

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Kansas is behind in road reporting

From Lawrence Journal-World
The snowstorm that paralyzed eastern Colorado and western Kansas last week, leaving thousands of travelers stranded, was bad news in many ways. ...

However, one good thing may have surfaced out of the storm. It may have pointed out that it is far past time for the Kansas Department of Transportation to modernize its system for reporting road conditions on highways in the state. There are few ways — actually none without a phone call to someone who lives or works near a highway — to learn about highway conditions.

There's no excuse for the antiquated Kansas highway reporting system.

In Colorado, for example, television cameras are mounted at strategic spots on major roads, and those camera views are available on the Internet allowing viewers to see for themselves the real-time condition of the highways.

Why can't Kansas have a similar system along the entire route of I-70 or I-35, with cameras mounted on overpasses at intervals so that travelers can see highway conditions before they hit the road?

It's likely some at KDOT or the Kansas Turnpike Authority will have a reason that the Colorado system cannot be duplicated in Kansas. Unfortunately, this negative, can't-do attitude is far too common in Kansas. Why not have Kansas be a leader, not a follower, and why not have Kansas known for the best, most up-to-date highway reporting system in the country?

Last week's storm showed just how far behind time Kansas is in the highway reporting business. Maybe it will serve to prod officials to think big, outside the box, and figure out a way to give the public the ability to scan highways, see current conditions and make informed decisions about whether it is safe to get behind the wheel to travel over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house.

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

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Happy parents

Some of last week was spent planning holiday gatherings with my brother, sister-in-law, their three daughters and two of the three's husbands and two little one.

Plans were made. Ice and snow developed. And plans were changed.

A closed airport in Denver necessitated changes for my niece flying from Washington, D.C., and closed roads made travel plans for another niece be put on hold due to her coming from Arizona. Throw in my brother's travel from Houston, and I wonder, "Oh my gosh, why are we so spread apart?"

In anticipation of the gathering, an earlier trip to Pratt and Coldwater to visit my husband's grandchildren and my dad and his ladyfriend made me glad we spread out our holiday travel this year. I'm not one who likes to battle snow and ice, since that was part of a previous part of my life as a contract mail carrier. That meant no option but getting out and going in the wet and white stuff.

However, that trip to see dad, who is 89, and Wanda, 83, made me realize how truly blessed I am to have them in my life. While many adult children cannot, or choose not to, accept their parent's involvement with another adult after the loss of a spouse, I have no problem with it.

Dad met Wanda almost two years after mom died and they have been together almost 10 years. I'll admit there have been moments when neither Wanda nor I liked each other, but over the years we've grown to love each other very much. She's much more than my step-mom, she's my friend.



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

While my mom was my best friend in life, and no one can replace her, Wanda has filled the gap left by mom's death. She's someone I can call for a recipe, ask for an opinion, and giggle with at some of dad's goofy antics.

One of his latest, being that adorning himself with new title, that of Dr. Katz, despite not having a medical degree.

Sure enough, dad couldn't figure out why he wasn't feeling good, and after a visit to his real medical doctor, dad finally decided the prescription instructions were on the bottle for a reason.

"Do not stop this medication without consulting your physician," actually meant don't stop taking the silly stuff on his own advice. No wonder his legs tingled and the symptoms of one of two earlier strokes were returning. He'd stopped taking his medicine. Go figure.

Anyway, as dad was telling me the story about his most recent visit to his doctor, Wanda sat there in her chair, rolling her eyes and tilting her head just like mom used to do listening to dad. I had to giggle at the story, but got much more amusement out of Wanda.

Dad's move to Coldwater meant moving his 80-plus years of equipment. I won't even start to describe the list, but suffice it to say there is a path in and a path out of Wanda's garage. What doesn't fit in the garage spills over to not one, but two sheds in the backyard. And since dad is an inventor, one of his upcoming projects is that of creating a bumper and rack to go on the back of Wanda's car to haul the scooter they bought at an auction.

Sure enough, one of those little Rascals (a blue one) sits inside the garage door. At dad's insistence, I took it for a spin down the drive, out on to the road and back to the garage. That, coupled with the numerous oxygen tanks sitting around spurred me on to the fact I need to exercise, exercise and exercise again while I'm young. I don't want to be 89 and have my kids visit me and walk around oxygen tanks.

But like I said, some adult children do not have it figured out how much fun it can be to have their parents happy. No, you can't bring back a parent who dies, but you sure can have fun if your surviving parent is happy again.

I wish it was closer to Coldwater, but since it's not, I get down there as often as I can. Which as time passes, won't be often enough.

But if I can say one thing as 2006 comes to a close, it would be to not let time pass you by without counting your blessings.

God bless you and have a Happy New Year! And if you drink, don't drive.

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

They deserve a chance to build it

By Steve Haynes

Should Kansas allow three new coal-fired power plants to be built at Holcomb, west of Garden City?

It's the top environmental issue of the year in Kansas. Above you can get a sample of the sort of logic being used to fight the plant, which is to say, not much.

Why bother with logic or facts when you know what's best?

Let's take a look at the arguments here.
• "This will allow corporate pirates to reap billion of dollars in profits..."

Just who are these corporate pirates, anyway? The plant would be built by two "generation and transmission" power cooperatives, both owned by consumer-controlled rural electric cooperatives.

Sunflower Electric, based in Hays, is owned by six Kansas cooperatives, including our own Prairie Land, formed to bring power and light to the High Plains.

Sunflower's partner is Tri-State Generation and Transmission, a larger Colorado co-op owned by 44 local-service cooperatives. All are

owned by their customers.

So the owners of these plants, the evil geniuses behind this plot, are the farmers and rural residents of Kansas and Colorado, parts of Nebraska and Wyoming, a few in New Mexico and Utah. Us, in other words.

• "As a western Kansas farmer, I am sick and tired of the colonization of rural America. ... We cannot allow the continued exploitation of our natural resources."

Except to grow corn, of course.
• "Corporations don't die... they don't answer to society... they pay little in taxes."

There's one good point. Cooperatives don't pay corporate taxes, but their members do. Utility cooperatives have to pay taxes on their equipment, though.

• "If you are looking for the truth, follow the money (which) isn't even passing through our neighborhood. The imported coal will be transported by an out-of-state railroad. The vast majority of the energy produced will be exported."

BNSF Railway, which serves the plant, is one of two major railroads serving Kansas. The successor to the old Santa Fe, it has its largest freight

yards in Wyandotte County, its main shops and a business office in Topeka and a division office in the state. It's one of Kansas' largest private employers.

• The power will go out of state. That's true.

So do most of the cars produced at the General Motors plant in Kansas City. So does most of the wheat grown by Kansas farmers, most of the beef raised on Kansas pasture, finished in Kansas feed lots, killed at Kansas plants. That's how we make a living out here.

• "Speak your mind."

First, think about what you are saying. This country faces a real issue in whether it will keep adding to the "greenhouse gases" thought to fuel global warming. Hysterical debate grounded in emotion won't lead us to a better decision.

That is a question the country needs to face, but it's not one Kansas or the citizen-owners of the Holcomb plant can solve.

Under present law, at least, they deserve a chance to build it.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers

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