

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Did Baughn and the county act too fast?

Thomas County Sheriff Mike Baughn appears to be doing the right thing. But it's too bad Thomas County Commissioners could not have had more say when Baughn returned to work.

Last week, Baughn was very candid about attending a seminar related to how law officials handle stress, line-of-duty death and suicide. It is good for him to attend those things considering he attempted to take his own life in October. One of his deputies committed suicide the month before. Baughn is attending another seminar later this year in Maryland.

Did the commissioners take Baughn's situation serious enough? No, they really can't tell him what to do with his own department, which begs the question what commissioners are really responsible for. Commissioners approve purchases and pay bills for county departments, but should have more say in personnel matters. What happened with Baughn is a prime example.

It's common for law officials, and people in other industries, to have a certain amount of time away from work after incidents involving death. Baughn's case was no different. The amount of time he took off after the incident was relatively short.

Baughn's incident occurred Oct. 27 and was back to work Nov. 7. Is that enough time to recover from the injury and undergo enough counseling before heading back to the front lines? Remember, he didn't have chicken pox — he attempted suicide.

Considering the job Baughn has, the problems he admitted having and the loss of a deputy last year, he should have had more time away from the office. Even though he confidently told the commissioners he was ready to go back to work, Baughn may have been too anxious to get to work. He even referred to re-election in 2008.

Baughn is the leader of the sheriff's department. He is the one who is supposed to take the lead to settle the struggles within the department and have the insight and authority to delegate what else needs done. He admitted in November he had poor judgment and leadership. How effective are those decisions when Baughn admitted the stresses of the job overwhelmed him enough to do what he did?

Baughn suffered a knee injury and another deputy was injured before a deputy committed suicide Sept. 23 — a month before Baughn's incident. That was obviously a terrible month for him or he may not have done what he did. So was the stress impacting his day-to-day duties before Oct. 27?

It's not that Baughn is not capable of doing the job or should no longer have the job. No matter what job it is, expect stress.

If stress led to what Baughn did, it's unsettling knowing the same stress was apparently behind him 11 days later to continue to work.

A couple of more weeks off would have sounded better and he may have felt better.

As the proverb goes, "time heals all wounds."

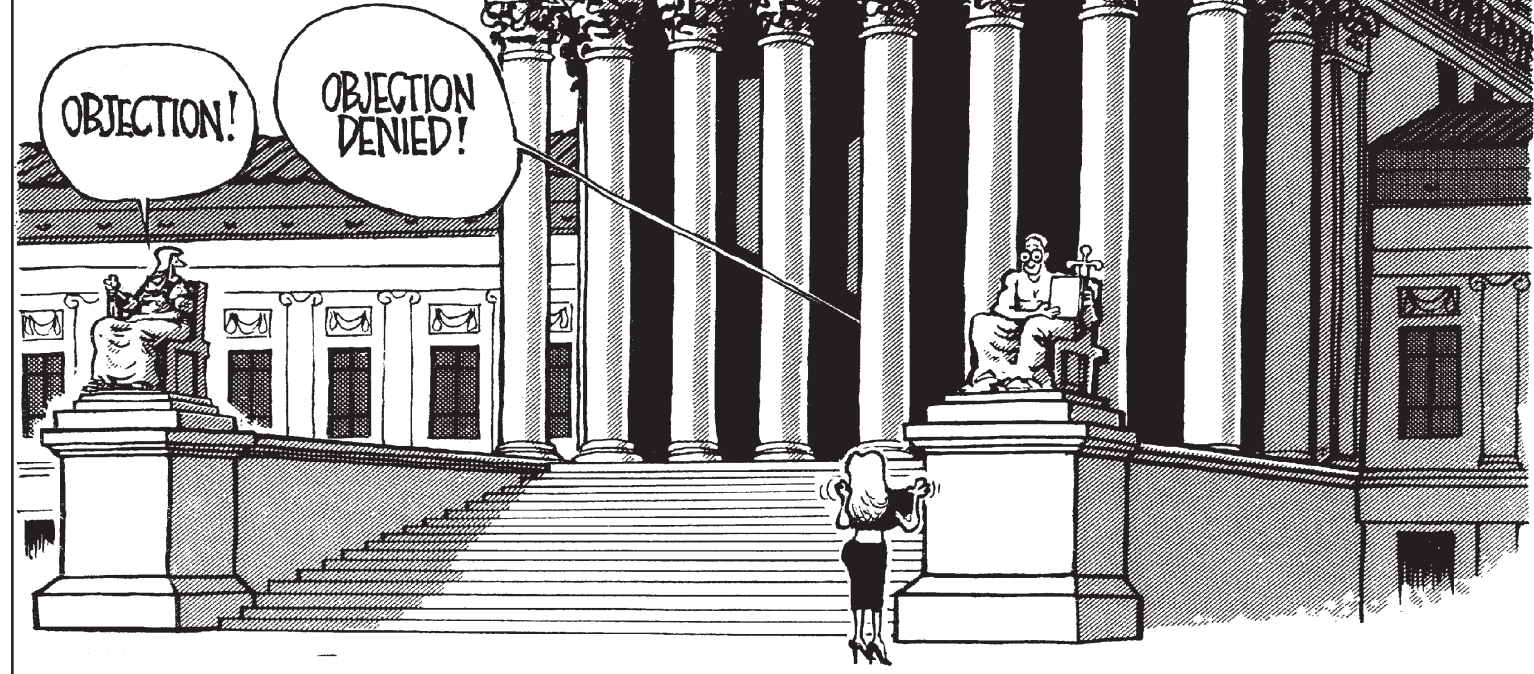
Baughn has the wounds. It's uncertain if he will ever have the time.

— John Van Nostrand, publisher

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@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

Bill Day The Commercial Appeal of the United Feature Syndicate

ANNA NICOLE SMITH SUBMITS HER 'BRIEF' to the SUPREME COURT...



What do you want your dash to stand for?

I've heard it said a person's life is just a little dash. But I'd like to believe that my life is a big dash, not a little one.

The dash I'm talking about is the line on a person's headstone which rests between the date of birth and death.

A conversation at the library in Hoxie Friday prompted me to once again think of the saying, "A person's life is just a little dash."

Library Director Cindy Eller and two patrons were talking about the elder of the two women's desire to go home and read versus going home and clean house.

Chuckles erupted when the younger of the two women said, "I promise I won't let your kids put 'She wasn't much of a housekeeper' on your headstone."

It was at that point I interjected, "Yeah, and I can just see her out there at the cemetery with a cordless grinder grinding off those words in case they do get put there."

Laughter rang throughout the library and the older woman grabbed two books she'd checked out and headed out the door. I'll bet the books are being read with sheer joy and delight as her vacuum waits patiently in the closet.

Seriously, what do you want your dash to stand for?

Will it be rushing to and fro and leaving a dusty path of unfinished business in your wake? Or will it stand for a life well spent of this big ball called Planet Earth?

As for my life, I'm praying my dash stands for a life which left a legacy for other people to follow as a directive to get to know Jesus Christ. I'll never forget the fact I was called into the mission field when I was 14 years old and didn't follow



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

the call out of fear and my old self-satisfaction. I wanted a husband, children, a dog, two cars in the drive and a picket fence lifestyle.

Now, some 36 years later, I'm not taking lightly the fact that when I'm dead and gone my dash had better stand for something which resembled my confirmation verse about disciples of others and introducing them to God (Matt. 28: 19-20).

Like the ladies in the library, it took me a long time to learn how to prioritize my life. I have a saying which I've become known for, "If you come to see me come any time, but if you come to see my house, make an appointment." I used to be one of those women whose floors from which you could eat supper, but now it's best to have a tetanus shot before coming over for a meal.

As far as my dash, rather than the dates I was born and died, I'd rather someone carve these words on my headstone: "Jan Katz Ackerman does not reside here, she lives upstairs."

Speaking of the dashes of a person's life, my husband and I traveled to Denver over the weekend to witness the baptism of his oldest grand-

child, Morgan.

Dressed in a white dress with glistening beads work, Morgan was baptized in front of a huge congregation where her mommy, daddy and a large family of aunts, uncles and paternal grandparents attend.

There Morgan was, a 2-year-old wondering what all the fuss was about. When it came time for her godparents to take her up front to the baptismal font I figured there'd be a loud scream for her mommy. Much to my surprise, Morgan lay gently cradled in the arms of her godmother and waited for the deacon to pour water over her head. Not a peep did she make and neither did the water alarm her. It was so cool to welcome another one of God's creations into his kingdom and witness it along side her family and friends.

Following the mass and baptismal ceremony, my husband and I were treated to lunch at the home of one of Morgan's aunts. The beaded white dress was quickly replaced by hot pink pants and a hot pink and yellow striped shirt and Morgan was back to being a typical 2-year-old. Off to the back yard she scurried, and it wasn't long until Morgan found a large patch of landscaping rocks along side a window well.

It also didn't take Morgan long to get down inside the window well and proceed to stuff rocks into the dryer vent. This process was short-lived as Morgan's daddy stepped out the back door, scooped her up out of the window well and redirected her attention to my dog, Katie.

It's moments like those which make a person's dash worthwhile.

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher

jvannostrand@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor

pdecker@nwkansan.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment

tcoc@nwkansan.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter

ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director

crystalr@nwkansan.com

Jasmine Crottinger - Advertising Sales

jasminee@nwkansan.com

John Altman - Advertising Sales

jaltman@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager

lea@nwkansan.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building

japplegate@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator

support@nwkansan.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

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Your turn

We could not have done it without help

Ginger Rupp Colby

We are fortunate enough to have Northwest Kansas Sexual Assault Services located here in Colby at Citizens Medical Center.

The purpose of this program is to provide immediate and follow up medical, advocacy, and legal services to all victims of sexual assault no matter what age or gender. The program places emphasis on crisis intervention, forensic evidence collection, care of associated injuries, and prophylaxis of sexually transmitted diseases.

The program consists of a four-person team, called the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), who works with assault victims. They

are the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), Law Enforcement, Victim Advocate, and County Attorney. Each member has a different role. The nurse provides care and collects forensic evidence. Law enforcement conducts a formal investigation. Advocates provide support and crisis counseling. The District/County attorney's become involved in the case at a later time.

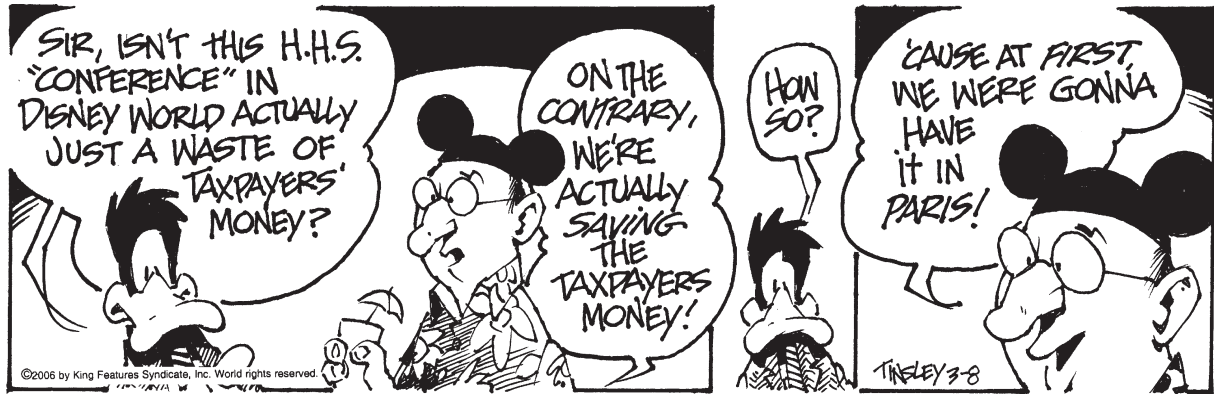
Victims are provided with compassionate, non-judgmental services by team members who have the knowledge, experience, and advanced education to help victims. One of the goals is to reduce the risk of additional trauma to victims. Sexual assault services are free and confiden-

tial.

The communities of northwest Kansas will benefit from quality care, consistency and accuracy in evidence collection and higher prosecution rates. A big thank you to: Tricia Carney, RN, CD Hopper, TCSD. Gary Shull, CPD and Mark Kendrick, KBI for all the hours spent in getting this program together. We could not have done it without the help of others, especially the local civic groups that donated money. I appreciate everyone's hard work over the last four years to make sure the victims of northwest Kansas have a place to go to for care and support.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

