

The court selection process, is it fair or not?

Is it wrong to want the Kansas Supreme Court to be more responsive to the will of the people?

Apparently. Sen. Sam Brownback, the Republican candidate for governor, is taking some heat this week for comments that the process for selecting justices could stand some reform.

The Democratic candidate, Sen. Tom Holland, ridiculed his opponent. An Associated Press analysis piece claimed the his comments meant Mr. Brownback was on the far right.

Anyone who's watched Sam Brownback's political career knows he's a conservative, of course. He's never tired to hide his beliefs. But he keeps getting elected by big margins in Kansas, so there have to be a lot of people voting for him. Maybe most of them don't like abortion or big government - or far-left judges.

The Kansas Supreme Court raised a lot of questions about its objectivity when it forced the Legislature to add more than \$1 billion to school spending a couple of years ago. Many people, some of the far to the right, others more moderate, were critical of the court making a decision that a lot of them saw as belonging to the Legislature under the state Constitution.

The real questions here are, is the selection process for the court fair and democratic, and would changing the process restore some sense of humility to the justices?

Kansas Supreme Court justices hold their jobs until they die or retire. While theoretically, voters could remove a justice by simply voting against him or her during every-four-<?>years "retention" votes, the truth is, no Kansas judge has been removed by that process.

In districts where judges still run for election, voters can and do remove a judge now and then. Usually, the issue is performance on the bench, not a judge's political views or decisions. But everyone agrees, the electoral process makes judges think about how they handle issues.

The point is not to bend judges to the will of the voters, but to force them to at least consider it. Unpopular decisions sometimes are what a case calls for, after all.

With the Supreme Court, the selection process has been changed until it's anything but democratic. The governor gets three names to choose from, selected by a panel dominated by lawyers. If the governor fails to act, the chief justice gets to choose for him or her.

The people have no say, no voice. A federal lawsuit challenging the system was filed this summer, but a decision could be years away.

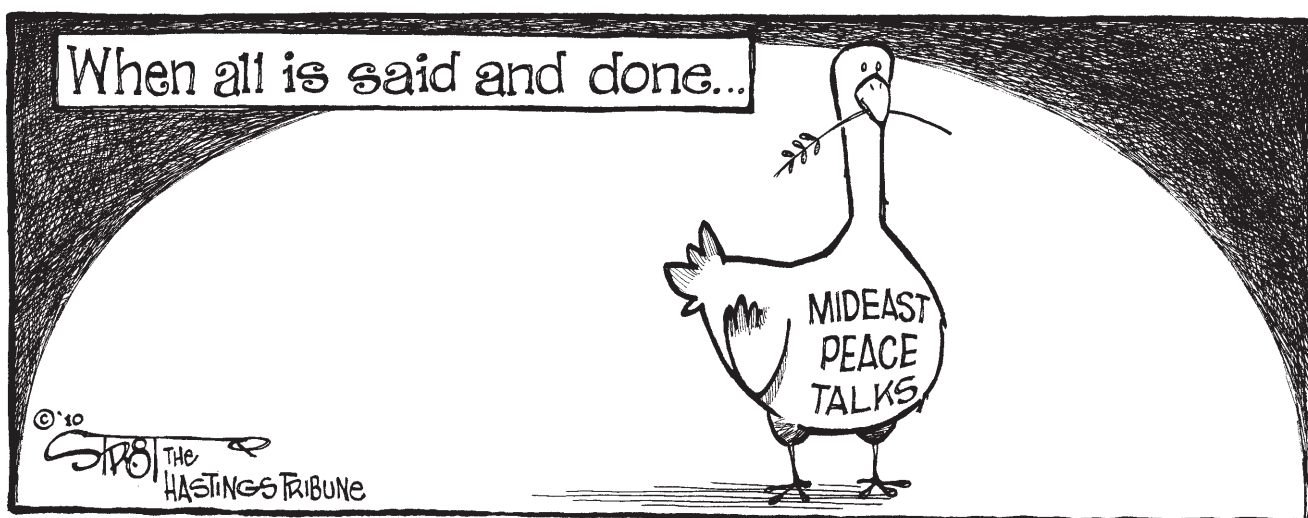
One proposal for change is to let the state Senate vote on the governor's nominees. Similar to the way federal Supreme Court justices are selected, this plan could at least provide a forum for public comment and push the process closer to the center. No one doubts today that the court leans to the left.

However, pro-school forces made sure that an amendment to change the selection process went nowhere in the Legislature the last few years. Courts are not supposed to be about one side or the other, however, but about the Constitution and the law.

So, Sen. Brownback has a lot of company when he questions the court selection process. If that makes him right-wing, so be it.

But many, including this newspaper, think it's high time the court is called to account for its decisions. Perhaps with a Republican governor, something will be done.

Steve Haynes.



Mental chore list, who, what, why, when and where

Was that four or fore?

That's what my brother, Bob, must have been asking after being hit in the gut by a hard-driven, low-flying golf ball last week.

He called late in the afternoon Friday to tell us he was in the Intensive Care Unit of his local hospital. In his typical fashion he said, "I'll be okay. I'm still planning to go to Florida Monday." A black-and-blue belly is the only outward sign of his injury but, his doctor wanted to check out what might be going on inside. Bob said he had a round of CAT scans and gastrointestinal scopes. Does not sound like fun. The good news: he was able to finish his round of golf.

-ob-

We haven't heard anything since Wednesday from the cowboy who stayed with us for a week. He was camping out at a deserted farmstead about 15 miles west of our county seat. He's traveling without

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



a cell phone, so unless I read about him and Rico in another newspaper, I won't know where he is. He has our number, so we hope he calls.

-ob-

I had a long laundry list of things to get done before heading south with Bob for a visit with our transplanted-from-New York sister, Kathryn. I shipped my clothes to Kathryn's house via the U.S. Postal service. Hopefully, not having any luggage, except my carry-on, will help us get through the airport faster. The box is promised to arrive Tuesday,

just hours after we arrive late Monday. I wish I had remembered to pack a jar of my homemade apricot jam in it.

Some things were added to my to-do list; some were deleted. I wanted to leave Jim with a nice, clean kitchen. Instead, he'll have dirty dishes in the sink and clean dishes in the dishwasher. But, he will have two boxes of peaches in the freezer.

I canned a few jars of tomatoes but, he'll have the bulk of them to take care of. Don't worry about him...he's the one who taught me how to can tomatoes.

He has potato salad in the fridge, hamburger ready to fry and quite a few other planned-overs. I know he won't go hungry.

Writing this column is the final item on my mental checklist. It's after 2 a.m. Sunday morning and I have to get up at 5 a.m. So, I better sleep fast.

Food safety is also our responsibility

By John Schlageck, Kansas Farm Bureau

There is anxiety about food safety in our country today. The most recent example is the half-billion egg recall. As a result, people are worried about the safety of the eggs they eat.

While some food safety problems occur on the farm, many more occur in the kitchen where food can be mishandled or poorly prepared. Keeping food safe is everyone's business. Yours and mine.

The way we handle, store and cook food can mean the difference between a satisfying meal and a bout with E. coli or salmonella. Keeping food safe requires a few tried and true steps. Keep food clean, keep it separate, cook it completely and always chill it.

When shopping, keep eggs and raw meat items separate in your grocery cart from foods that do not need to be cooked. Avoid cross contamination.

To prevent raw meat and poultry from contaminating foods that will be eaten without further cooking, enclose individual packages of raw meat or poultry in plastic bags. Position packages of raw meat or poultry in your shopping cart so their juices cannot drip on other food.

When purchasing products labeled keep refrigerated, do so only if they are stored in a refrigerated case and cold to the

Insight

John Schlageck

touch. Buy frozen products only if they are frozen solid. Never buy something that feels mushy.

As wise and safety-conscious shoppers, it is our responsibility to keep food safe once it leaves our local grocery store or meat market. Always shop for perishables last. Keep refrigerated and frozen items together so they will remain cold.

Place perishables in the coolest part of your car during the trip home. Pack them in an ice chest if the time from store to home refrigerator will be more than one hour.

You can prevent E. coli infection by thoroughly cooking ground beef, avoiding unpasteurized milk, and by washing hands carefully before preparing or eating food.

Cook your eggs to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit. This is where the egg yolk is firm. Eliminate recipes that use raw eggs such as meringues that are whipped up from raw egg whites and folded into mousses or pies for example. Pre-pasteurized egg whites are options for these recipes. Completely cooked is completely safe.

Fruits and vegetables should be washed well, but washing may not remove all contamination. Keep a separate cutting board for raw meats and another for food preparation that does not require cooking such as salads. Again, this simple step helps avoid cross contamination.

Keep food chilled. Meat, lettuce and eggs should be stored in a refrigerator that is between 33 and 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Keep eggs in the original container in the main body of the refrigerator, not in the egg carrier in the door.

Minimize the time in and out of your frig. It is difficult to keep the temperature constant, especially if you have a family that continuously opens the door.

Never leave cooked eggs or other perishable food products sitting out on the counter. Put them in the refrigerator once you've served them. The rule is if perishable food is left two hours at room temperature, it should be discarded.

While most of these tips sound simple, a common-sense approach the next time you shop and cook could ensure safer food for your family.

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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