

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Pleading ignorance

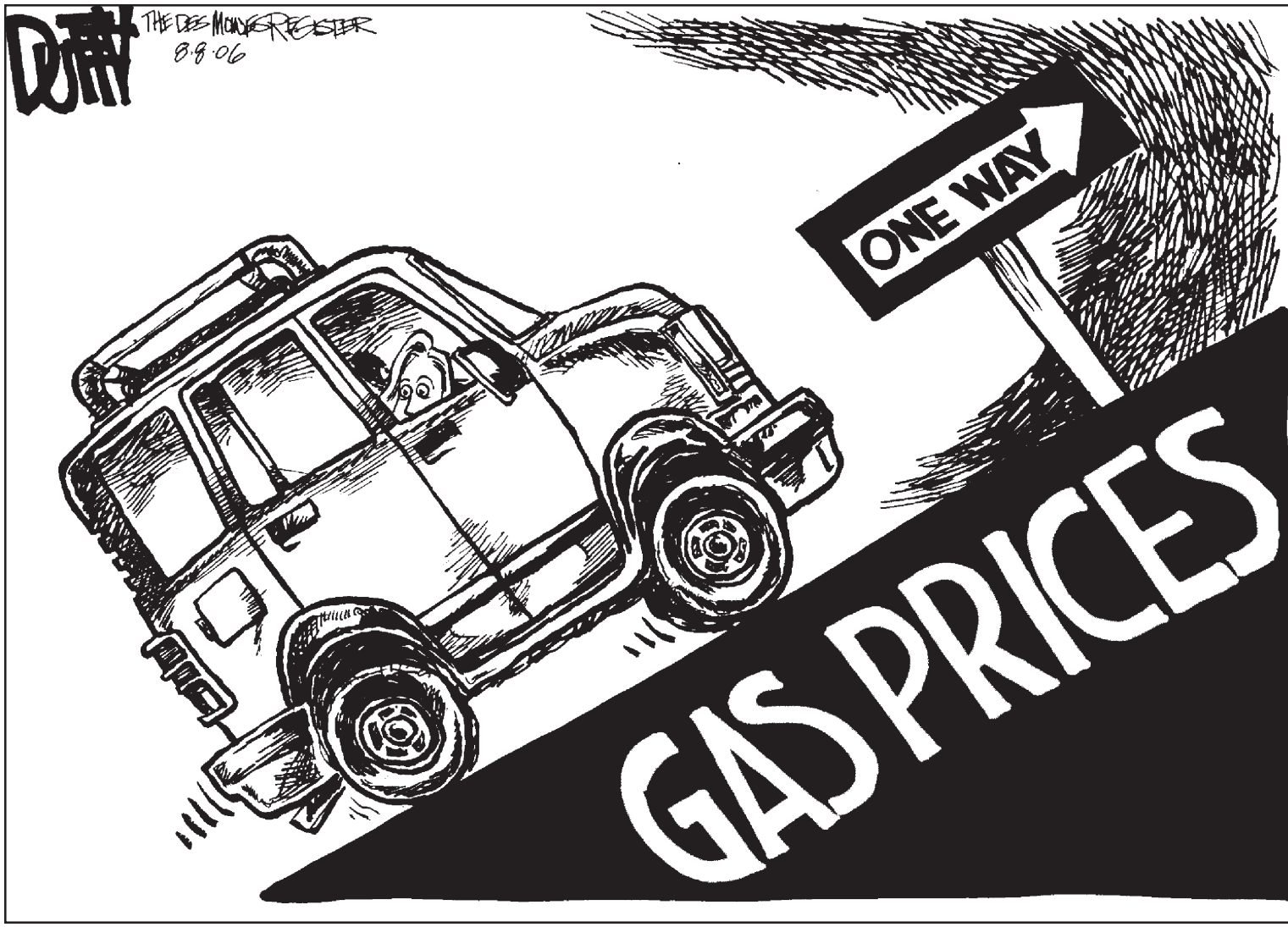
The Wichita Eagle
 Experts on America's immigration mess agree: To dissuade illegals from entering this country, border enforcement isn't enough. You have to turn off the spigot at the source — jobs. U.S. Attorney Eric Melgren recently announced 28 charges against a Wichita company, Bob Eisel Powder Coatings, for allegedly knowingly and routinely hiring illegal aliens from Mexico. The bust is part of a larger enforcement effort that should send a clear signal to U.S. businesses: You need to be part of the immigration solution. As Melgren said, "Businesses that knowingly employ illegal workers are undermining our laws, violating the public trust and contributing to the problem of illegal immigration." Of course, the key word here is "knowingly" — and that's part of the problem. At present, it's difficult to bring immigration charges against an employer, because authorities must prove the business knowingly hired illegals. And current law offers employers a huge loophole for claiming plausible ignorance: Businesses are merely required to check whether an applicant has official-looking papers — they don't have to verify whether the documents are indeed authentic. No doubt many employers suspect that some of their employees are illegal — but they have no easy way of proving it, and the law doesn't require them to.

... In the absence of meaningful immigration reform in Congress, it's good that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement is making workplace violations a priority: Nationally, the number of employer arrests for such violations has gone from 25 in fiscal year 2002 to 445 so far this fiscal year. Still, those numbers are a drop in the bucket given the scope of the problem and the millions of illegals working in the United States. What's needed is a more foolproof national system that lets an employer instantly verify the identity and legal status of an applicant — that would end the excuse that it didn't know it was hiring an illegal. Without that reform, employers can continue to plead ignorance, and authorities will be able to catch only the most blatant offenders. And the underlying supply and demand dynamics of the immigration problem won't change.

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

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Learning to fly



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

Last week's thwarted terrorist attack by British officials brings to mind many thoughts about travel. Having traveled overseas, I'm reminded of the effort it takes by all parties to make sure travelers arrive safely. Think of the massive undertaking it involves to get a plane full of people off the ground. Not only are airlines responsible for maintenance and logistics of travel for millions of people each year, changing times are forcing people to rethink travel as well. The time of throwing a few things in a carry on bag and heading for the airport is over. It's now a case of careful planning as to what can be carried on the plane, as well as what can be checked into the plane's cargo hold. It's also no longer a time of getting to the airport only minutes before they close the airplane door, but getting there sometimes three hours before departure. When I traveled to Germany in 1979, I put very little thought into what I would or would not put in which bag. Clothes went in the checked bag, but shampoo, hair spray, perfume, a brush, nail clipper with nail file and a small knife went into my carry on bag. Traveling like that is a thing of the past. As my daughter and a group of friends prepare to travel to the Philippines at the end of the month, I find myself preparing for their departure. Prayer is at the top of the to do list, but a shopping trip last weekend made the question about what can and can not be taken aboard the plane

surface often. It wasn't a matter of, "I'll need this or that," but more along the lines of "Can I take this or that?" I often think about how the world has changed so drastically since my parents got married in 1940. My mom often commented of her and Dad's honeymoon to Colorado and how it "seemed like it took forever to get there." Driving on roads which were probably no wider than U.S. Highway 24, otherwise known as Fourth Street in Colby, Mom ended up being a die-hard homebody most of her life. It was that trip to Colorado which caused Mom to have a strong dislike for the mountains. I'm guessing Dad drove a little too close to the Royal Gorge for Mom's taste. It was that trip to Colorado which helped Mom develop her philosophy about Colorado. She'd often comment that God made the entire world and then scooped all of the leftovers into a pile and called them the Rocky Mountains. Much to the contrary, I'd banter back to my mom that I thought God probably made the

Rocky Mountains first and then took the debris and flattened it out over the plains. Anyway, travel has changed since the 1940s, and I watch my own two children developing into world travelers. My son and his wife have traveled overseas many times and my daughter makes her first jaunt later this month. It is a test of faith to let go and watch children fly. Literally. Watching a child's love for mission work develop is a challenge of faith on a parent's part. While it's easy to be supportive during the planning stage, it's the execution stage that proves the hardest. Chats with God sound something like, "I know she's only on loan Lord, so please keep her under your watchful eye and if it be your will let her return safely to me." My own faith is a constant reminder that Jesus Christ's death on the cross was God's ultimate sacrifice as a parent. Who am I to be so petty? I'm a mom, that's who I am. Being a mom in today's world of uncertain travel conditions is much different than it has been for the past 30 plus years. Having children who travel so far away from home helps make or break a parent's faith. I choose not to be broken and say, "Fly my children. Spread your wings and fly and know you are loved." *Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press*

An extra tax on immigrants

By Jeannette Huezio
 Imagine the most unfair tax you can. How about an extra tax on the incomes of people who are hard working but poor, a tax that hits them just at the moment they're using their money to support their families? Several states, including Texas and Georgia, have debated taxing the international wire transfers by which many immigrants send money back to their families. This year, the Arizona legislature considered a bill to add a tax of 8 percent on all international wire transfers. The bill envisions using the tax revenue to build an extra wall (in addition to the federally funded one) along the border between Arizona and Mexico. Proponents argue that most immigrants in Arizona are undocumented, and their use of health care, housing, and education benefits is a burden on the state. But in December 2005, the Arizona legislature took care of that reason for the tax, by passing a law barring the undocumented from access to emergency rooms and other health benefits. Supporters of the bill also argue that these international transfers, called remittances, represent money that has never been taxed: Consider it a payroll tax by proxy. What they don't consider, though, is that most undocumented workers — 75 percent, according to the Urban Institute — do have taxes withheld from their paychecks. And undocumented immigrants also pay many of the other taxes that we all pay: sales tax, property tax, and special taxes on gasoline, cigarettes, alcohol, and other goods. The Urban Institute estimates that undocu-

mented workers make up 6.9 percent of Arizona's labor force and contributed \$6.6 million to the state's payroll tax revenue in fiscal year 2005. Arizona's undocumented population also paid \$18.7 million in sales and use taxes that year. At the national level, the Social Security Administration reports that it receives about \$7 billion per year under false Social Security numbers, while Medicare takes in \$1.5 billion. The typical undocumented worker will never see a penny of his or her Social Security or Medicare contributions in benefits, so that's free money for those programs. This proposed extra tax is inherently regressive — that is, a heavier burden on those who can afford it least. It would apply only to the money sent through wire transfer services, such as Western Union and Money Gram, not to money sent through banks. And it is no secret that the undocumented — who tend to be poor, who move often, and who send money to poor countries that don't have strong banking systems — must use agencies like Money Gram instead of the Bank of America. And in proposing taxes especially for immigrants, people not only overlook how their proposals interact with state and national politics, but also their connections to the global economy. Throughout history, supporters of wire transfer taxes would say, the United States of America has been an economic magnet that has attracted many people from around the world. But is it really such a magnet? Or have people instead been forced to choose this country? The policies that rule the global economy have saddled most developing countries with distressing external debts, in many cases impos-

sible to pay off with internal resources. Between 2001 and 2004, the global South received \$1.2 trillion in aid, grants, loans, debt re-organization, trade credits, and foreign direct investment. During the same period, the South paid out \$2.2 trillion in interest and principal on its loans. Yet in 2004, the South was 6.6 percent deeper in debt than it has been in 2001! The pressure of debt helps further concentrate the wealth and power of the elites in developing countries. That concentration exacerbates the lack of opportunities and jobs in the developing world and deepens poverty. As a result, we've seen increased migration at all levels, from rural areas to the big cities as well as from poorer countries to richer ones. Some economies have come to rely on the remittances that emigrants send home to their families. Taxing these remittances would be nothing more than another way to keep the immigrant community and their home countries in economic lethargy, burdened with extra taxation and deep debt, while the super-rich and corporations enjoy steep cuts to the taxes that it should be their responsibility to pay. *Jeannette Huezio is education coordinator at United for a Fair Economy (www.faireconomy.org). United for a Fair Economy is a Boston-based national, independent, nonpartisan organization that puts a spotlight on the dangers of growing income, wage and wealth inequality in the United States and coordinates action to reduce the gap. United for a Fair Economy, e-mail: stw@stw.org. This column was provided by Minuteman Media.*

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