

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



There are ways to help the cost

From The Topeka Capital-Journal

Many Americans have developed an unhealthy philosophy that money can solve any problem.

As the cost of gasoline continues creeping upward toward \$3 a gallon, the response of some has been: the government should do something about it. Sorry, but even the U.S. government can't "do something" about the law of supply and demand.

There is a limit to how much oil can be brought out of the ground, shipped to a refinery, then the gasoline shipped to a gas station near you.

USA Today reported that surveys by the government and by private organizations indicate that people are cutting back on their driving because of the cost. But the most startling statement in the article was a quote from Tom Kloza, senior analyst at the Oil Price Information Service.

"If everyone decided to drive 3 percent less the next 30 days, prices would crash," he said.

Think about it. There is actually something each of us could do to save money for ourselves and others by bringing down the cost of gasoline.

That something is to use less gas. And that could be done a number of ways. Driving less is an obvious one. Car pool to work or take a bus or ride a bicycle. Plan out your errands to make fewer and shorter trips.

In the long run, more of us will need to replace our gas-guzzling SUVs and other large vehicles with smaller, more fuel-efficient cars.

A side benefit to less driving would be better health. Anyone who travels overseas knows that there is less obesity, and thus less illness, in many developed countries because in those countries people still walk to a nearby grocery store or other shopping or work. They stay thin that way by burning off the calories they ingest from remarkably large meals.

In fact, the law of supply and demand is already at work, keeping gas prices from being even higher than they are.

Many people this year have decided that a visit to the Grand Canyon would be as enjoyable as a flight to Europe.

Or consider visiting some of the sights within that 60-mile radius of Topeka instead of seeing the Grand Canyon again.

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 jvanostrand@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com.

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Not a perfect world, but I'm fine so far

One of the coolest stories I remember one of my great-uncles telling me was when he hitchhiked across portions of the country years ago. He said the people who stopped and picked him up were friendly and apparently perceived him the same way.

That happened many decades ago, he is in his early 90s now. His trips happened long before today's occasional kidnapping or hijacking. Not that crime didn't exist before the Great Depression, it just didn't have the presence as it does now — I think.

With Homeland Security and security cameras all over the place, finding that level of trust in society can be hard to find.

But I found a little bit of it.

Last week, I attended the Kansas Press Association convention in Wichita. The entire event was held in one of Wichita's finer hotels.

After preparing for Friday's sessions, I walked out of my hotel room and noticed my room's door would not lock. I asked a housekeeper down the hall what to do and she said I probably didn't slam the door hard enough for the lock to latch. Sure enough, she was right.

But the same trick didn't work after leaving the room a few hours later. And there was no housekeeper around to ask this time. I left the door closed, went down the elevator and told the front



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

desk clerk about my lack of a lock.

"There are 20,000 million rooms in this place. What are the odds someone will pick my room," I thought walking into the convention. The contents of my room were nothing fabulous, other than some formal clothes.

I completely forgot about my room the rest of the afternoon until returning after dinner. When I returned to the room, everything was there and in its right place. Obviously, hotel maintenance either never got to my room or could not do anything about the door.

But I never had a sense of fear for leaving my hotel room unlocked.

Living in rural America the past eight years, I've grown used to not having to worry about major crime. Call me naive, but I can't forget the environments I lived in. Where I lived previously, it was common for people to leave the keys in their car's ignition while parked outside

of stores, church and wherever else. Front doors of homes were also unlocked or left open. I still had a secure feeling seeing things unsecured.

I have been a victim of crime before. Years ago, a car of ours was broken into while parked on a city street. A rear, passenger-side window was broken, but there was nothing in the car worth stealing.

Last month, after returning late from Salina watching the Trojan women basketball team, I noticed footprints in the snow leading to the front door of our house. I noticed the trail of footprints came from the back of the house. I assumed the prints were left by a city utility meter reader on his rounds.

The next day at the office, Patty told me about the reports of suspicious people in my neighborhood. Remembering the footprints, my assumptions quickly went from city employee to a potential criminal. But I never worried because nothing happened.

That does not mean I don't care or have a lack of responsibility. I'm careful protecting myself from identity theft. I'm close to my children when we are in public places.

I don't want to live in fear, because I have never lived there before.

Van Nostrand is publisher of the Free Press.

Leading by example

Our legislators are still working on the Federal budget. The Democrats have been accused for years of being the tax and spend party, but we have had a Republican majority now for 10 years and our deficit has grown faster than at any other time in history.

The only difference I see is that the Republicans have borrowed and spent. We have given massive tax breaks to the wealthy and are attempting to balance the budget by cutting programs that benefit the middle class and lower income levels of society.

When the various statistical sources are showing upper level management receiving average increases in compensation from 25 to 30 percent last year and the working classes being rewarded with 3 to 5 percent increases, we really need to show more compassion and concern for the upper level tax brackets. Or do we? They really don't need to worry about utility bills, basic transportation to and from work, tuition, health care costs, etc.

These headlines appeared in the Miami Herald a few weeks ago.

"Health of vulnerable Floridians at risk"

"Our opinion: Medicaid policies block access to needed treatment"

The story then describes some real life tragedies as a result of limited access to food and medication by the vulnerable, many through no fault of their own. That headline and the story needs only the name of the state changed and it will fit most every state in our Union. Partisan or sectarian majority doesn't seem to change the story or the statistics. Rural, urban or metropoli-

Ken's World

• Ken Poland

tan doesn't seem to show any significant advantages or disadvantages for the vulnerable.

"Vulnerable" is what makes this a defining policy of our society. Where is the state? Will the church step up to the plate? Is the sustaining policy "Survival of the fittest?" The vulnerable are a minority and minorities do not win elections, pay the taxes, or fill the offering plates. The fittest win the political elections and fund the budget for the churches. The very fittest also tend to avoid paying taxes, if possible. That leaves the middle class (that is most of you folks reading this) to fund it all.

Communities and political divisions have a tendency to camouflage the less desirable elements of their society. You won't find very many places where they advertise the programs that serve the vulnerable of their communities, to attract business or individuals to move in. Organized society is much more apt to flaunt the amenities that cater to the middle and upper classes of people. Those amenities are all good, but they don't seem to make much of a dent in the facade that obscures the failure of our urban renewal efforts and the growing numbers of those "poor and vulnerable" that will always be with us.

All too many of our churches are more concerned with the environmental controls and comfort inside their facilities than they are the physical needs of the less desirable of the community around them. Some of our churches depend upon the attraction of their hi-tech worship aids and popular upbeat style to fill the pews and offering plates. Emotional choice of legal requirements and restrictions segregate them from the unrighteous world. That segregation inspires and motivates their financial support more than the outreach programs that seem to never quite meet the needs of the lost and hurting vulnerable elements of society.

I don't think Jesus is going to look at labels defining our politics or theology to judge us as individuals. Jesus didn't tell the rich young ruler to go to the corporate board room, the governor, or the ecclesiastical headquarters to find the legal opinion for guidance. He didn't tell him to check the legal requirements and be sure he didn't go over the maximum or fail to meet the minimum level of assistance to render aid to the poor.

Don't get me wrong, I know we have many political leaders, individuals and churches that are truly dedicated to spreading the Christian gospel. That gospel is a holistic gospel that meets the physical, mental and spiritual needs of all humanity. However, I also see evidence of the fact that there are many who profess their commitment with words and entertaining performances, but their works fall far short of the example of Christ.

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. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous. You can expect your letter to appear in print within 24-48 hours of receipt. Letters to the Free Press allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of Colby Free Press readers. Thank you.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

