

Your government at work in Kansas

Before I update you on capitol happenings, I would like to encourage anyone coming to Topeka for a meeting, or just to visit the capitol, to contact me. We are invited to many lobbyist meetings each evening and it is fun to go to the ones with people from back home. January 24, I went to the electric cooperatives meeting and there were some wonderful people to visit with from NW Kansas. January 26, I spent the evening with Mike Braxmeyer from Atwood.

News from your legislator
Ward Cassidy



Committee meetings are going fast and furious. I believe we are approaching seventy new pieces of legislation so far. I had another interesting Corrections Committee meeting. We will introduce a bill making Sudafer a prescription drug. Law enforcement tells us that meth is still a gigantic problem in the state. After visiting with some friends from Norton, I brought up in our meeting today a discussion on the theft of copper wiring in the state. Our revisors (lawyers that work with our committee) are looking at the current laws and seeing what could be done to slow down this problem.

I listened to our new head of the Kansas Wildlife and Parks, Robin Jennison, discuss the merging of his department with Tourism. The Governor is promoting initiatives to encourage rural development. One initiative advances the state as a destination spot for outdoor sports and activities, with plans for increased use of Kansas State land and parks. Any ideas from the Northwest should be sent to me or directly to Secretary Jennison.

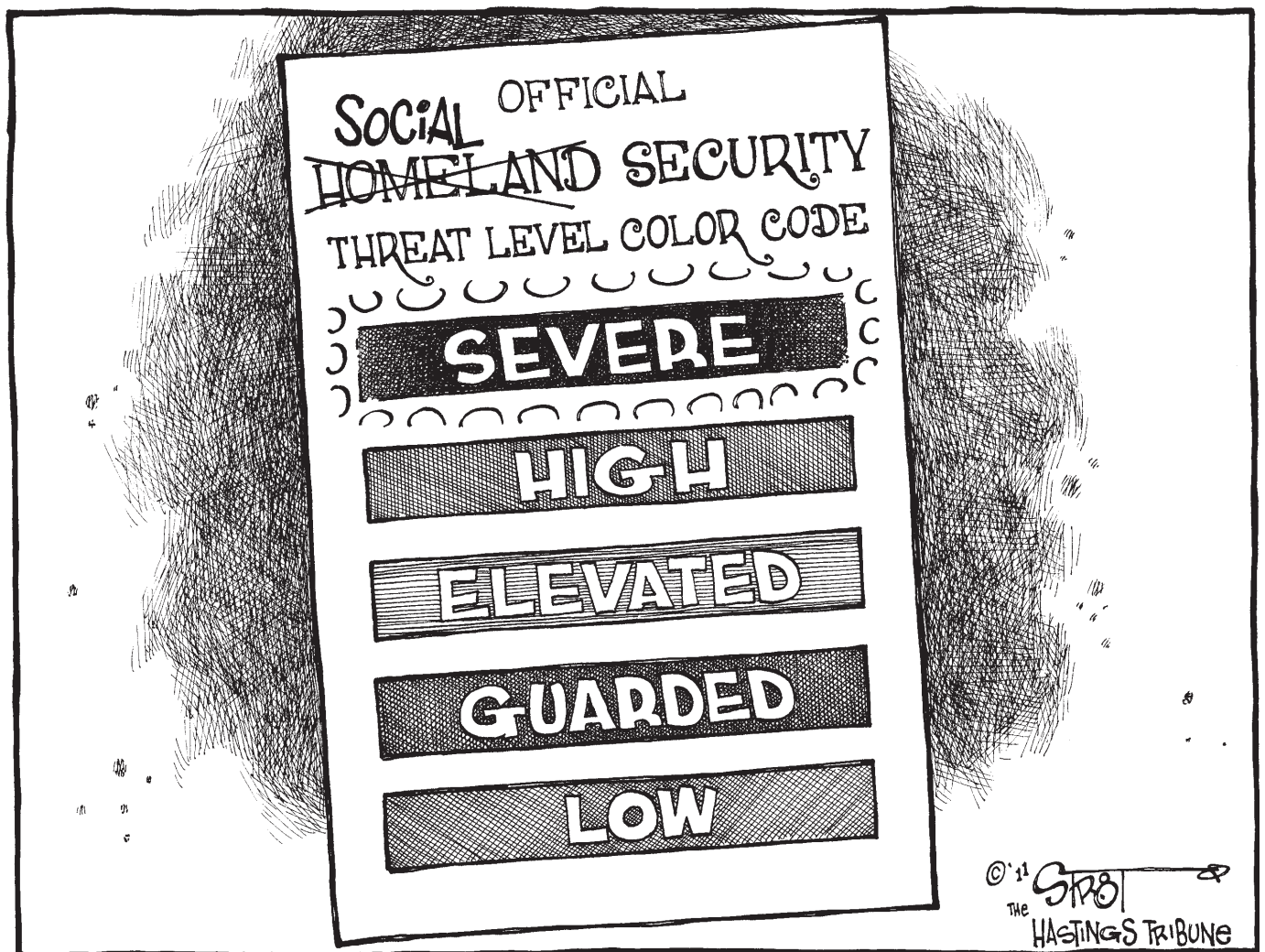
Economic development is on everyone's mind and Secretary Pat George has been given the job of leading the Kansas Department of Commerce. I like his goals of encouraging job creation, retaining existing businesses, recruiting out of state companies, and expanding sales to international markets. He has been contacted by seven companies in his first week in office.

There are many proposals that have the state stirring. None more so than the proposed cut of 7.5 % to all state employees pay. There is a senate version and a house version that are quite a bit different. Next week the proposals should be better understood. E-verify, a proposal for requiring identification for state jobs is really being pushed.

What I found very amazing this week was that I am in committee meetings all day, walking back to my office I received a call from Norton County about the 7.5 % cut to state employees and I had not yet heard anything about it. News travels fast in today's world.

Personally, I will take my first bill to the floor tomorrow hoping to revise a statute that will help a firm in Phillipsburg. I have talked to the Governor about changes in the State Fire Marshall Department that are really affecting our area. He has promised to look into the problem. I have also been invited to the Governor's home (Cedar Crest) for supper and a meeting.

These are very difficult times and all I hear is cut, cut, cut - just not what their group is involved with. There is a lot of stress in the capitol halls. Please pray that everyone here can work together and make good decisions.



Looking at weather, gas and technology

It's pretty bad when your kids have to issue a disclaimer at the end of a conversation. But, I guess they know me pretty well. Absolutely anything is fodder for this column.

Following a recent conversation with my oldest daughter, Halley, about a humorous occurrence in her life, she ended it by saying, "Mom, you can't put that in the paper."

She probably sensed that my mental wheels were already turning on how to phrase her particular incident. But, out of respect for Halley, I won't print it. At least, not now.

-ob-

Weather, of course, is the topic of most conversations. Followed closely by the rising cost of gasoline. I can't explain either one.

Weather is what it is. Nothing to be done about it except to prepare for it and endure it.

Gasoline, however, is another matter. I suppose we have to endure the prices or stay home. Which, in our mobile society, is not possible. I'm foreseeing that the pressure of out-of-sight gas prices will force some innovative inventor to deve-

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



lope a vehicle that runs on water or air.

At the very least it will probably force our government to reconsider the moratorium on drilling in the Alaskan "outback". It doesn't appear that wildlife suffered too much when the pipeline was built. With the proper controls, drilling can be safe.

I would much rather buy petroleum products produced in America than imported from who knows where.

-ob-

Our little town is now totally "wired". A local communication company completed wiring the town for high-speed internet access, cable television and telephone service. It's my understanding every home in town subscribed to at least one of the offerings.

We got the whole load. And, do we love it. Dial-up internet access was okay because that was all we had. But, oh my! The pleasure of instant internet is wonderful. We didn't even subscribe to the fastest access possible but, it's plenty fast for us.

Before, watching a video or opening pictures was impossible. It would, literally, take hours to load. Now, snap, and we have pictures.

Someone sent me the cutest video of a two-year-old little boy singing his heart out in church. Another is of a four-year-old pretending to conduct an orchestra. Foolish? Perhaps, but, they certainly brought a smile to my face.

-ob-

Last week I shared that Jim had a woodworking project in the living room. He made a shelf to hold stemware and bottles for a new Mexican restaurant. It was completed, delivered and installed. The restaurant owner and his wife were delighted. When asked if it was what they had in mind she replied, "More better."

That's what I say too, when he completes a project for me. It's "more better" than I could have imagined.



Thumbs up to the Java Jive, it was great! Called in.

Thumbs up to Tamara Cochran and her talented students on a magnificent Java Jive performance. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to the Child Study Club for all of their hard work putting on the carnival for the children. I know mine enjoyed it very much. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to Mr. Will and all the NCHS band students. The concert held in tribute to Kansas was very enjoyable. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to the City of Norton for the extra recycling pick ups at the roadside park dumpsters. That will help decrease items blowing all over and hopefully encourage even more recycling. Emailed in.

Thumbs up to the doctors at the Norton County Hospital for all you do. Thanks, Dr. McKinley for going above and beyond the call of duty. Called in.

Thumbs up to the Norton Police Department for the ride to the Norton County Hospital; it was greatly appreciated. Called in.

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Living in the here and now may be the way to go

Where do you live? No, I am not asking you for your street address or even your e-mail address. I am wondering whether you live in the past, the present or the future. People who live in the past are there for one of two reasons they are dealing with regrets ("If only I had done/said something different.") or trying to recapture a time that was happier than the present. Of course we all look back at pleasant memories of certain times in our lives, the meeting of the love of our lives, our child's first smile, our first paycheck but we don't "move into" those memories. Having regrets about things done or undone doesn't do us any good. We don't get any "do-overs" in life. We need to take appropriate steps offering an apology, being accountable, asking forgiveness but then we must let it go. If it is impossible to let go of regrets, it may be time to see a therapist for some help.

Life is Good Rita Speer



There are also people who live in the future. It is populated with people and things as we'd like them to be: getting out of school, getting a job, finding a better job, meeting our Prince (or Princess) Charming, getting the kids through school, being retired. Life goes on, day by day, and the people who are constantly looking forward to a future event miss the joy of the here and the now. I am not suggesting that making plans is inappropriate, but each one of us needs to be aware of what is happening in the

moment. One example of this is when a traditional college student can hardly wait to finish his/her degree and get the dream job and misses the wonderful experiences of being a college student. The same can be said for someone who focuses on retirement, thereby missing the opportunity for friendship, service and taking time to smell the roses while still working.

I prefer living in the present. It isn't always fun, joy-filled or free of stress. It means giving up denial and taking responsibility for what I do. But living in the here and now gives me wonderful opportunities as well. I can encounter people where they are at that moment of their lives and be genuine. I can listen both to what they're saying and not saying. And then I can respond with sincerity and offer the only real gift I have myself.

Are colleges allowing students to "dumb down"

Alarming statistics were released regarding college students' educational gains following two years in an institution of higher learning. Forty-five percent of youth in over two dozen schools, which included New York University and University of Virginia, "demonstrated no significant gains in critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and written communications during the first two years of college." The statistics regarding four year attendance aren't much more encouraging with 36% exhibiting the same tendencies. Students reported writing fewer than 20 pages a semester and reading less than 40 pages a week. One of the authors of the study, Dr. Richard Arum, is quick to note the fault does not rest solely on the student but professors and administrators as well.

For some, the purpose of college is

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



merely to gain the extra financial/career advantage obtainable primarily with a college degree. Any reward of added knowledge and thinking skills is merely frosting on the cake. However if we are going to be competitive in the global market we must use the college experience as more than just a passing of time. It must encourage the very skills lacking in many students now.

To be sure 55% of two year attendees are improving as are 64% of four year

students, but what is the cost for those who are lagging behind. Many will end their college career with high debt and not have gained the skills necessary to propel them into successful careers.

Current thinking seems to suggest most parents feel all young people, or at least their own children, should go to college. Unfortunately if we adhere to this we fall into the trap of the 'dumbing down' of the colleges to permit success for some students.

I am not suggesting college is a waste of time or money but just as we evaluate our public school education we must also identify the problems of our higher education and the needs of each student. We can then work to make a success of all who do attend, whether it is college, trade school or an apprenticeship.