

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



We need to judge the judges

By Steve Haynes
 If you get a speeding ticket, you might have to pay a fine, go to court and pay a little more for auto insurance. In many towns, you'd also find your name in the newspaper. Suppose you're arrested for drunk driving. You'd be taken to the county jail, booked and photographed. You'd go to court. You'd pay a really big fine. You might lose your license. And your name, in many towns, would be in the newspaper. No one wants their name in the paper — at least not in connection with a crime — and sometimes people will do almost anything to keep it out. They beg, they plead, they cajole. They ask the police not to release it. They pressure the editor. But under our system, that's part of the price you pay for making a mistake. Our court system is public. Part of the penalty is having everyone know you blew it. You were speeding. You were drunk. You were wrong. That is not a bad thing. If the threat of having your name in the paper keeps just one person from driving drunk, then it is a net benefit to society. This standard does not apply to one select group in Kansas, though. Judges. Though most are selected by committees in a distinctly non-democratic process, and appointed by the governor more or less for life, judges who make a mistake often escape public scrutiny. The Associated Press found that just eight of 65 cases involving violations by judges in the past six years had been made public. It's like, if you're a member of the club, and a gentleman, then a slap on the wrist is sufficient. No need to alarm the public. Though it is our job, as voters, to approve or disapprove of judges' conduct and vote on them every few years, we don't get much information. Even in those cases which did become public, in most, little information was given out. Even a doctor accused of medical violations faces more public scrutiny. Yet judges must stand for election, and voters are supposed to make informed decisions on whether to keep them. In the cities, and for the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court, judges are appointed and usually serve until they retire. They must stand for a "yes-or-no" vote on retention every four to six years, but no Kansas judge has been voted out of office in our memory. Generally, in statewide races, judges win by landslide numbers. That may be because voters don't know why they should not vote yes. In rural areas, by contrast, district and magistrate judges still run for office. They can face a challenge every four years. Sometimes, if another lawyer has the gumption, and voters are fed up, there is a change. Not often, but the threat is there. It keeps courts in line. With the current scandal involving a Supreme Court judge meeting with legislators and discussing the pending school finance lawsuit, we need to take another look at this system. If we are supposed to judge the judges, shouldn't we know when they mess up? — *Steve Haynes*
Steve Haynes owns Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

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That Sunday in May should be tradition

There's a saying which goes, "It is easier to preach 10 sermons than it is to live one." How true that saying is. Not that each of us was called to preach, but we are called to walk the walk if we talk the talk. And if we live in America, we are called to support our nation's Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. I was happy to see the handfuls of people who turned out to welcome the Run For The Wall riders and support crews Sunday when they stopped in Oakley. But from where I stand, there needed to have been thousands of us there, not the few hundred which were. I'd like to see every pastor in northwest Kansas hold church along Interstate 70 the next to the last Sunday of each May. Churchgoers, and even those who aren't, need to line up along the roadway and on overpasses and salute those making the sometimes more than 1,500 mile one-way ride to Washington, D.C. While the date on the calendar changes each year, the day of the month doesn't. For the past 19 Mays, men, women and children, and a few pets, have joined the Run For The Wall ride which crosses our nation to raise awareness for our military personnel who are missing in action or are prisoners of war. So what are the rest of us doing? We aren't straddling a motorcycle to do the job. The least we could do is get out of our comfort



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

zone and rub shoulders with the hot, sweaty and sunburned ones who are. I'm not advocating missing church, but in future years rather than dressing up, how about dressing down and holding church along the roadway so we can all cheer on Run For The Wall participants. Then let's all go to Oakley so next time we say "God Bless America" we understand the sacrifice of those who helped us be blessed. Fortunately I attend church which has a Saturday evening service so I can go to Oakley to visit with the Run For The Wall folks. Prior to moving up this way, I did miss church and drove to Salina to spend time with them. My annual visit lets me remember not only the 20 plus years I lived among military people, but lets me feel their love. One man I visited with on Sunday told me the ride was not only a ride for freedom, it was a ride of salvation. He said he handed out nearly 1,000

Christian tracts from where he started in Ontario, Calif., to Oakley. And he had half the nation to go yet. A devout Christian, his motorcycle's backrest supports not only American and POW-MIA flags, but a Christian flag as well. "The front of my vest shows that I ride for the vets, but the back of my vest shows I ride for Jesus," he said turning to show me that very phrase embroidered into the black leather. One of the newest members of the Chaplin squad, the young man is available to stand along side those whose hearts are still healing from the ravages of war. There isn't a participant among the group who doesn't have a thorough understanding of what it means to give something up for another person. They have given up part of their lives for those who didn't get to come home and each one would tell you they would do it again in a minute. You would be hard pressed to find anyone in the group who wouldn't give you the shirt off his or her back. They would even button it up for you too. From where I stand, anyone who has not taken the time to spend a few hours with members of Run For The Wall has wasted part of their life. *Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.*

Power struggles

Ken Poland

• Ken's World

It doesn't seem to be just one dog in Washington D. C. chasing its tale. There is a whole pack of them. Both aisles of the kennel have mongrels that should be sent home. Perhaps I should apologize to the canine species for using them for a label to identify some humans. Yes, I meant tale, not tail. They all have their story to justify their actions. The latest is the Liberal Anti-Christians that have attacked Mr. Delay because he is a Christian. Bosh! If the evidence is true, some of the shenanigans and methods he used for control should be punished regardless of his religious affiliations or claims. Freedom of and freedom from religion is guaranteed in our amended constitution to prevent just that sort of thing being used to convict anyone of anything. It works both ways. Some are claiming prejudice because of their lack of religious affiliation. Nobody is a crook because of their political party affiliation or religious devotion (or lack thereof). We find a significant number of individuals, both public servants and private individuals, who are using religion like their mother's skirt. (i.e. I'm mama's favorite so you better not touch me. I'm a Christian, or whatever, so you can't question me or touch me.) The insinuation is I'm God's favorite, therefore, you should not question my wisdom and authority or privilege of exemption from the rules and regulations that apply to others of less favor. And, because I am God's chosen, I will determine the rules and regulations. The computer world calls that a

"circular reference." They are using themselves in the formula and the proof of the equation that proves them right. It is a discredit to both major political parties, when they jump into the fracas with a partisan effort to discredit the other party for the sins of one of its members. If Mr. Jefferson is guilty as charged, the Democrats should be dumping his water dish and putting him out of the kennel. The evidence, as we have it being released, looks pretty convincing. I surely hope that the method the administration used to gather some of that information doesn't result in it being disallowed if the issue comes to court. Why? Why can't this administration go through proper channels and get court orders for surveillance and searches? It isn't as much a question of whether the surveillance or search is justified as it is who makes the final decision on execution of the procedures and how they are conducted. We have a tried and proven system that has worked for a couple of centuries. It was designed to prevent unilateral authority for any

single individual or small group to intimidate any who might be construed as being a threat or nuisance. The Democrats are sometimes a threat or nuisance to the Republicans and their agenda. The same is true that the Republicans are a threat to the Dems. We have an adversarial atmosphere between the three branches of our government. They are all jealous of their authority and independence and do not trust one another. We have that same atmosphere surrounding the public and government. No one trusts anyone. There is a reason for that. The fact of human nature and experience finally soaks into most of us. That is why we have laws. If we all lived up to our professed creeds and morals, we wouldn't need laws to keep everyone honest and fair. But, we don't. Man never has and the Christian's canon presents evidence that we never will, so long as we are mortal. Those laws will not change our nature, they only set out specific limits and punishments for exceeding the limits or failing to meet the minimum requirements. Our Constitution, supposedly, protects both the minorities and the majority from injustice in society and our courts. No where do we find the constitution guaranteeing exemption from law or authority without proper procedure as authorized by law and proof that law is being fairly and non prejudicially applied. *Ken Poland is a Gem farmer who occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press*

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

