

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### We can never be too safe with kids

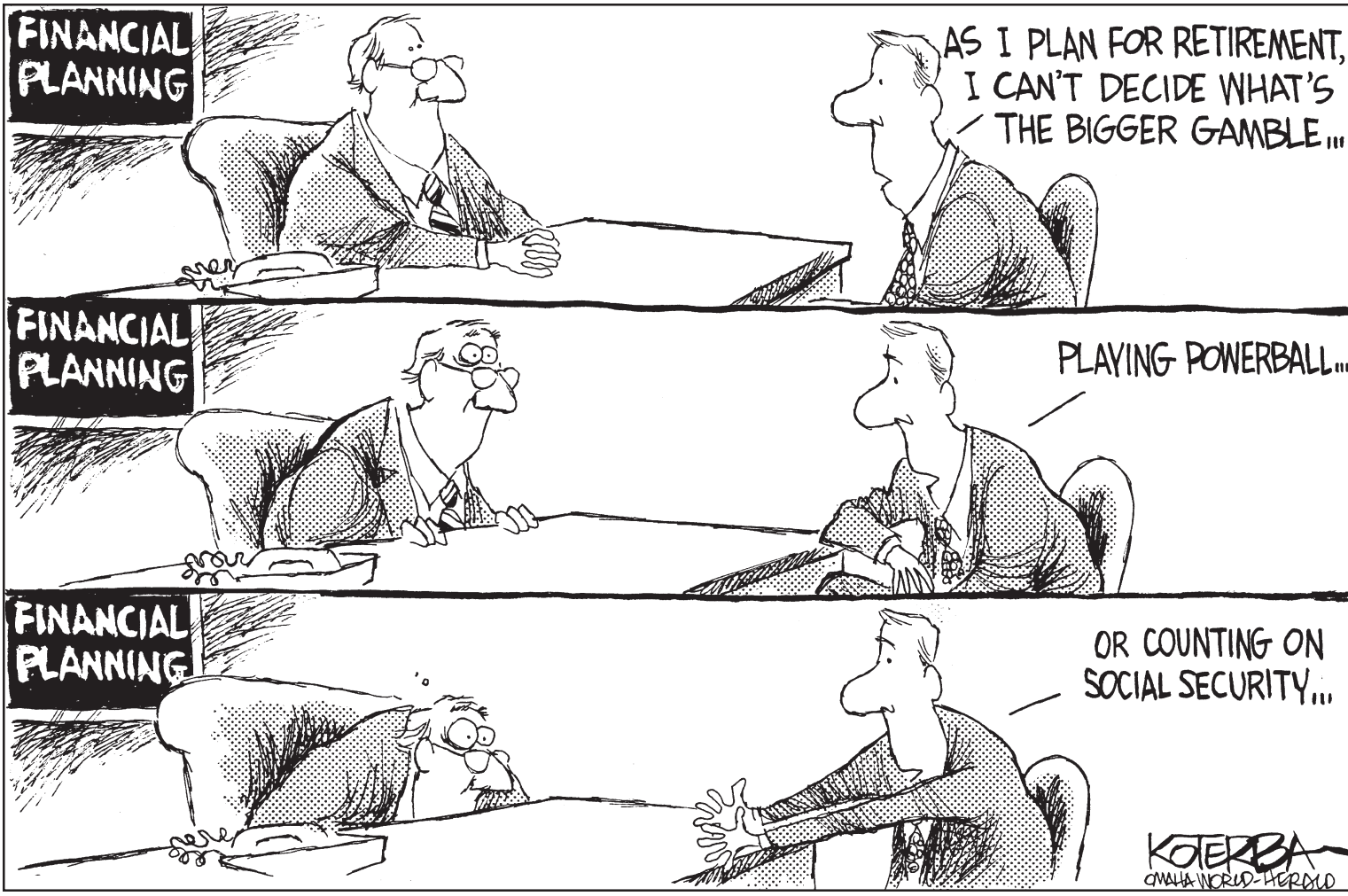
**From The Hays Daily News**  
 School buses are safe, many people will tell us. Still, the lack of seatbelts on most school buses is peculiar.  
 Every vehicle imaginable is equipped with seatbelts. We now have seatbelt laws to encourage or require — depending on the degree of enforcement — drivers and passengers to wear seatbelts.  
 Children are our most precious cargo, and we have laws about car seats for children and proper anchoring in vehicles — with a seatbelt, of course. The Kansas Legislature is even debating another law about car seats for children.  
 And yet, most school buses are not even equipped with seatbelts. A bill in the Legislature would change that, requiring seatbelts in all school buses. The measure is pending in the House Transportation Committee.  
 The Legislature cannot debate laws for securing children in private vehicles without discussing the school bus issue. The discrepancy simply is too obvious.

Federal law does not require large school buses, those weighing more than 10,000 pounds, to have seatbelts. Instead, school buses are designed to be safe without them. They have a “compartmentalization” design, protectively enveloping passengers with strongly spaced seats and energy-absorbing seatbacks.  
 Several school and transportation officials testifying before the committee last week said that seatbelts would not improve student safety. They said that school buses already are the safest way to transport children to school. And they have statistics to back that up.  
 If nothing else, it sends the wrong message to children when parents require them to buckle up in the car yet they can bounce around on a school bus without restraint. Children should be taught to buckle up all the time, every time they are in a motor vehicle.  
 Equipping existing school buses with seatbelts no doubt would be a costly requirement, and school districts need to be cushioned to some extent. We could start by requiring seatbelts on newly purchased school buses and then maybe allow a phase-in on older buses.  
 School buses may be designed not to need them, but we still should be consistent with the seatbelt message. And we can never be too safe with our children.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwks.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwks.com) or [pdecker@nwks.com](mailto:pdecker@nwks.com).

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- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
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### Can we change more than the calendar?

It may sound dorky, but I like March 1. Consider all the changes that occur in March. For starters, spring officially starts this month. I am not much of a winter fan, but I expect snow and cold from mid-December through February. This winter has been mild, but maybe we can have more rain than snow, all because it says March on the calendar. But I am not so naive to think we are free from snow and cold.



**John Van Nostrand**

#### • Line in the Dust

Other than seasons, March begins with Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent season in the Christian calendar. Years ago, a preacher once explained how Lent should be considered a time for change in each of us.  
 In a moving Ash Wednesday service, he gave small slips of paper and a pencil to everyone in the congregation and asked for us to write down our biggest struggle. We all then folded the piece of paper. We gave him the paper back and he burned them all at the same time.  
 He then took the ashes and placed them on our foreheads in the cross symbol as a reminder of what Christ did for us and for us to try and change our struggle.  
 During Lent we are also supposed to give up something until Easter. After years of putting that off, I want to try it this year.  
 Last fall, a doctor told me I had high cholesterol. It was nothing serious, but enough to consider changes in my diet and lifestyle. Now I will watch my high-cholesterol food intake. I am hoping I will be so used to the change that I will not miss those foods and more importantly have a better cholesterol reading later this year.

In preparation for Lent, Tuesday was Mardi Gras in New Orleans. We all know the city drastically changed since Hurricane Katrina six months ago.  
 Some people say New Orleans will return to the city it once was. Others say the city will never be the same. New Orleans couldn't have a year without Mardi Gras — it refused to change in that respect.  
 So what else could change this month?  
 This month marks the third anniversary of the Iraq War. And, like every March since 2003, there are planned protests against the war.  
 I was in the Iowa capital building in Des Moines the day the war started. I was writing a feature story on two legislators. In front of us was a television screen showing footage of American troops' march toward Baghdad. All three of us had a feeling the world will again change, and it did.  
 Maybe this month things will change enough those in the Pentagon will have a better idea of when all our troops will come home.  
 In the sports world, March is an exciting

month.  
 Fans will be guessing who will play in the state high school basketball tournaments. Colby Eagle boys were finished Tuesday and the girls continue to play. Colby Community College fans will be wondering how far the basketball teams will go. Then the sports fans have to change to spring sports.  
 Major League Baseball spring training games are played in March and the unfortunate stories of the players suspected of using performance enhancing drugs may again surface.  
 It's too bad Major League Baseball can't treat that problem like the Olympics organization. How shocking it would be to hear of MLB authorities raiding the homes of Barry Bonds and others to find out if they have the drugs.  
 Bonds is saying 2006 will be his last year. My guess is the drug accusation is becoming too big for him. And nobody apparently wants Sammy Sosa. Baltimore let him go and he was not interested in playing in Washington.  
 Funny how well Sosa's English was during his home run-hitting days with the Cubs then apparently he forgot the language when questioned by Congress about the drug use.  
 Maybe baseball will change this year to restore the integrity and honesty the game deserves.  
 Change does not always have to be a bad thing. We need to remember it can be a good thing too.  
*Van Nostrand is publisher of the Free Press.*

### Your turn

## Did the Supreme Court goof?

**Frank Sowers Benkelman, Neb.**  
 Were their decisions on right to life, flag burning, ownership of property erroneous? Ruling on 10 commandments a flawed precedent. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator, with certain unalienable rights. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Jails were never biblical punishment. Next to the death penalty, they should be a last resort. Pre-trial jailing is a violation of the premise innocent till proven guilty. Jailing the nonviolent will often do more harm to society than the actions of the accused. Depriving them of lost earnings and stressing their business and personal affairs is an excessive fine (cruel) and unusual punishment to them and the taxpayers

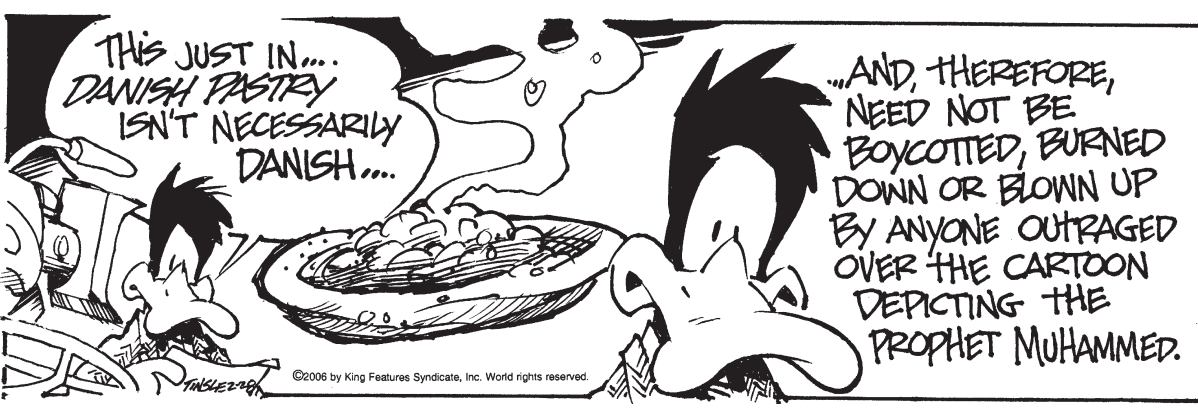
forced to pay for their keep.  
 Kids would be better playing in old cars than doing drugs. Acres of junk look better than the horrible hair doos, goo-paint grease tattoos and body piercings of the camouflage saloons. Forgetting seat belts ... having designated drinking areas would save more lives.  
 “Doth our law judge any man before it hear him and know what he doeth?” John 7:51

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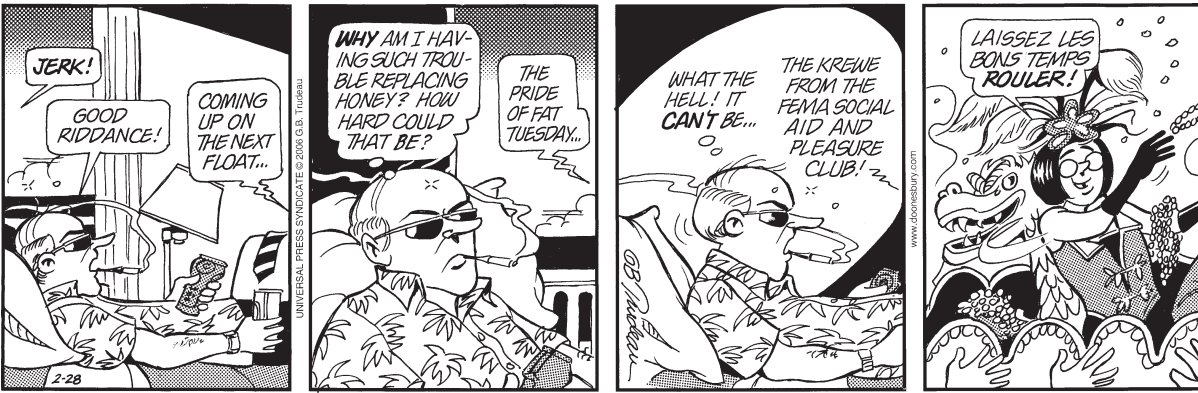
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• Bruce Tinsley



### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau



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