www.distraction.gov](http://www.distraction.gov), which has excellent suggestions for drivers, parents, law enforcement, employers and others.

The NHTSA has a distracted driver campaign that provides videos and other materials to organizations who want to put on driver-education seminars.

FocusDriven, a non profit organization dedicated to helping raise awareness of distracted driving, was formed in January by the National Safety Council as an advocacy group for victims.

Laws don't change minds, people do.

— Kevin Bottrell



## With age comes privileges

With age comes certain privileges. Like "telling it like it is."

Jim's dad has been in the hospital for a few days getting over some breathing problems. I was visiting and the discussion turned to eyesight. He said he had been looking out the picture window of his room watching workmen repair the roof across the courtyard. He said his vision is pretty good at a distance.

I agreed and added that Jim is the same way: that he can spot a gnat on the wall at a hundred feet but, he can't see to read the paper without his glasses.

Next, I said I had just bought new glasses and proudly put on my new black, horn-rimmed glasses. Dad took one look at me and said, mater-of-factly, "Well, I don't like 'em."

There's no come-back to a comment like that. You just change the subject and move on.

## Out Back Carolyn Plotts



—ob—

I just finished reading "A Kid's version of the Bible." It's a compilation of children's skewed understanding of biblical stories.

Adults, too often, assume they comprehend all we tell them. But, sometimes their understanding is a little "left of center."

In the kid's version God made everything but it was dark so he asked for a light and someone gave it to him. Then, Moses led the Israel Lights out of Egypt. And Judas Asparagus was such a bad

man they named him after a disgusting vegetable.

—ob—

Alumni Banquet time is creeping up. All the "girls" in my class are wondering if they have enough time to lose 20, 40 or more pounds before our reunion.

This the Class of '65s 45th reunion. We just lost No. 6 from our ranks a few weeks ago. Tommy was so much fun. He truly enjoyed our reunions and was trying to hold on for this one.

As I talk to classmates about our plans we realize that this will become a more common occurrence every year.

I don't think reunions are all about the past. True, it commemorates where we come from but, as we age, it's more about where we are.

Life is like a rowboat. You can't see what lies ahead. But, you can look at where you've been and see where you are.

## Articles about antiques appreciated by many

Just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate your printing the articles from my friend and fellow antique lover Liza Deines.

I especially enjoyed the one about the old Seth Thomas Clock.

It brought back old memories and a reminder of how in years past things were built to last.

Should something break or develop problems, it was taken to a local repair shop.

Do you remember when we had local repair shops for just about anything.

There was the shoe shop, jewelry, watch and clock shop, small appliance repair, tailor and seamstress place, bicycle, hand tools and toy repair shop and others.

Now almost everything is made in China out of plastic and programmed to self destruct.



I do admire the beauty, quality materials and craftsmanship that went into the making of all things old and as Liza in her article, how foolish I am to endow these manmade items of the past with emotions and feelings. And yet, somehow...

Del Lee Norton

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## Change and adapt

### Insight

John Schlageck

few minutes of our ever-shrinking time. Cellular phones, e-mail, Twitter and Facebook also are taking their slice of the communications pie.

Used to be when driving your car, windshield time was spent thinking, dreaming and planning future work projects or events with the family. Today, most people conduct business by phone, or even hand-held computers – some while speeding along at 75 miles-per-hour. The phone, computer and e-mail are effective tools and they're here to stay.

Farmers and ranchers should be willing to use social media because it is the way many, especially those under 35, prefer to communicate and learn. Like some of the other communications tools, it can be a powerful tool for building influence. An example of this was the 2008 presidential race where candidates used it to attract supporters and campaign contributions.

The power of social media continues to grow. According to one source, in one year, the micro-blogging service Twitter grew 1,382 percent. Facebook grew 228 percent and now has more than 350 million users.

There's no question using social media is another way to connect with others, especially the younger generations. Even though Twitter and Facebook ask users to tell what they're doing at any given moment, most of their online friends or followers don't really want to know. The key is to be interesting, be helpful – or

be quiet.

Share information, ask and answer questions and build connections. Information may be text, photos, videos or audio files. Today's technology allows users to post or tweet from anywhere. Smart phones are simply computers that take calls.

Social media provides farmers and ranchers with one more avenue to tell their story to the non-farm public. It's important to commit to learning new social media tools.

Yes, today there are countless ways to deliver the message about farmers and ranchers who supply the healthiest food in the world – and the ways continue to grow. Some people prefer to read newspapers, others like to surf the net and still others watch their news on television in the comfort of their easy chair.

Regardless of the way we wind up delivering our message, we will all have to figure change into the communications equation. Change affects most people in one of three ways – it excites them, scares them or fills them with hope. Regardless of how it makes us feel, change is ongoing. Always has been, always will be.

To be successful, we must anticipate change and adapt quickly. We must be wise enough to incorporate change that will help us and continue to use tried and true methods.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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