

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Boosting the polls

From Lawrence Journal-World

An 18 percent statewide turnout in the primary election should be of serious concern to Kansas residents and officials.

The election featured some interesting and important contests, especially in the Republican Party. Moderate incumbents prevailed in races for secretary of state and insurance commissioner, and nominees for governor and Congress were chosen. The outcome of primary contests for five seats on the Kansas State Board of Education altered the political philosophy of that body and is expected to have a significant impact on the state's education future. These are matters that affect the lives of every Kansan.

What can the state do to increase participation in these important elections?

There may be a number of answers, but one that deserves serious consideration is moving the primary election to a later date. The first Tuesday in August was set as the primary election date by Kansas statute in 1908. It's time to re-examine whether that date still makes sense.

Hot weather was one of the reasons for this year's low primary turnout. The odds of scalding weather in any Kansas August are pretty high. August also is a time when many families are traveling or busy with summer activities. With many organized activities lasting through July, and school starting by mid-August, early August becomes a prime time for vacations.

How about moving the primary to the Tuesday after Labor Day in September? School is back in session. Families and university students are settled in for the semester. Candidates could use the Labor Day weekend as a final opportunity to campaign.

There still would be two months for primary winners to campaign before the general election in November, a period that most voters would think is ample, perhaps preferable to the longer campaign season.

The shorter campaign season might even make the campaigns less expensive and encourage more candidates to run. It's only fair to note that in the early 1990s, when Kansas primaries were drawing a voter turnout closer to 40 percent (41 percent in 1990, 43 percent in 1992, 36 percent in 1994 and 39 percent in 1996), almost every legislative race, including those with an incumbent, was being contested at the polls. That certainly isn't the case now. ...

Maybe early August was a good time for a primary election in 1908, but that doesn't mean it's the best time now. Kansas needs to look at ways to boost voter turnout for primary races, and moving the primary date to a later date is worth considering.

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*.

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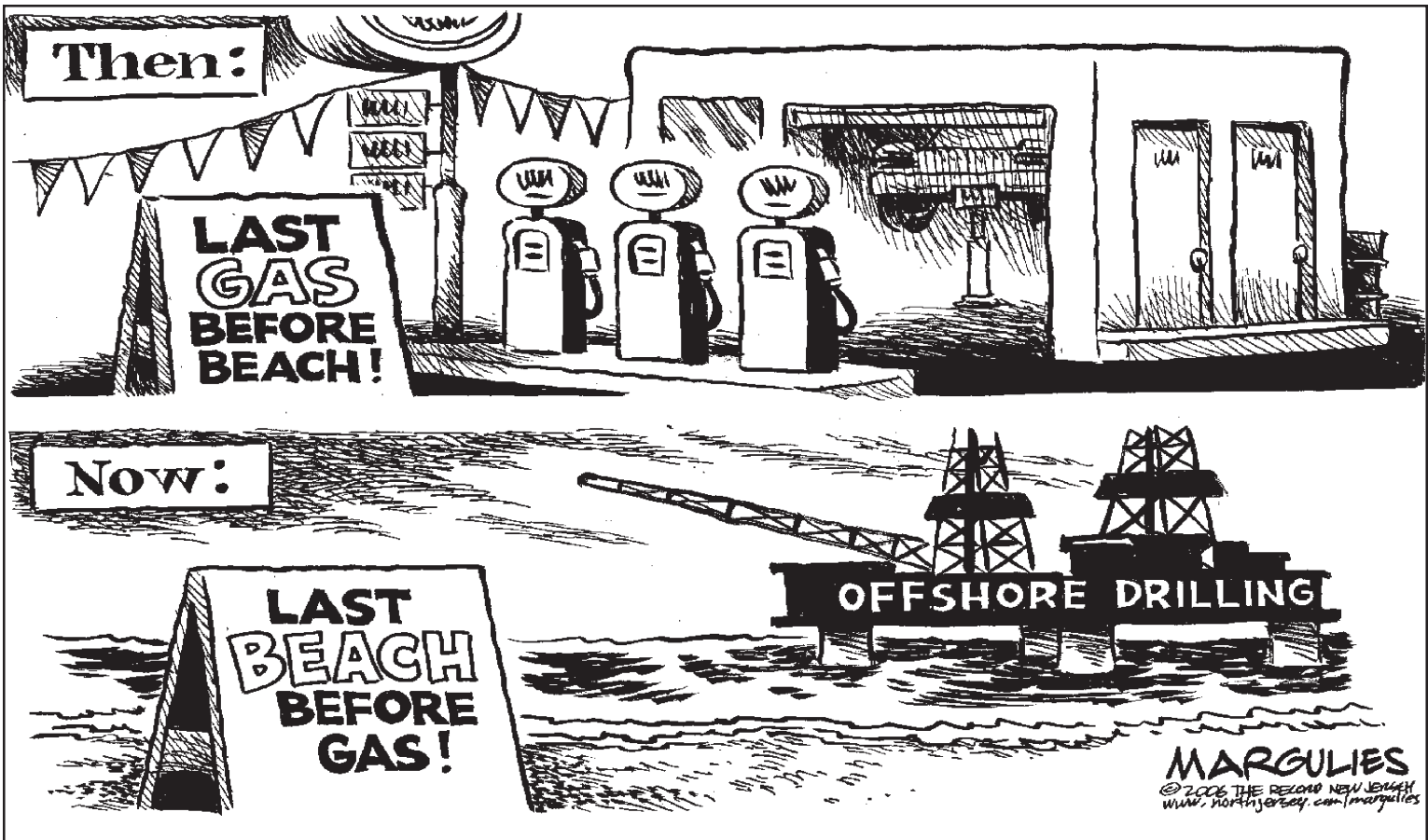
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It's time to saddle up

I remember when gasoline used to cost 25 cents a gallon. When I started driving 35 years ago it used to cost a small pocket of change to fill up.

Oh, how times have changed. Instead of a \$2.50 to put 10 gallons in the tank, it takes \$31.50 (that was as of Tuesday when I filled up). That is 126 quarters.

I think it's shameful that our government is allowing gas to increase like it has this summer.

Our famous United States Congress men and women, or should I say infamous, regulate tons of other things so why aren't they regulating gas prices?

I would like to know how many of them have financial interest in oil and gas companies. I bet the figure would blow one's mind. Sad thing is if anyone started snooping around in that area of our nation's leaders' lives the feds would be on their doorstep before the evening newspaper hits the porch.

I don't believe there is any reason gasoline should cost the American consumer this much money. But what's a person to do about it.

Those of us who live in northwest Kansas have no option but to drive our vehicles to and fro. It's not like we have public transportation to tote us from Hoxie or Oakley to Colby or vice versa and back.

I think I know the answer to why we are in this predicament. It can be summed up in two words, tolerance and apathy.

We, particularly those of us who live in western Kansas, are born and breed for tolerance. We tolerate every kind of extreme imaginable - extreme weather, extreme distance, and extreme



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

living conditions, which right now includes gas prices at record highs.

Not only are our towns extremely far apart, but homes on farms between the towns are a good distance apart. Most of the farms were homesteaded pioneers and handed down generation by generation. However, at some point in time many of the homesteads have been sold, sometimes to people who only want the land for its surface value.

Like Thomas County Commissioner Ken Christiansen recently said, part of the problem Thomas County has with musk thistle is that there are lots of out-of-county land owners who don't take the time or effort to be concerned about musk thistle.

The problem is not only with musk thistle, it's the same situation with gas prices. Too many people in our nation just pay the bill and aren't concerned about why the price is climbing.

Like I said, it's not like those who can car pool, but we can limit our travel as our own means of protest.

But people in the city ought to fight for those of us who can't. City people could car pool and take public transportation and refuse to pay these

atrocious prices. I think that would help force the price down again.

And, referring back to my initial comment about apathy, the Aug. 1 primary is proof we've become an apathetic society.

For instance, Thomas County had 1,265 registered voters which could have cast a ballot, but only 23 percent voted. The numbers are equally as bad in Sheridan and Logan Counties.

Sheridan County had 1,694 qualified voters but only 23.6 percent voted. Logan County had 1,721 people who could have gone to the polls but only 27 percent made it there.

That's shameful. Every time the poll booths are open there should be a 100 percent turn out.

My philosophy is if you don't vote, don't complain. Complaining is a right that is earned.

I voted and have earned the right to complain about high gas prices and the way our country, or county for that matter, works.

So, as I head to the pump the next time and plunk down my 126 plus quarters, bear in mind I've earned the right to say it's time to stop and think about who we want in office at Washington D.C., Topeka and here at home.

Don't think just because there was a primary Aug. 1 the voting booths have closed. There's still time to vote together a write-in campaign to challenge anyone you don't want in office starting in January.

The next local election is only two years away. It's time to saddle up.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

What is motivating the hospital?

Larry L. Booth
Colby

Something has gone wrong out here.

It's been going on for some time now, with periodic ridiculous skirmishes, but recently it's come to quite terrible outcomes.

I am writing about the conflict between our local hospital, (Citizen's Medical Center) and Dr. Victor H. Hildyard, who has had a highly respected medical practice here for nearly 40 years.

Recently, however, the Kansas State Board of Healing Arts revoked Dr. Hildyard's medical license, an action that seems incomprehensible, shocking our community. This is mostly a local issue. But it is one that has been taken to the state's courts and to the state's capital.

Those of us who would defend and support Dr. Hildyard find ourselves making our defense on local grounds, while those we are defending against seem to have a much wider and more powerful platform, and are willing to use it.

We find ourselves much like the subjects of Tom Friedman's comments on CBS's "Face the Nation." In response to Bob Schieffer's question about the ongoing Israel-Palestinian conflict, Friedman, a New York Times correspondent and an acknowledged specialist on the Near East, said, "It's only going to change if the moderates there - you know, in that part of the world, the extremists tend to go all the way, and the moderates tend to just go away. And unless those moderates stand up... this ain't going anywhere." It's a telling statement, and one that seems applicable to our situation here.

I have been a healthcare professional for many years, and was the last executive director of the Health Planning Association of Western Kansas.

This association was instrumental in the development of the Certificate of Need for Colby's Citizen's Medical Center. I have taken pride in that work.

And while we must continue to believe that folks on both sides of this conflict believe that what they are doing is what is best, we also know it to be true that, in all conflicts, the moderates tend to be powerless and negatively affected by the decisions and actions of those others who are willing to do anything to accomplish their goals. There comes a time - we hope there comes a time - when the affected ones need to stand up and at least raise questions. And raise them out loud.

Questions like: What motives and what influences would move a state Board of Healing Arts to set aside normal and statutory procedures in order to deprive a doctor of his long-standing and honored license to practice medicine? What would motivate and influence a local hospital, after arbitrarily denying privilege of practice to Colby's longest practicing physician, who serves a very large patient-base in a multi-county area, to also aggressively pursue the removal of his very license to practice medicine anywhere? Why has this doctor, who has been exonerated in every court case brought against him thus far in this conflict, and even by the KBHA's own formal hearing officer, lost every one of the administrative decisions at the hospital, and now of this State Board? What motives drive the hospital and the KBHA to declare their intentions to aggressively pursue further appeals on any subsequent court decisions that might come down in favor of Dr. Hildyard and against them? How do the hospital's administrative decisions and legal actions, aimed at driving this doctor from his large practice and depriving the

people he serves of their chosen doctor, demonstrate that they are fulfilling their state license to serve the healthcare needs of this area and its people?

In all power struggles, the world's wisest advise us to "follow the money". So we ask: Who owns, or has held, the hospital's indebtedness (bonds, etc.)?

We know that Dr. Hildyard has had to pay for his own defense. The question is, how have the actions by the hospital Board been financed? This month, KBHA is calling Dr. Hildyard to another hearing, ostensibly to deal finally with the legality of their removal of his license.

With no substantiated charges against him that warrant such actions, their actions seem motivated only to harass and to drag this on until Dr. Hildyard's resources are decimated.

Note that, dealing with the same doctor's license renewal, examining all the same data and charges, the state of Colorado renewed his medical license there without comment.

This raises another question: Where are those who should have the heart and authority to look into the behaviors of the State Board of Healing Arts... like perhaps Gov. Sebelius and the Legislature? There certainly are questions that need answers.

But even more than answers, most of all, we need to have our hospital governed by the people of our community who created it, who donated money to build it, and who toiled and loved it into being. And we need to be free from those who would, for whatever private motives, drive our doctors from our community and deprive us of the care of our chosen medical providers.

I make this plural, for which other private practitioner will be next?

COLBY FREE PRESS
155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

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