

Opinion

Farmers asked to ante up, again

By John Schlageck

Kansas Farm Bureau

When it comes to paying their fare share, Kansas farmers have always ponied up. When fuel prices go up, farmers and ranchers who consume a huge amount of diesel, gasoline and propane in their operations open up their wallets. When taxes increase, as they do every year, producers write their checks. Whatever is needed to ensure stability and growth in their communities, schools, state and federal government, farmers and ranchers are willing participants.

And now there's another crucial issue brewing in our nation's capitol that will impact agriculture and the rest of our country. That issue involves securing our borders while stepping up workplace enforcement. However, workplace enforcement is only part of the solution.

Illegal immigration has nearly doubled since 1997 — the last time Congress passed a bill (like the one the House passed in December) that focuses exclusively on enforcement. From 1953-64, when agriculture had a viable guest worker program, illegal immigration declined to an all-time low, according to a former INS official.

Enforcement alone has not worked. Never has. Never will. Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback understands this. That's why he supports a comprehensive approach to illegal immigration. The Kansas senator is looking for a real and lasting solution to a serious and ever-growing problem. He recently teamed up with Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Saxby Chambliss (Ga.) to support an amendment to the immigration bill that would prevent agriculture from paying a higher wage rate than every other industry.

In the current Senate bill there is a higher minimum wage for agriculture than for every other industry. There's not justification for that. If it's high enough for everyone else, it should be high enough for agriculture.

The proposed guest worker program for agriculture has about a \$10 minimum wage while for other industries it's only about \$6.50. This is significant. A recent American Farm Bureau Federation study shows that a one-dollar increase in the wage that agriculture would have to pay would be devastating on the order of billions of dollars.

That's just the beginning. The bill then indexes agriculture's wage so that it would rise annually with inflation, up to 4 percent a year. Agriculture would become the only industry with an indexed minimum wage rate.

Finding farm labor is one of the biggest issues facing Kansas agriculture — the state's most important industry. As American businesses and jobs continue to move overseas, it is critical for Congress to do everything it can to prevent the outsourcing of U.S. agriculture.

According to a study by the American Farm Bureau Federation, \$5 billion worth of U.S. production would be at risk to foreign competition if agriculture had to raise its average wage by a dollar an hour. But Kansas' farmers and ranchers are being asked to shoulder at least double that.

This means this country could one day be importing its meat, dairy, fruits and vegetables and other crops and livestock. Would America be more secure if we handed billions of dollars of U.S. production to other countries?

A sensible guest worker program is crucial to ensure that the ag industry is able to survive in the increasingly competitive global marketplace. As Congress debates immigration and border security legislation, it is vital that any reform measures contain an affordable and workable agriculture guest worker program. Taking an alternative approach could devastate agriculture, harm Kansas's economy and lead to the possibility of U.S. consumers becoming dependent on imported food.

Editor's note: John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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@nwkans.com or pdecker@nwkans.com.



"I'LL BE PUTTING THE 'PANIC' IN 'PANDEMIC'..."

Looking at the world another way

A few years ago, a friend sent me statistics based on a village with a population of 100 people. The statistics were meant to be comparable to shrinking the earth's population into one place and keeping the ratios the same.

The results were as follows:

There would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south and 8 Africans. The number of females would be 52 with 48 being males.

Seventy people would be non-white and 30 would be white. In addition, 70 would be non-Christian and 30 would be Christian.

There would be 89 heterosexual and 11 would be homosexual. Six people would possess 59 percent of the entire world's wealth and all six would be from the United States.

Eighty would live in substandard housing, 70 would be unable to read and 50 would suffer from malnutrition.

One would be near death; one would be near birth, one would have a college education and one



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

would own a computer.

When we consider our world from this compressed perspective, the need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly apparent, according to the research.

And here are a few more random thoughts.

For graduates:

If you are able to read this column, consider yourself blessed since there are more than two billion people in the world who cannot read at all.

Thinking about gratitude, try these:

For those of us who have never experienced the danger of battle, the loneliness of imprisonment, the agony of torture, or the pangs of starvation — we are ahead of 500 million people in the world.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness — you are more blessed than the million who will not survive this week.

If you can attend a church meeting without fear of harassment, arrest, torture, or death — you are more blessed than three billion people in the world.

If you have food in the refrigerator, clothes on your back, a roof overhead and a place to sleep — you are richer than 75 percent of this world.

If you have money in the bank, in your wallet, and spare change in a dish someplace — you are among the top 8 percent of the world's wealthy.

Have a great weekend!
Decker is editor of the Free Press.

Your turn

May is Women's Health Month

Dr. Mary Beth Miller
St. Francis

Do you know the leading cause of death for women? Breast cancer? Ovarian cancer? Lung cancer? Believe it or not, it's coronary heart disease; a disease that can cause a sudden heart attack or stroke. May is Women's Health Care Month. It is important for women to learn the risk factors, warning signs, and dangers of heart disease and how to prevent a fatal event.

Women are more than 10 times more likely to die of heart disease or stroke than from breast cancer. In 2004, nearly 700,000 people died of heart disease throughout the United States, according to data from the National Center for Health Statistics. Heart disease is the number one cause of death for both men and women, representing 28.5 percent of all deaths.

Women can decrease their chances of getting heart disease by using a number of preventive measures.

Have your cholesterol level checked regularly by your doctor.

Control your blood pressure, keeping it under

130/80.

Maintain a health weight. If you are overweight, losing just 10 percent of your body weight has a positive impact on overall health.

Exercise for at least 30 minutes a day.

Eat a nutritious diet with five servings of fruits/vegetables daily, and limit your intake of fats, oil and salt.

Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than one drink per day.

Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.

Know your family history of heart disease. If you have a closely related family member with heart disease, you are at higher risk.

Knowing the risk factors is one step toward preventing heart disease, but women need to know the warning signs of a heart attack. Often a heart attack will come on suddenly, with the classic symptoms of discomfort or pain in the chest or in one or both arms. Women are more likely than men to have other symptoms, including shortness of breath, nausea/vomiting, back pain, jaw pain, lightheadedness, or sudden fatigue. Women may dismiss their symptoms as

unrelated to heart health, or delay seeing their doctor, since they are not aware of the typical and atypical heart attack symptoms. According to the American Heart Association, 64 percent of women who died suddenly of coronary heart disease had no previous symptoms. Post-menopausal women are at much higher risk of heart disease, as are African-American and Mexican-American women.

Finally, know the correct emergency procedure. When a heart attack is suspected, call 9-1-1 immediately. Every second counts.

Talk to your doctor about coronary heart disease and determine if you are at risk. A few minutes today could add years to your life.

Editor's note: Mary Beth Miller, M.D., is in private practice in St. Francis. She is a district director of the Kansas Academy of Family Physicians, the largest medical specialty membership organization in the State of Kansas. The mission of the academy is to promote access to and excellence in healthcare for all Kansans through education and advocacy for family physicians and their patients.

Church does provide services

Ken Poland
Gem

I want to apologize to the members and pastor of the Wesleyan church. They had services at the Care Centers on Sunday, April 30. And they are involved at other times as well. I didn't

know who was scheduled for that day, so I was not directing my reprimand to them directly.

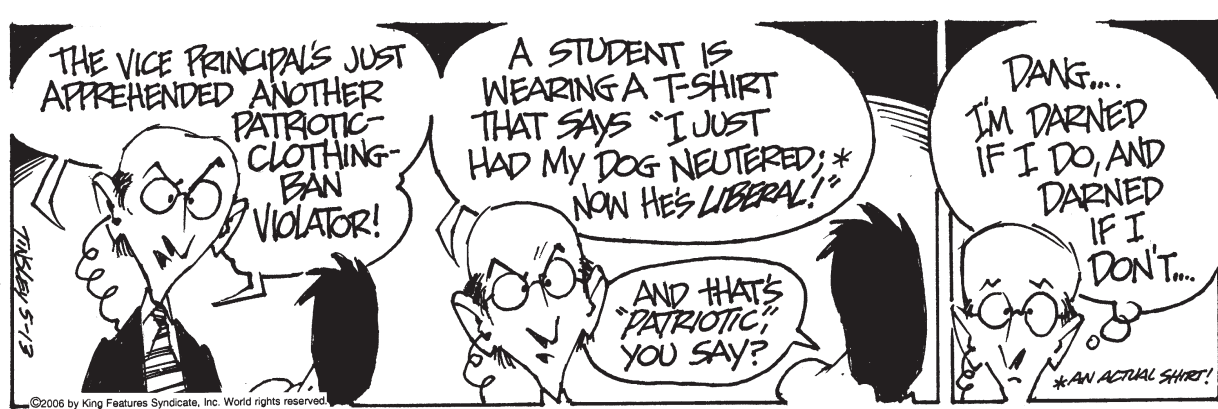
I did not appropriately check out the source of my information, indicating there were no services on that day. That information came by way of residents, and if you have had as

much experience visiting and dealing with Care Center residents as I have you know they sometimes forget or get mixed up on time or date. I do know, in times past, that frequently there is no one there to conduct services.

Again, my sincere apology to the Wesleyans for my error.

Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley



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