

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

Competition makes elections interesting

From the Lawrence Journal-World

Barring unusual write-in successes, a third of the Kansas House of Representatives already has been elected. With the state filing deadline past, 42 candidates — all of them incumbents — have no opposition from either party. In those races, there will be no primary and only one name on the general election ballot.

That is, perhaps, a sign of some degree of satisfaction with the job legislators are doing. By contrast, there is plenty of competition for seats on the Kansas Board of Education. All four board members running for re-election are opposed, and three candidates have filed for a fifth seat being vacated by Iris Van Meter.

But even if constituents are generally satisfied with legislators, it's unfortunate when candidates are elected without opposition. Some of them still will campaign door-to-door and make an effort to connect with their constituents, but, without the need to debate an opponent and formulate a platform, some won't be motivated enough to make that effort.

No incumbents are running for 16 House seats, all of which have multiple candidates. Sixty-five incumbents have at least one candidate filed to run against them. The fact that eight House Republicans face challenges from within their own party may be a byproduct of continuing animosity within the state GOP. However, two incumbent Democrats also face primary opposition.

The fact that multiple candidates have filed for seats on the currently controversial board is a positive development for Kansas. The contested elections will force candidates to more fully address the issues of interest to voters during their campaigns. Voters then will have the opportunity — and responsibility — to choose candidates who will best represent their views and philosophies on the state board. The state school board results likely will be closely watched around the state.

Competition always makes an election more interesting, but it also serves voters by providing for healthy debate and accountability among officeholders. The number of House members being elected by default this year actually is slightly lower than it was two years ago, but it's still far too high.

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

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It's the least I can do



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

Both of my grandfathers are still alive and conveniently live in the same town. It is convenient because when I lived closer and when we visited, we would see both sets of grandparents at the same time.

During those visits, my grandfathers, both in their early 80s, would occasionally mention something about their time during World War II. My grandfather Van Nostrand still has a place in his heart for his military years. He attends the annual reunion of the ship he was stationed on. He assists with military rites at funerals of veterans and would usually tell the highlights of the person's life when we talked. He has known most of those people in one way or another.

Like the story we had on Dale Deaver before Memorial Day, my grandfather is also one of the World War II-generation people who goes to the cemetery to install flags, help with the service and put everything away at the end of the day. And, like with every other town across the country that does that, that generation is fading away and people to take their place are limited.

I thought assisting with military rites at a funeral was only done by veterans. I thought only those who have served in some way were able to formally say goodbye.

But I was wrong.

For about the past six weeks, Colby Church of Christ preacher and *Free Press* contributor Jay Kelley has asked me to play golf with him. We want to, but because of our hectic and surprising schedules, we've never been able to find an afternoon to do that.

Last week, Jay stopped by and asked if this week would be better to play. I thought it would be a good week, and I told him I would call him Monday to confirm the day and time.

I forgot to call. In fact, I forgot about Jay all together, until he stopped by the office Tuesday morning.

"I can't play today," Jay said. "I was asked to help with a funeral today."

"Oh, that's fine, maybe next time," I replied. "Can you play the bugle," Jay quickly asked.

"No, Jay," I said.

"We need somebody to help with the funeral,"

he said.

Jay, also a veteran, assists with military rites at funerals. He said the usual people who help with these funerals were out of town or had something else planned. He ran out of people to ask. He asked me if I wanted to help with the music.

"But Jay, I have never been in the military," I pleaded.

"John, you don't have to be," he said. "It's recorded music of 'Taps.' All you do is turn it on. I don't think many people or family are going to be there. He deserves the respect."

Bob Gordon, the man laid to rest Tuesday, was in my grandfathers' generation. In a second, I felt like I was hearing all of those stories my grandfather told me at once. I'm sure grandpa told me stories of people just like Bob.

"Jay, I'll do it," I said.

Jay was right. It was a simple task, and it meant a lot to the funeral. If my grandfathers and Bob can take time out of their life to ensure what this country is all about, I can spend a few minutes out of one day to at least say thanks that way.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Close the border



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

While listening to the hand-wringing about having National Guard troops assisting the border patrol and the repeated assurances that most of the troops would not be carrying guns or doing anything generally useful like stopping illegal aliens from crossing the border, I was struck by a question.

Why is the protection of our borders from an unwanted and possibly hostile (don't forget the drug-runners) a purely civil matter? Yes, there are some legal issues that must be hurdled, such as what to do with United States citizens captured while engaged in illegal activities, but surely turning them over to the civil authorities should take care of the problem.

By the way, the Canadian border is no less important. One need only remember the would-be terrorists caught during a random check on that border a few years ago to understand the importance of securing all our borders.

Of course, some will scream bloody murder about xenophobia and an "America for the Americans" attitude, but that is not the case. The simple truth is that any nation which cannot control its borders will not long be free.

Furthermore, we can do nothing about the illegal immigrants who are already here until we can control the incoming flow. As long as our borders resemble a rusty colander, attempts to find and deport or legalize aliens resemble the proverbial Dutch boy with his finger in a dike. We cannot even offer a program of citizenship

in return for hard work, learning the language and good behavior. It is too easy, so long as the inflow remains, to remain a part of a large and not very secret underground with its own culture and rules of conduct.

Nor can we expect to effectively change our immigration laws to reflect the 21st century needs of our society until we know who is here, who isn't and what we need to do.

Finally, there is the effect of the outflow on other societies, primarily Mexico from whence most of our immigrants come. So long as the possibility of getting in to America is greater than the possibility of getting sent home, people will continue to try.

As a result, there is less incentive to make things better in Mexico. One does not need to be a rocket scientist to understand that those crossing the border into America are not all lazy. In fact, it takes a certain amount of motivation and ambition to try to make a better life anywhere.

Take those people away from a society and

things rapidly get worse, but that is precisely the effect our open border is having on Mexican society. Give them greater incentives and the border problem decreases.

Ultimately, closing our borders to illegal traffic is a national security issue and is therefore something that should involve the military. Troops, fences and perhaps even more drastic measures are acceptable in light of the threat this invasion carries.

Then maybe we can get serious about restructuring our immigration policy to allow more of the people who want to be here to get here and become Americans instead of a divisive subculture threatening our stability.

We can work with those who are here and want to be Americans. Make no mistake, there are many in this country illegally who want very much to be a citizen. There are also those who are simply here to take what America offers without thought of producing anything, once our borders are protected we can do something about both groups.

We need to find a way to help those who want citizenship and are productive members of society without pushing those who came here illegally for the same reason aside. As for the others — send them home.

Jay Kelley is a local minister and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelley@st-tel.net.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

