

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### Kansas has reason to celebrate

By Tom Betz

President Dwight Eisenhower signed the law creating the Interstate Defense Highway System on June 29, 1956, and with his signature the mobile society began to roll.

Americans have always been a rambling lot, and that spirit carried people in covered wagons to the west until the country reached from shore to shore.

We drive some of the best highways in the world today, and it is hard to remember when there wasn't a national highway system, or a state highway system.

The covered wagons left ruts that can be seen today, and we replaced the trails with ribbons of gravel, concrete and asphalt until we have a web of roads that can take us anywhere we wish to go.

After World War I a convoy of 80 military vehicles and 300 men began a journey from the east coast to San Francisco. Vehicles, roads and technology were not up to modern standards. The convoy was lucky to average 6 mph, and it took 62 days for the transcontinental trip.

Merrill Eisenhower Atwater, great-great grandson of President Eisenhower, is traveling with the special convoy driving from San Francisco to Washington, D.C., to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Interstate system. He stopped at the Tourist Information Center west of Goodland Wednesday with part of the special convoy to get a little lunch and begin the trip to Abilene for a special ceremony honoring his great-great grandfather's interest in developing a national highway system.

Atwater said he was glad to be in Kansas, and that it has been an interesting trip through the first half of the country. Atwater said the longest section so far was between Salt Lake City and Cheyenne, Wyo.

Atwater is writing a log about the trip, which will be placed in the Eisenhower Library next to the daily log of the trip in 1919 that then Lt. Col. Eisenhower was part of.

Atwater wrote that in the log from 1919 Eisenhower said the convoy was lost for two days in the Great Salt Lake plains with nobody knowing where they were.

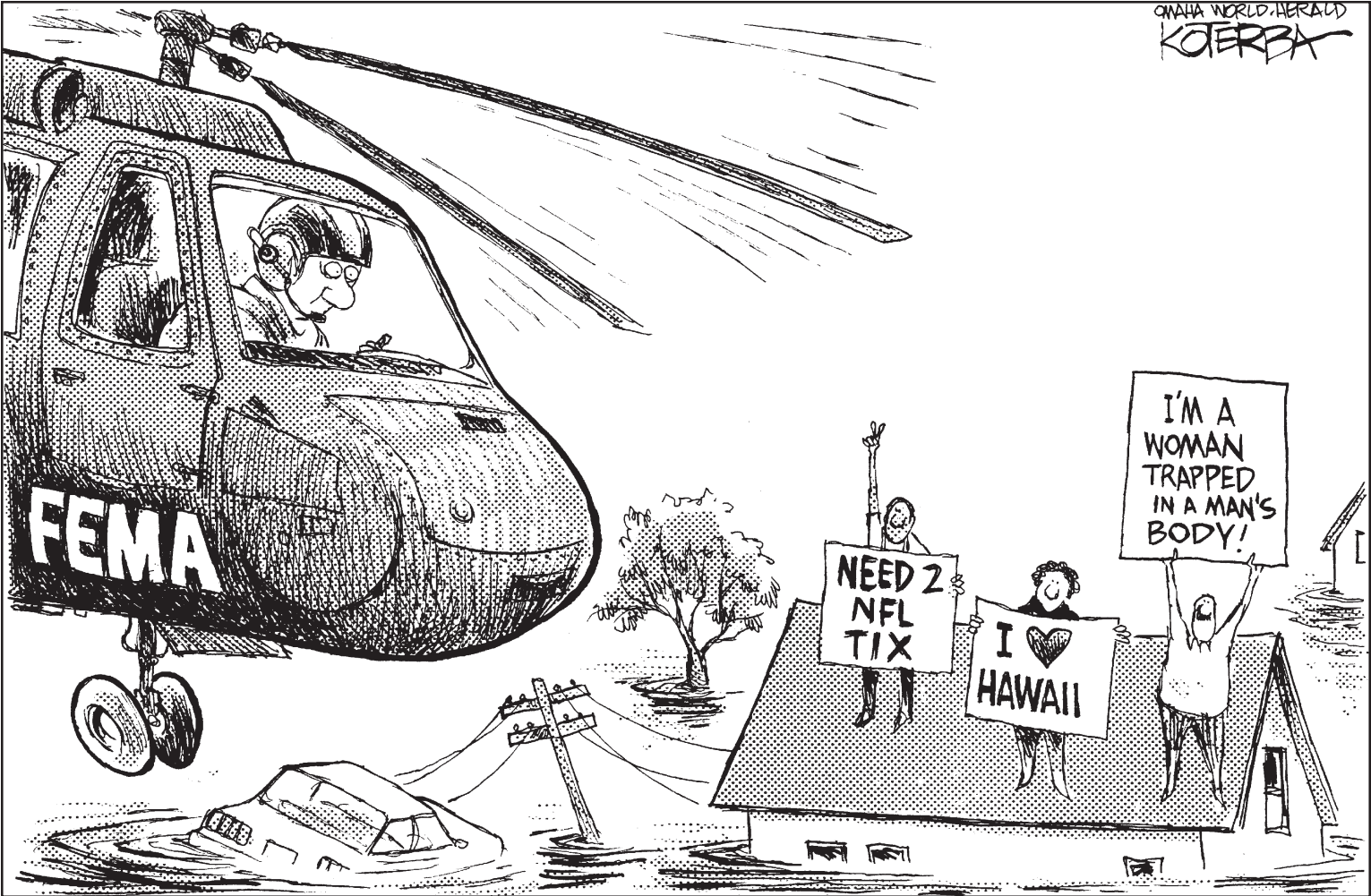
"Last 6 miles was natural desert trail of alkali dust and fine sand up to 2 feet deep with numerous chuck holes. No rain for 18 weeks and traction exceedingly difficult. In places chasses of trucks grounded on road surface leaving wheels free, making jacking up and digging out necessary. Sage brush was cut from desert to fill in wheel ruts, as this was the only material available."

Atwater said the trip now is averaging 60 mph, and the people are riding in comfort through all kinds of weather.

Those who grew up with the Interstate system remember when all the roads went through the towns and not around them. The four-lane freeways have changed the face of our country. Today as never before the mobile society takes to the highways and complains about the price of gas.

Kansans can be proud of the historic connection through President Eisenhower, and watch the rolling wheels of commerce that take products through the state.

— Tom Betz is editor of the Goodland Star-News



### Nature trails

A Sunday afternoon drive through parts of Sheridan County allowed me to again see the power of nature and brought home the reality of my meagerness in the grand picture of life.

Having scooped up my little four-legged buddy Katie and made a dash to my car early Friday evening, I drove to a nearby concrete dug-out to ride out a storm.

Raised by a dad who chased tornadoes rather than huddle in a basement away from them, I respect nature's forcefulness but I'm not afraid of it. Lessons about nature, which were provided by an uncle, came to mind as I waited for Friday's storm to blow over.

"Don't go in a basement because you could end up with someone's dead horse on the door," Uncle Ben would say during a storm. "Don't be afraid of storms, enjoy their power."

For those of you who have lived less than, say 50 years, the basement my uncle was talking about was the type you entered through an outside, almost ground level, doorway, kind of like the one in "Wizard of Oz." If not locked, it could be blown open and the contents of the basement, people and all, snatched and up into a storm.

It's that same respect for nature which makes me wise enough to leave the structure of my single-wide mobile home for a more substantial structure when tornado sirens go off in Hoxie, as I did Friday about 5:15 p.m.

Katie and I sat in my car and watched sprinkles turn into a downpour; followed by tornado-like winds which lasted only a few minutes.

Once comfortable leaving the confines of the concrete dugout, I drove around town to begin photographing the aftermath of the short lived storm.

Sunday afternoon's drive took me out into the rural areas of the county and that's where I truly witnessed nature's powerfulness.



Jan Katz Ackerman

- From Where I stand

Standing alongside grain bins which towered over me in height and seeing firsthand how wind had caved in either their sides or tops made me feel small.

I was small to the grain bins themselves, but smaller to the energy it took to crush the tops and sides of the metal structures, some of which had grain inside pushing back as hard as the wind pushed in.

No match to the winds, at least two farm sites were victim to the winds against the grain bins.

Wind, rain and hail acted like a shredder during the storm which cut about a 12-mile wide swath through Sheridan County from the southwest corner near Angelus to the northeast part near the Decatur County line.

My drive let me see stripped wheat and corn fields, dumped over an estimated 50 irrigation systems, let loose an estimated 3,000 cattle at two feedlot sites, ripped out windows in homes, cars and farm equipment and downed huge trees in its pathway.

Reminiscent of the evening I spent cuddling a then 5-year-old son as a tornado passed over our home in Lawton, Okla.; Friday's storm creaked and cracked around me.

It's evenings like Friday which remind me I'm but a mere mortal in a large picture of life. And it's times like those I'm thankful I've got a close relationship with nature's creator.

Knowing someone much bigger than me is out there directing things brings calmness over me just like the calm after a storm.

That same calm which I felt Friday evening as I opened windows of the house and let fresh air in. The calm that assured me the sun would rise again Saturday morning.

Which it did, in all its glory.

Do you know Josiah Bartlett, William Whipple, Matthew Thornton of New Hampshire; John Hancock, Samuel Adams, John Adams, Robert Treat Paine, Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts; Stephen Hopkins, William Ellery of Rhode Island; Roger Sherman, Samuel Huntington, William Williams, Oliver Wolcott of Connecticut; William Floyd, Philip Livingston, Francis Lewis, Lewis Morris of New York; Richard Stockton, John Witherspoon, Francis Hopkinson, John Hart, Abraham Clark of New Jersey; Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Morton, George Clymer, James Smith, George Taylor, James Wilson, George Ross of Pennsylvania; Caesar Rodney, George Read, Thomas McKean of Delaware; Samuel Chase, William Paca, Thomas Stone, Charles Carroll of Maryland; George Wythe, Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, Thomas Nelson, Jr., Francis Lightfoot Lee, Carter Braxton of Virginia; William Hooper, Joseph Hewes, John Penn of North Carolina; Edward Rutledge, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Thomas Lynch, Jr., Arthur Middleton of South Carolina; and Button Gwinnett, Lyman Hall, George Walton of Georgia 230 years ago?

They signed the Declaration of Independence making us a free nation.

God bless America.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

### No limit to the ineptitude

#### From The Manhattan Mercury

Members of Congress, blind to the irony of their rhetoric, were in fine righteous form recently in their complaints about the waste of taxpayers' money.

The occasion was the congressional committee hearing at which Government Accountability Office officials were testifying about the defrauding of FEMA during the agency's response to last year's hurricane. The fraud was widespread, often imaginative, predictable and, one would have hoped, preventable.

Loss estimates run from \$600 million to \$1.4 billion, with just \$16 million accounted for. The range itself speaks to how little is really known about the losses. It was deservedly painful for

FEMA officials already embarrassed by the agency's slow and spotty response to the disaster on the Gulf Coast. Despite presumably noble intentions, they were responsible for giving emergency aid to prison inmates miles from the devastation.

There seemed no limit to the ineptitude or perhaps the simple lack of attention.

If the bureaucrats are deservedly red-faced, they're not the criminals. And though one is tempted to hold a contest for the most-creative instance of fraud in this episode, the fact remains that hundreds or thousands of people stole hurricane relief money. And while lawmakers such as Rep. Michael McCaul, a Texas Republican,

decry the acts as "an assault on the American taxpayer," the thieves' greater offense was in preventing many of the hurricanes' true victims from getting help they desperately needed.

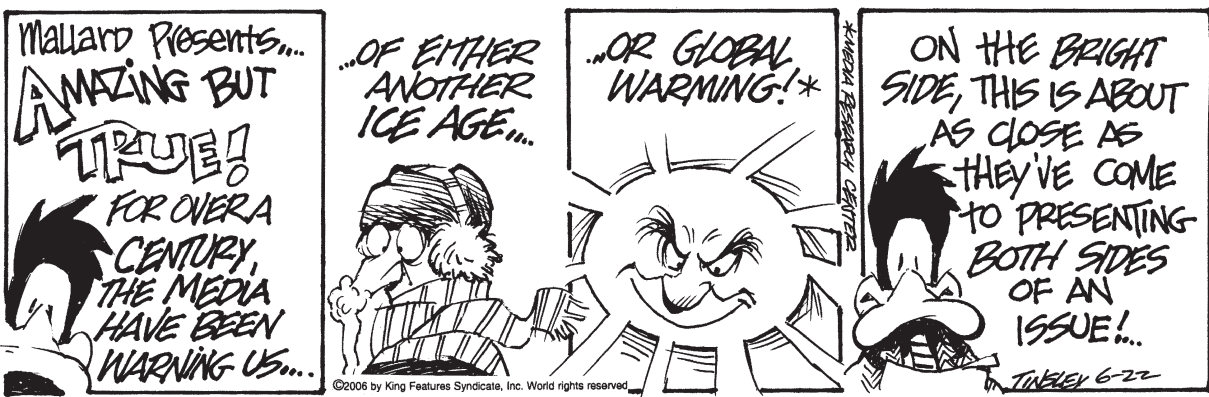
That the government made it so easy doesn't mitigate their offenses. As for what happens now, the loophole-closers and people with some sense of responsibility should apply their expertise to improving FEMA. Those who exploited a national disaster for their own purposes should, of course, be prosecuted. But rather than lock away these people, it would seem more productive to put the ones who don't have records involving violence to work restoring ravaged communities.

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### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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