

Kansas open records takes a step forward

Backers of open government achieved a milestone victory last week as the Kansas Legislature approved a compromise bill to open up affidavits filed to obtain arrest and search warrants, making Kansas the last state to make these public.

The bill had passed the House, but bogged down in the Senate over amendments that had nothing to do with these affidavits. In the time between the end of the regular session and the wrapup "veto" session, however, supporters got together with the state's prosecutors and came up with a compromise.

With backing from Speaker Ray Merrick, this version was adopted by a conference committee, then passed in the Senate 40-0 and the House 123-1. It's not perfect; provisions allow prosecutors and defense attorneys to delay release as long as 10 days by asking for "redaction" of sensitive information such as Social Security and driver's license numbers, phone numbers and addresses and some police secrets. They can even ask the judge to seal the records for good.

However, the change represents a quantum step forward for Kansas, which had been the only state not to make these documents public. In federal court, for instance, they routinely posted in online files available to any user of the court's computer system. These sometimes make fascinating reading.

Prosecutors had opposed opening up the records, at least partly because they feared it could produce more pretrial publicity which might be endangering a defendant's right to a fair trial. Backers pointed out that wasn't likely, since Kansas has never had a defendant released because of pretrial publicity.

Another argument was it would be a burden on the attorneys to go through every affidavit to seek redaction of specific items, but there's no requirement that either side do so.

A 10-day delay is less than perfect, but it's something people will have to put up with for now. Given some experience with the new law, it might be possible to cut that time down later.

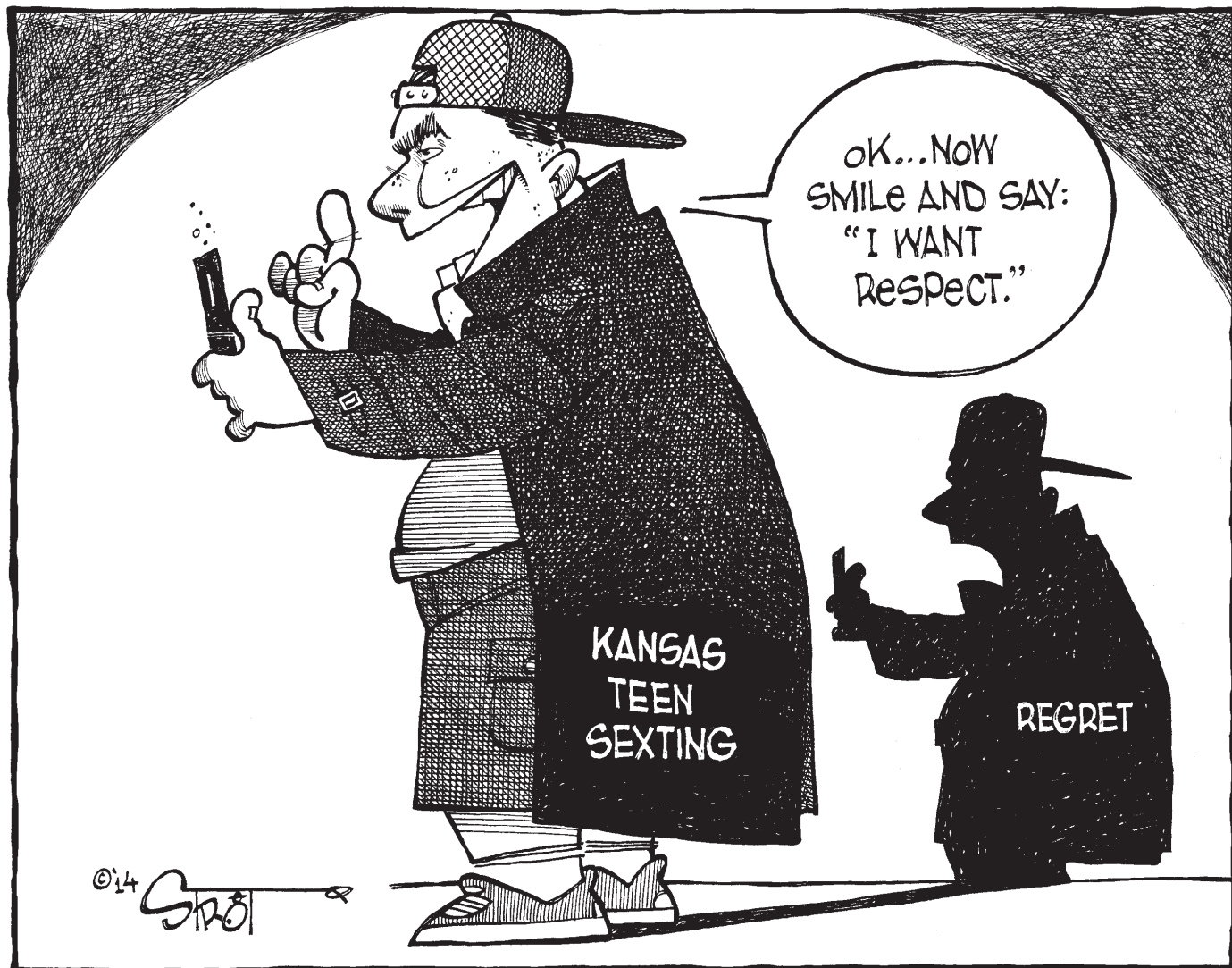
For now, it'll be possible for any citizen to get to the bottom of why someone was arrested or why a house was searched. That would have come in handy for the Kansas City-area family who wound up being held at gunpoint while drug agents ransacked their house.

After a year and thousands in legal fees, they found out it happened because they had bought supplies for their son to grow tomatoes in the basement. The cops thought, after searching their trash and finding wet tea leaves, that the couple was growing marijuana.

One real benefit for the public will be a source of honest, factual information about crimes major and minor, to replace the current flow of rumors. Prosecutors and defense attorneys will be able to turn questions to this source and avoid making any comments, as court rules require.

Otherwise, in Kansas, it's sometimes six months to a year before citizens' legitimate questions about a crime can be answered. That's one reason why the Kansas Press Association was a major backer of this bill.

All in all, this law, which now awaits the governor's signature, is a major step forward for open government. — Steve Haynes



Religion propels people to do great things

Religion is an interesting thing and it matters little whether one is Christian, Jewish, Muslim or atheist. Yes, in my book even an atheist has religion. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines religion as "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith." Those people I have known who profess to not believe in God do so with great ardor and true conviction.

I recently attended the movie, God Isn't Dead. First off, I must say, it was well done...as a Christian movie. My complaint with it would be the missed opportunities. My God is a universal God, whether a person is Christian, Jewish, Muslim or, for that matter, agnostic. The movie would have been a perfect outlet to promote a loving God in the most basic sense, revealing God as a God available to all and within us all! In addition, rather than portraying the Islam faith in a violent way why not let the movie reflect the loving nature

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



of God through Islamic eyes. I understand the purpose of the movie was to promote Christianity, but it might have been better titled Jesus Christ Lives.

I have never been able to understand a conflict between science and religion. My God does not need to be portrayed as a magician. I see him as someone who delights in the spontaneous evolving of plants and animals. Evolving from a monkey seems rather appropriate, considering some of our actions as human beings.

Sometimes religion propels indi-

viduals, no matter the faith, to do great things, sometimes it also propels them to commit horrendous crimes. One only has to examine the history of any religion or country to realize, as a people, Christian, Jewish, Muslim or atheist, we can all lay claim to terrible injustices. We may not act on those ideas, but certainly sometimes mankind's thoughts are less than benevolent.

The movie's portrayal of how the disappointment and anger of grief may affect our faith are very real. The positive side, however is how questioning life's circumstances can also be the catalyst to help our faith become stronger.

Hellen Keller once said, "It is wonderful how much time good people spend fighting the devil. If they would only expend the same amount of energy loving their fellow men, the devil would die in his own tracks of ennui." mkwodyard@ruraltel.net

Acknowledge the power of death, it waits us all

Maria, a college student majoring in journalism, upset her mother when she asked for information regarding her latest assignment: Write your own obituary.

As a parent that is distressing but to think of it another way; obits are written in advance for famous people. You could think, "Ah, good things await my child."

Famous or not, death awaits us all. I remember the obituary of my mother's cousin's husband. It told of his joy in simple things like "a celebration with homemade ice cream." Those words evoked a memory so strong upon hearing them at his memorial service I was right there in their house watching him remove the churn. I could taste the ice cream.

Another obituary ended with a poem: "Death came the other night and heaven's gate swung wide:

With kindly grace an angel ushered me inside.

And there to my astonishment stood folks I'd known on earth— Some I'd judged and labeled as unfit or little worth.

Indignant words rose to my lips, but never were set free.

For every face showed stunned surprise: No one expected me!"

There is much to consider when death occurs so while maybe we do not need to write our own obituaries it's good to do some advance planning.

The hubby and I have had this discussion. I'm opting for cremation. As he does not want to be embalmed, his body must be buried within 24 hours of death. For a long time I equated burial

This Too Shall Pass Nancy Hagman



with a funeral so his request bothered me. I am relieved now that services are sometimes held at the most convenient time, unrelated to burial.

Cremations, burial before services, and closed caskets bring a set of problems all their own. I recently heard a woman, who does not want her body viewed, say it puts the pressure on to keep a nice current photo for display.

Hmmmm—I expect my family to display a photo from the past— when I was 25! And thin!

Sorry if I sound morbid. That's what you get from a person who takes a vacation with extended family every other year for the purpose of viewing the graves of ancestors!

We all agreed one cemetery with a view of a beautiful valley was perfect for eternity. Then Ben told us of a communal place for ashes in his community. The gal who cuts his hair says that is where she hopes to end up. Because there will be lots of people to talk to!

Ah—the hairdressers and the barbers! Do they teach them how to entertain in school?

I'm asking because Bozie died. His obituary says "Bozie was a joker..." An understatement maybe?

I liked Bozie and Bozie liked me.

Before he closed his shop he would tell the hubby, when he went in, how much he enjoyed my column. He also called a couple of times. I love hearing from readers.

Bozie knew how to tell a story well, I'm flattered he thought I did also.

I've told the girls the music I want at my funeral; especially the Vince Gill song, "Go Rest High on That Mountain." Elizabeth expressed surprise because the first line is "I know your life on earth was troubled."

"Is your life troubled, Mom?" Well, everyone's is to an extent. What I love about the song is the chorus:

"Go rest high on that mountain 'Cause, Son, your work on earth is done

Go to Heaven a shoutin' Love for the Father and the Son"

I've noticed funerals aren't really funerals anymore. They are "celebrations of life". I like the term and all it encompasses. And yet—

During my college years, in a class, we discussed grief: a story of a family that lost a child. A person making a sympathy call was so uncomfortable discussing the death she never mentioned it. After she left a very young surviving sibling asked his mother, "Does she know Mary died?"

I never had to write my own obituary but I remember that story.

Acknowledging the power of death is painful but how much worse to pretend there is no pain. Even when a person has lived a long life, a good life, they are lost to us. So we mourn.

And that's a good thing!



Thumbs up to all the volunteers that helped with the Norton County Council on Alcohol and Other Drugs Youth Forum and to Valley Hope, Pizza Hut, The Rock and the Norton Theatre. It is a great thing to help our youth understand the negative impacts of using drugs and/or alcohol. Emailed in.

Congratulations to the NCHS Forensics Team and Coaches for their State Championship! Way to Go! We are so Proud of You! Emailed in.



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