

Opinion



Guest
Viewpoint

The key is drought disaster assistance

As this dry summer season draws to a close, emergency drought relief remains the focus of attention among sun-blistered crop and livestock producers in Kansas. June, July and August were devastating and provided little moisture to parched grass and cropland across the state.

Understanding how important drought assistance will be to ensure farmers and ranchers continue in the business of producing food for hungry people in this country and throughout the world, Kansas Farm Bureau (KFB) and other agricultural organizations are committed to making sure help is on the way.

Farm Bureau is studying the emergency drought relief legislation that will be discussed when Congress returns to Washington after Labor Day. Representing 43,000 farmers and ranchers in Kansas, Farm Bureau supports utilizing emergency dollars to provide disaster assistance. This would be funded using dollars from farm bill "offsets" similar to other emergencies including fires and hurricanes.

Kansas farmers must see drought assistance before Jan. 1, 2003. If such help isn't forthcoming, our state will lose families who won't be able to continue farming. Farmers across the western third of the state have already liquidated cowherds and fall crops are being harvested early in an attempt to salvage corn, milo and other row crops for silage.

This sort of disaster assistance does not undermine crop insurance reform and programs already available to Kansas producers. The state's largest farm advocacy organization is working to extend the time for capital gains to two years beyond the drought, instead of the current two years from sale of stock. Both of these proposals are crucial to Kansas farm and ranch families and may likely be found in a compromise bill.

In a letter to U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman, Kansas Farm Bureau urged this nation's chief agricultural leader to release producers involved in CRP (conservation reserve program) contracts from certain rental payment provisions. This requirement burdens producers who are struggling to provide forage for their livestock. It also hampers USDA staff with administrative details when time is crucial.

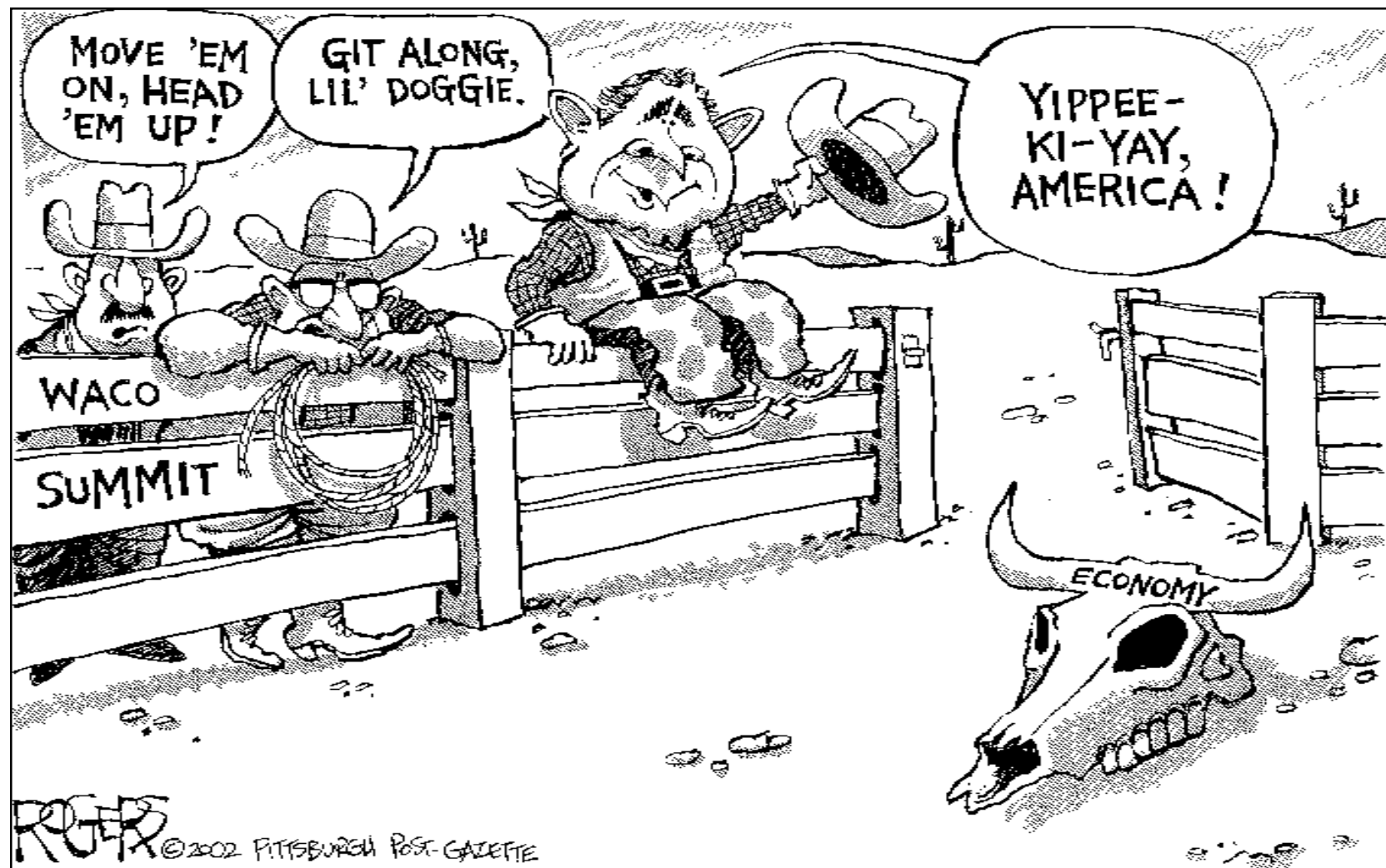
While KFB has not taken position to support one of the three major bills currently be recommended, the two measures introduced by Sen. Pat Roberts and Rep. Jerry Moran both contain provisions that could benefit Kansas farmers and ranchers. A compromise bill will probably wind up before Congress.

Until the details are hammered out, only farmers and ranchers can effectively communicate their needs for drought assistance. Members of the Kansas Congressional delegation understand what's at stake in this debate, but their urban counterparts may not.

Put yourself in their shoes. Many of them voted against the recent farm bill because of budget concerns. No doubt some of them will view this effort as agriculture coming to them again with its hand out.

Supporters of agriculture and rural communities in Kansas and across the drought-parched sections of this country have a job to do — remind those lawmakers what farmers and ranchers do for their constituents. Unless they receive calls, letters and e-mails by the truckload, the assistance package may not arrive in time. This could spell disaster for farm families in Kansas and the Midwest. — *John Schlageck*

Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.



And then there's that 'other person'

I AM not making light of lawyers. I have one of the very best in brother Norbert (at Hays). He's been practicing for 50+ years and during that time I have come to appreciate the long hours, the intensity, the preparation, the ongoing commitment, the perpetual study — all those things about attorneys not many people are aware of. I love and respect that man dearly. Now, with all that said....I will get on with the topic at hand — lawyers.

Have you noticed that most people appearing on television talk shows, or news shows, always have that "other person" sitting next to them? Well, that "other person," 99 percent of the time, is a lawyer. There are so many stupid things going in society today that you never know when you are going to need one of those guys or gals. Take the lady in Ohio whose kids got sunburned and she ended up in jail for eight days because the sheriff said she wasn't practicing responsible parenting. He described the burns in terms of degrees, and it turned out that the burns weren't that at all. Criminal charges against the mother were dropped. So she appeared Thursday morning on ABC-TV's "Good Morning America" or whatever it is called, to tell her side of the story. Seated next to her was "another person" — her attorney.

I use this as an example because this goes on practically every day. Different faces telling different stories of what many times seem so insignificant that you begin to think we live in a gigantic loony pen. But thanks, in many cases to the do-gooders — who should be butting out instead of butting in — there are literally, I would venture to guess, thousands of incidents that don't warrant legal intervention. And I'm sure I'm not alone in shaking my head many times in disbelief.

But, unfortunately, we live in a time when you got to be on your toes 24/7 for fear someone will see that — uh-oh — you forgot to tie both of your shoes and you know that will certainly offend someone. Or your child makes a sour face as he or she picks up his or her lunch tray in the school cafeteria, and that, without question, comes under the category of offending. And of course that child's parent will charge interference with freedom of expression under the First Amendment — and the legal gloves are on. Or how about the lady who was forced to drink her own breast milk from a bottle before being allowed to board a plane to demonstrate what she was carrying on was, in fact, breast milk and not something that could be ignited and blow up the plane. She's suing. And I think she should. Common sense could have settled this matter. Or the high school student who was kicked out of school for giving a speech that contained the word *God*. She was forced to get legal counsel in order to get back into her classes. Or the 6-year-old boy who kissed a playmate on the school



Tom Dreiling

• My Turn

playground and was sent home for unacceptable behavior. On and on it goes. It's a litany of insanity.

But if I were an attorney I would most certainly take some of these cases. That's what the good guys and gals in the legal profession are there for. It's just unfortunate that something that used to be the popular name for a girl — Sue — is now commonplace in a society that just isn't quite sure why it even exists.

Watch out! Get your finger out of year ear. Somebody is watching and you could very well be hauled in for a publicly unacceptable gesture.

QUICKWIT — If you want your wife to listen and pay undivided attention to every word you say, talk in your sleep.

MAYBE the way President Bush can tackle the forest fire problem is to outlaw matches. But then I got to thinking, I have a box of matches that haven't started a fire on their own, and I used to have a weapon in the closet that never hurt a soul on its own. Hmm. Maybe it is the irresponsible handling of these two things that triggers disastrous results.

WORTH A CHUCKLE

As a trucker stops for a red light, a woman jumps out of her car, runs up to his truck, and knocks on the door. The trucker lowers the window, and she says "Hi, my name is Heather and you are losing some of your load." The trucker ignores her and proceeds down the street. When the truck stops for another red light, the lady catches up again. She jumps out of her car, runs up and knocks on the door. Again, the trucker lowers the window. As if they've never spoken, she says brightly, "Hi my name is Heather, and you are losing some of your load!" Shaking his head, the trucker ignores her again and continues down the street.

At the third red light, the same thing happens again. All out of breath, the woman gets out of her car, runs up, knocks on the truck door. The trucker lowers the window. Again she says "Hi, my name is Heather, and you are losing some of your load!"

When the light turns green the trucker revs up and races to the next light. When he stops this time, he hurriedly gets out of the truck, and runs back to the lady. He knocks on her window, and as she lowers it,

he says (are you ready for this?), "Hi, my name is George. It's winter in Nebraska and I'm driving the salt truck!"

HAPPY Birthday to...

Aug. 23 — Willie Engelhardt (87), Rosie Stockton, Sabrina Foster

Aug. 24 — Cassie Lechman (2), Clayton Appelhans, Zita Rundel

Aug. 25 — Elise Corbett, Mandy Hoagland

HAPPY Anniversary to...

Aug. 23 — Dave & Kay Wessel

Aug. 24 — George & Mary Shackelton, Sean & Kelli Hankin

Aug. 25 — Oscar & Josephine Jones (62nd), Jim & Karen Morrison

Congratulations!

Now, I have one more I failed to mention on Aug. 21 — Kuper Jones, who turned 19 and it is always a very special day as his birthday and his grandparent's anniversary — Harold & Grace Jones — are on the same date. That's cool!

STORY TIME

Sitting on the side of the highway waiting to catch speeding drivers, a state police officer sees a car putting along at 22 mph. He thinks to himself, "This driver is just as dangerous as a speeder!" So he turns on his lights and pulls the driver over. Approaching the car, he notices that there are five little old ladies — two in the front seat and three in the back — wide eyed and white as ghosts.

The driver, obviously confused, says to him, "Officer, I don't understand. I was doing exactly the speed limit! What seems to be the problem?"

"Ma'am," the officer replies, "you weren't speeding, but you should know that driving slower than the speed limit can be a danger to other drivers."

"Slower than the speed limit? No sir! I was doing the speed limit exactly — twenty-two miles an hour!" the old woman says quite proudly.

The state police officer, trying to contain a chuckle, explains to her that "22" was the route number, not the speed limit.

A bit embarrassed, the woman grinned sheepishly and thanked the officer for pointing out her error.

"But before I let you go, ma'am, I have to ask...is everyone in this car OK? These women seem awfully shaken, and they haven't muttered a single peep this whole time," the officer says with concern.

"Oh, they'll be all right in a minute, Officer. We just got off Route 119."

HAVE a good evening and a good weekend!

Dreiling is publisher of the Free Press. His column appears Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published.

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Even in,
The market boom;
All my kids,
Slept in one room.

Perhaps it was all those dreary years working in real estate that sensitized me to housing. I tend to view it as a measure of our democracy. Take 1976. Back then many voters still recalled family experience with subsidized units, and fewer of us were rich. There also lingered in our hearts some residue of a post-war spirit of community team play. That year the federal government spent \$77 billion (adjusted) on low-income renters. Meanwhile the mortgage interest deduction on homeowners' tax returns cost the Treasury only \$29 billion.

Now that is all reversed. We middle class voters no longer relate to assisted housing. We often feel that such aid is a kind of handout to folks who have simply made poor lifestyle choices. We're also ill at ease that inappropriate people, if subsidized, might somehow nudge into our neighborhood or our town. Congressmen, alert devils that they are, can sense this shift, and have consequently lowered the budget for assisted housing to \$24 billion. At the same time the mortgage interest deduction for the middle class and the wealthy has zoomed to \$121 billion. (The bigger the house, the more the deduction.)

Somewhat less chintzy, thank goodness, is aid for those who are actually homeless. We respond more generously to poignant photos of desperate families camped out in abandoned cars. Thus we pay for shel-

William A.
Collins

• Another Viewpoint

ters to at least get these sufferers into a warm place. To move them beyond the shelter, though, is another matter. Political support for transitional housing, family services, and down payment assistance is sparse.

And now all at once even the shelters are inadequate. Welfare reform and the slipping economy have pushed demand over the brink. Everywhere in the state (Connecticut) they are overflowing, with many folks now moving back into packing crates. That's unfortunate timing. The state has a big deficit at the moment, and the governor is unwilling to raise taxes on rich people to fill the gap.

For folks not actually out on the street, there is less help yet. If you have a place to live, no matter how wretched, you don't make a poignant photo. That shortcoming affects many legislative votes. Back in 1990, for example, the state approved over \$100 million in new housing bonds. Now that level is near zero, with no real hope of improvement.

Nor is it any different for rental assistance. Last fall the state opened its application list (normally closed)

to let newly qualified people sign up. During that 10-day window, 37,000 did. The state responded by funding 300 new rental certificates. Thus it seems that the only citizens who care anymore are do-gooders and the sufferers themselves. And those latter, as we know, rarely vote.

The towns, likewise, are not much help. The state reports that wealthy Weston contains only one affordable housing unit. And Vernon, a town more likely to understand housing needs, has just cut back seriously on its low-interest low-income home improvement loans. Henceforth one can only borrow for repairs that affect the "life, safety, and threats to the immediate health of the occupants."

Down here in exorbitant Fairfield County the problem, as always, is worse. Rents are astronomical. Two-bedroom apartments run over \$1,500. Many low-pay workers can only find housing in Bridgeport, if at all. But such tales of woe are insufficient to persuade voters to offer more subsidized units in their own towns. Clearly taxes might go up, schools might integrate, and property values might go down. Life doesn't get any worse than that.

Only when the shortage affects our own kids are we likely to relent. Maybe.

Columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Connecticut. His column today is shared with readers all over the country who might feel only they are faced with such problems.