

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### Kansas must be better than 42nd

**From The Topeka Capital-Journal**  
 It's also possible to have too little of a good thing. The number of jobs available in Kansas grew by 2.4 percent in three years, putting us in 42nd place among the states. The optimum rate of growth is subject to debate, but most Kansans surely would like to see more than 2.4 percent in three years. All the surrounding states did better than that, ranging from 3.3 percent in Missouri to 6.2 percent in Colorado. We have to be careful, though, with any single statistic. One measurement can be misleading when looked at alone. For example, during that three-year period, Kansas ranked 27th in the nation in the percentage growth of its gross state product, which is the market value of the goods and services that are produced in the state. There are all kinds of factors that make state-by-state comparisons difficult. ... Then we get back to the question of how much growth begins being a bad thing. Many metropolitan areas in the country — Atlanta has been used frequently as an example — are experiencing such rapid growth that local units of government are having difficulty building streets, sewers and water mains as fast as the housing subdivisions are springing up. Excessive growth causes all kinds of environmental problems. Still, keeping all those factors in mind, 42nd in the nation in job growth is embarrassing. We are left with the feeling that the quality of life in Kansas would be even better if the Kansas economy was growing a little faster. The Capital-Journal will be asking candidates for public office this month for their ideas on improving that situation. Kansans attending the public forums with the candidates need to keep the issue alive, too.

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](mailto:jvanostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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- 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: [jmorriso@ink.org](mailto:jmorriso@ink.org) web: [www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso](http://www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso)
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 [ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us](mailto:ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us)

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### It's not good to sound the same

I really don't like to publicize the competition in my column, even though I love to criticize television. I am more selective, and positive, with my comments about radio.

Now, I feel like I have to defend radio for its tenuous future.

One of the cool things about living in Northwest Kansas is the variety of radio. Here in Colby, I can listen to country legend Marty Robbins on the AM and was thrilled Lacy, on Colby FM's KQLS, played a David and David song last week. Down the road in Brewster, at KGCR, I enjoy the "Money Matters" and "Unshackled" programs.

Before I go any further, I must state even though some people think the Free Press must have a bitter competition with Colby radio, that competition is not as intense as they think it is. Yes, we do go after the same advertisers, but it's not war between us.

Colby radio manager Mike Fell and I have a honest friendship and work well together. It was his idea for our Thursday morning news segment on KQLS. Radio personality Rich Epp and the Free Press work well together too. And KGCR's James Claassen occasionally reads our headlines on his news segments.

I don't want northwest Kansas to lose that diversity on the dial - and I don't want the area to lose those people behind those boards. Here's why.

Ten years ago Congress passed legislation loosening the restrictions the number of radio



**John Van Nostrand**  
 • Line in the Dust

stations one entity can own. Since then companies have purchased and operated multiple stations at one time, and some of those companies have homogenized those stations.

"Radio conglomerates have taken the 'local' out of local radio to such a degree that, by and large, radio in Atlanta sounds like radio in Denver, Los Angeles, Nashville, or Washington, D.C. Playlists have been corporatized, nationalized, and sanitized. Airplay for local and new artists is a virtual impossibility," said Mike Mills during a Federal Communications Commission open hearing on media ownership Oct. 3 in Los Angeles.

Mills plays in the rock band R.E.M., a personal favorite of mine. The band grew its fan base some 25 years ago because of the individuality of radio stations. Mills is afraid the 1996 Telecommunications Act will continue to take out the regionalism and uniqueness of radio stations. (I don't agree with all the political and social views of secular musicians, but this one I'll stand up with them.)

The telecommunications act shows how big

business can work in America. Company A acquires X amount of stations and to simplify the workload and agenda, the company requires all of its stations to do and play the same things.

"It was very difficult as it was for bands to get commercial radio airplay, and a journey like ours would be virtually impossible in today's era of consolidated radio conglomerates and concentrated mega-labels. If a band doesn't have a hit on their first record, they often find themselves dropped," Mills said.

One of the beautiful aspects of the United States, is our regionalism. It's cool to hear the people talk about the differences between living in rural northern Alabama and western Kansas.

"The FCC has a mandate to consider the goals of localism, diversity, and free competition when contemplating changes in radio ownership rules. However, changes in radio ownership rules since 1996 — most notably the increase in station ownership caps — have only had a negative effect on localism, diversity, and competition," Mills said.

Fell and Claassen both have to answer to somebody else. They don't own the stations they work at. That somebody else could easily sell to one of those big companies — which they have the right to.

I just hope Fell and Claassen's work doesn't ever sound the same.

*John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press*

### The corporate battle over fat

**By William A. Collins**  
 All those ads, For sweets and grease; Soon had made me, Quite obese.

Licking their wounds, the tobacco companies have finally, like Osama, been driven off into the hills. From there they continue to seduce the rest of the world and still lure our own kids into danger. Mostly though, they've been routed. Lung cancer incidence is already declining.

But Satan takes on many forms. The Marlboro Man may have been deported to Thailand, but Ronald McDonald is still here, tempting us daily with a shortened life span. Indeed the main reason that the U.S. span has not spurred ahead of the rest of the world, what with our big advances in medical science, is that we're fat. Cancer and heart disease may still be our biggest killers, but diabetes is coming on fast.

And therein lies a serious public policy question. Conservative commentators and politicians feel that what we eat is our own business (like smoking) and government simply ought to butt out. We've created enough of a Nanny State as it is, they say. But health officials, worried parents, insurance companies, and corporate critics take a different view. Why should we subject ourselves to poor health just for corporate profit?

Years ago the health nuts successfully established a potent bridgehead. They got nutrition labels on most food packaging, and if you bother

to read them, some are pretty scary. Unfortunately it's largely encrypted, comprehensible only to the cognoscenti who have studied the code.

Thus some jurisdictions, like Connecticut, have decided to push intervention up a notch. Thanks to the legislature, our children can now no longer buy soda pop at school. That sounds like a no-brainer, but it set off the War of the Worlds in Hartford. The proposal became informally known as the Lobbyist Full Employment Act, but thankfully, it passed.

So the question is now, how much more should government control, and how much should instead be left to individual decision-making under our hallowed concepts of liberty? Mostly, it's the food corporations who are pushing liberty.

Unfortunately the numbers suggest that we not leave it to them. Sixteen percent of school age kids are now "obese," condemning them to a raft of chronic health problems as life advances. We're the fattest country in the world, except for some suicidal South Sea islanders. No, not because we, like they, think fat is beautiful, but because sugar and grease taste good and sell more product.

Besides soda bans, this danger has set some local governments and non-profit institutions to pushing ahead further still. Fairfield, Cheshire, and Canton have even ended school bake sales, and many education boards and Parent Teacher

Associations are poring over lunch menus looking to raise nutritional values. Further, public pressure has even slightly added to the "healthy" items on the McDonalds menu. And blessed Subway claims not to use grease at all. What a revolution! Plus, believe it or not, the University of Virginia Medical Center puts colored stickers on its vending machine offerings distinguishing the healthy from the poisonous.

But should government do more to, say, control TV ads for Amalgamated Grease and Inter-galactic Sugar? It sounds like tobacco all over again, only a lot more complicated. Given the diversity of food products, could we make a useful dent in the universal flood of food ads, considering that we don't even prohibit beer commercials?

Well, maybe. Remember, while beer is still OK on TV, hard liquor is gone. With luck, this kind of compromise is possible for food too. Let's first only ban ads for the most egregious pound-adding and heart-stopping items. All right, maybe we sophisticated editorial page readers know about such foods already. But the big beneficiaries would be the kids, the poor, and the new immigrant. They're the ones most likely to get fat and sick from following the blandishments of advertising.

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*Columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Connecticut.*

#### About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

**Mallard Fillmore**  
 • Bruce Tinsley

