

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Don't just blame cell phones

Yet another city is still missing the principle, or putting too much emphasis on just one part of it. This week, Lawrence's Traffic Safety Commission refused to ban the use of cell phones by motorists within the city. Even though the commission was not interested, Lawrence's city council could want such a law. Cell phone use has massively grown the past years and those phones have caused some drivers to lose attention while driving and cause an accident.

But why cities across the country are just blaming cell phone use for bad driving habits is borderline ignorant. There is much more to blame on bad driving than calling home or the office.

Fast-food restaurant drive throughs can also be the culprit for bad driving. Trying to unwrap your hamburger on your lap and digging in the bag for fries, you can forget about the car in front of you — until it hits the brakes.

If a city wants its law enforcement to look for people talking on the phone while driving, they better also park a patrol car at every fast-food drive through.

Families with young children are also a concern. A parent may eventually get upset with unruly kids in the backseat and, like a habit, want to turn around to face the children to discipline them — all while going down the street or highway.

Law enforcement should follow the families that leave the park or the swimming pool, just to see if the kids behave, so those accidents can be prevented.

And it's not just kids. A intense conversation between adults riding in a car can be a distraction to a driver.

What about the options on cars these days? We love turning up our favorite radio station, make sure our favorite CD is playing or plugging in the MP3 player. Cell phones are not the only form of technology in a car that can distract drivers.

What about reading, applying makeup?

The safety commissioners voted 5-4 against the ban, but did support an ordinance doubling the fine to \$120 if a person is involved in an accident while using a cell phone. That ordinance, approved 6-3, also needs city commission approval.

Singling out cell phone users is unfair.
— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvannostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Tisha Cox - General Assignment
tcx@nwkansas.com

Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter
ackermanjk@ruraltel.net

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystal@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Crotinger - Advertising Sales
jasminec@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Lea Bandy - Circulation Manager
lea@nwkansas.com

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping & Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Ron VanLoenen, Judy McKnight

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The Return of Chicken Little

God's thoughts on lawns

Watching people watering and mowing their lawns the last month or more got me thinking about something I received a couple years ago from a friend. When I read it, I had to laugh and I hope others will enjoy it as much as I did. The article was titled, "God's Thoughts on Lawns." Here it is:

God: Wra, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

God: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as



Patty Decker

Deep Thoughts

it grows a little, they cut it — sometimes twice a week.

God: They cut it? Do they then bail it like hay? **St. Francis:** Not exactly. Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No Sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes, Sir.

God: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the sum-

mer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. Francis: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch? **St. Francis:** They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

God: Enough. I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

St. Catherine: Dumb and Dumber. Lord. It's a real stupid movie about ...

God: Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.

As with most things that are passed around these days, the author is unknown. After reading this dialogue between God and St. Francis the first time, I did pause for a moment in deep thought.

Happy mowing!
Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

What goes up ... is still going up

From The Hutchinson News
Leaders of the six state universities in Kansas have, for the fifth year in a row, proposed significant student tuition and fee increases to the Board of Regents.

The recommendations, ranging from a 4.6 percent increase at Fort Hays State University to a 16.7 percent jump at Kansas State University-Salina, leave students and their parents wondering about the factors driving college education costs ever higher.

Instead of settling for superficial explanations about stagnate state support and general pledges to offer students more education for their money, regents this year should press university presi-

dents to justify their recommendations, line item by line item.

Consider that, as proposed, tuition and fees for in-state students would jump 13.7 percent at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, to \$6,152 next year, and 12.8 percent at Kansas State University in Manhattan, to \$5,734.

Yet the Higher Education Price Index projects that college costs will rise about 5 percent this year. University officials should explain why their institutions need to double or triple that rate of increase.

Plus, this year's increases follow a series of double-digit hikes. For example, K-State's recommendation comes on top of a 10.9 percent

hike last year; a 17.1 percent increase in 2004; a 20.3 percent increase in 2003; and a 25.1 percent jump in 2002.

Since 1991, state general fund contributions have gone from providing 47 percent of funding for university operating expenses to 28.5 percent last year. Meanwhile, tuition has jumped from providing roughly 18 percent of operating funds in 1991 to nearly 23 percent last year.

Some university officials have sought to ensure that students receive more for their money.

This time around, the regents should insist on it.

About those letters ...

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

