

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Leaders need to kick the habit

From The Wichita Eagle

When gas prices started to go north this spring, President Bush and others in the federal government turned to the talking points that had worked pretty well during the post-Katrina surge.

Supply and demand. Soaring usage in China and India. Fears about Iran's nuclear program and other supply disruptions. New U.S. refineries needed. Ditto drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Reason to stay the course in Iraq. Still cheaper than in Europe and elsewhere. Government doing what little it can.

Most of which is true, as far as it goes.

But that does not go far enough for many exasperated drivers this time. Many consumers now see red on this issue, making it difficult to see how it all could be evidence of a fair and free market at work.

This being a midterm election year, the president and lawmakers have gotten newly serious about sounding serious on gas prices, too. If there is something meaningful Congress and the White House can do in the short term, they should do it. More scrutiny of price gouging and encouragement of alternative energy development are warranted. But there are some questionable ideas being floated on both sides of the aisle.

For example, both the GOP proposal to mail a \$100 rebate check to each taxpayer (tied to ANWR drilling) and the Democrats' call for a 60-day suspension of the federal gasoline tax and diesel tax sound costly to implement. And Bush's decision to stop filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve finds him guilty of flip-flopping, and with an action that experts say won't have much impact on supply.

More likely, this surge in prices probably will pass, and drivers will return to their complacency. If so, that will be another opportunity lost.

If the United States is as "addicted to oil" as Bush said it is during the State of the Union address — and it is — what it needs is the leadership to kick the habit, through a moon shot-like initiative on energy independence. As entanglements such as Iraq should have taught us by now, too, finding new ways to power our country also could serve the goal of securing it.

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 or pdecker@nwks.com.

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Students today, job hunters tomorrow

In about one week, students in Thomas County and elsewhere will be graduating from high school.

Even though it was 36 years ago for me, I still remember how happy I was to finish up and get on with my life.

The problem was that I really didn't know what I wanted to do and so for many years I ambled into job after job. Yet after all the challenges and heartaches, I am finally at peace with my career in journalism.

I admired those in my graduating class and the young men and women now who know what they will do and how they will make those dreams come true.

No one has a crystal ball, but if a high school graduate wants to see a sneak preview of the future, just take a look at the classified page in the Free Press today.

Why? Because today's job market is but only a peek of tomorrow's jobs and here's the proof.

In the next 10 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the greatest need for higher skilled workers will be in health care, education, accounting and computer services.

Another way to prove the point is to visit the job search site known as "Monster.com" — and it appears the trend right now is that companies cannot keep up with the demand for these positions.

Taking this one step further, think about how many baby boomers are out there and we are getting old.

In fact, many of the jobs held by the baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) include government jobs and postal employees to police officers, truck drivers, and airline pilots. Some experts are also predicting shortages in the traditional skilled trade professions — plumbers, carpenters and mechanics.

Another estimate by the labor bureau is in the next 10 years, more than half of the auto technicians working in the country's repair shops will be eligible for retirement.

Wages in the automotive repair field range from about \$25,000 to more than \$100,000 for the more skilled technicians.

As one spokesperson said with the National



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, vehicles are being built better and require less repair, so we have been getting by with a shrinking work force.

As for healthcare, predictions are shortages will continue in the area of registered nurses, respiratory therapists and occupational therapists.

In fact, the labor bureau is predicting that one in five new jobs will be health care. Some of the reasons for this almost incomprehensible amount of jobs in the future is due in part to the advances in technology, retiring baby boomers, the rise in obesity-related problems and the aging population.

Statistics indicate that Americans over age 65 are expected to increase to 40.2 million by 2010 and to 71.5 million in 2030.

The yearly salary for a 21-year-old registered nurse just graduating, without overtime, is about \$60,000, according to one report.

Another plus will be the flexibility of a young person. Those who are willing to change locations are more apt to win in the job market.

I was also unaware of the benefits of working weekends, nights and overnight jobs. In a related article from the Associated Press, it seems those odd shifts are no longer limited to police, medical workers, etc. Now that our economy is connected globally, workers are looking at new ways to cope with the demands of education, child care and career advancement.

For example, some moms are taking night jobs so that they can be home during the daytime with their children while others gain experience on night shifts.

Lots of industries rely on night shifts such as transportation, shipping, mining, utilities, health care — and — even journalism.

One parent interviewed by the Associated Press said she would "love to work nights," add-

ing that, "a happy parent will be a better parent, and if that means working, then you should do it."

Surprisingly, I couldn't believe what I read about actors and actresses and the struggles they have. Not to sound naive, it's just that I assumed actors in commercials or on television sitcoms and Broadway had fairly good paychecks.

Come to find out, though, that's not necessarily true. In reading an article written by Melissa Rayworth, a Screen Actors Guild member, many actors have corporate jobs that pay the bills.

She talked about how thousands of actors — the ones on television and in movies — either can't afford to quit their day job or choose not to because the alternative would be a "hand-to-mouth existence."

Rayworth cited actors and actresses who are regulars on television shows, but many of them have second jobs working nights at restaurants or pursuing other careers.

Salary amounts were not disclosed in this particular article; however, off-Broadway actors earn about \$400 a week, according to one source.

Sadly, that amount barely pays the bills and doesn't even begin to help pay back tuition costs of \$35,000 a year in acting programs.

Colby School District has in its mission statement something about making lifelong learners as a goal. In one quote from the director of the career resource center at the University of Florida, he said:

"The odds are extremely great that you will change the job you're doing and change your career multiple times during your work life... We all have to be lifelong learners."

He went on to say, "We need to prepare for changes in our society and in our economy and be able to adapt. As you accrue ability, new avenues will open up to you — and that's actually pretty neat. It means you have a lot of freedom."

To our graduates — congratulations! For those planning to celebrate Cinco de Mayo — have fun!!!

Decker is editor of the Free Press.

Your turn

Thomas County prepares for bird flu

Juanita Gatz, Administrator
Thomas County Health Department

Local preparation of our community is happening in the event the Avian Bird flu arrives.

Members of the local Homeland Security, under the guidance of Jim Engel, and the staff of the Thomas County Health Department are

putting a plan into action. A pandemic influenza task force is being organized.

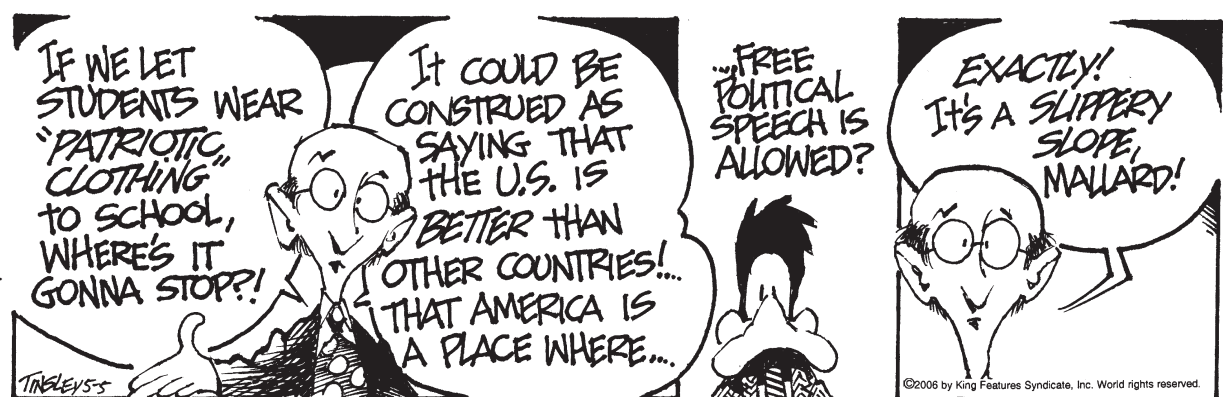
Volunteers are being solicited. A point of dispensing training exercise will be conducted June 5 by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment Center for Public Health Preparedness under the guidance of the Center for Dis-

ease Control.

A draft of the local pandemic influenza plan will be completed by June 30. Fliers addressing Family Disaster Preparedness will be distributed beginning today in grocery sacks at Dillons.

Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley



Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau

