

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Saving lives is an end in itself

From The Kansas City Star
 Seat-belt use by Missouri and Kansas drivers has improved in recent years, but it remains below the national average of 81 percent. Passing stronger seat-belt laws in both states would boost the usage rate and save lives.

Advocates of such laws plan to press their case again when the legislatures of both states convene.

“Primary” seat-belt laws allow authorities to give tickets to motorists solely for failing to buckle up.

In Kansas and Missouri — two of about a half-dozen states without primary seat-belt laws — police may ticket unbelted motorists only when cars have been stopped for other violations.

Opponents of seat-belt laws say buckling up is a personal decision, but the costs of death or severe injury are not confined to those involved in crashes.

If a low-income individual is hurt, for example, the costs of medical treatment may be paid by taxpayers through programs such as Medicaid. And when injuries and deaths in a given area are above the national norm, those risks are reflected in the insurance premiums of other drivers.

Saving lives is an end in itself. If the two states passed primary seat-belt laws, it would also mean federal grant money for safety programs: \$16 million for Missouri and \$11 million for Kansas.

This is one case where the costs of risky behavior are not borne solely by individuals. It’s time Kansas and Missouri lawmakers approved primary seat-belt laws.

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

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I DO BELIEVE, ... THAT I, NOT AS PRESIDENT BUT AS A HUMBLE SERVANT OF GOD, WILL RECEIVE JUSTICE WITHOUT MERCY IF I FAIL TO SHOW MERCY - GERALD FORD



Getting attention

We thank our subscribers who receive their paper by carrier for their patience during the aftermath of the snow.

We know the streets are not in great condition and not everyone has cleared snow off their driveways and sidewalks the same way (let alone have the same layout of driveways and sidewalks). Carriers are looking for the closest dry spot.

It's not just Free Press carriers looking for the right spot either.

With a little hope and a lot of persistence, maybe our blizzard has made eastern Kansas people pay a little more attention to our part of the state. The timing of the storm is interesting too.

Friday, we had a story about what Sen. Ralph Ostmeier and Rep. Jim Morrison thought of this year's legislative session. It started Monday.

Not long after the Nov. 7 election, we had an Associated Press story about how more western Kansas legislators are getting into critical positions at the statehouse. Other than Ostmeier and Morrison's work, Virginia Beamer from Oakley is on the appropriations committee and John Faber chairs the agriculture committee.

It was great and appreciated to see Gov. Kathleen Sebelius in town last week. If anybody can get some momentum and attention for western Kansas, you would think it would be the gov-



John Van Nostrand
 • Line in the Dust

error.

Ostmeier said it is probably still not enough people or positions to convince the entire legislation that western Kansas has priorities, but said it should be enough to create more cooperation between the two sides of the state.

Morrison said, "what's good for western Kansas is good for eastern Kansas."

But no matter what our state politicians do, we still need the eastern Kansas residents to pay attention. A few months ago, I attended a meeting about job creation in western Kansas. A variety of business owners from the region were in attendance. They all talked about their struggles of finding employees when they have available jobs. Some of those places just can't hire anyone off the street.

A man from a factory in Oberlin said he has tried to advertise jobs in eastern Kansas. What

he experienced proved our struggles go far beyond what politicians are capable of doing.

"What part of Overland Park are you in?" the man said the caller asked.

"We are not in Overland Park," he responded. "We are in Oberlin."

"Where's Oberlin?" the caller then asked.

(For those of you who don't know, Overland Park is a Kansas City suburb.)

In other snow news, my biggest pet peeve with e-mail are the forwards.

Last week I received the one about how people in our portion of the country never called FEMA, never blamed the president or Congress, did not ask for compensation or had the major news networks in their front yards reporting about the snow.

I received the same e-mail forward last year after a similar storm hit North Dakota. Where it read North Dakota, it was changed to eastern Colorado or western Kansas.

I'm sure after the next blizzard somewhere in the country will again circulate that e-mail and where it read Kansas, the new location will be put in.

Whatever happened to creativity?
John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

Your turn

Time for a change of leadership

Tom Cook Colby

First of all, I don't know who John Van Nostrand talked to that have lived here a long long time, but I am 50 years old and have lived here my entire life and you only need to back to October of 97 to find a winter storm with the same magnitude.

But whenever the last storm was is totally irrelevant.

The fact remains, this is western Kansas and a storm like this can happen at any time and the

city of Colby should have a plan in place and a budget to deal with it.

As for asking the citizens if they are willing to pay more in taxes, well I would say absolutely not since we pay as much or more in taxes per-capita as any town or city in the state. What is expected of our officials is to manage the revenue, budget it accordingly and always plan for the unexpected.

I would have to ask the city council members, Carolyn Armstrong, or anyone else involved, if there are concerns of the cost of removing the

snow, then where do they propose to come up with the funds to repair all of the damage to all of the streets in Colby that will show up this spring due the freezing and thawing of the snow that was not removed?

This cost could exceed 10 times what it would have cost to have every available city employee and piece of equipment out at the beginning.

In closing I will say in my opinion it's time for a change in leadership in Colby.

Hey, the rich have problems too

By Jim Hightower

As anyone who has read the New Testament knows, Jesus spent most of his life among the poor and the shunned, rather than hanging out with the rich. Indeed, he frequently blasted the avarice of the wealthy elites of his day, even declaring that,

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

But, gosh, if Jesus visited our country today, surely he would feel the pain of the modern rich - wouldn't he? For example, consider the tragic agony of "wealth status."

Let's take the case of some swell who's sitting on \$999,999,999. Are you aware that this poor

wretch does not even make the "Forbes" list of America's 400 richest people?

In this year's ranking, it took a billion dollars just to be number 400 on the list. Sure, such ultra-richies as Bill Gates, Michael Dell, and all five Wal-Mart theirs easily acquired "Forbes" status, but what about Martha Stewart, Steve Case, and others whose incomes fell short his time and were unceremoniously dropped from the list? Forget about fishes and loaves for the masses - what about caviar for the "Forbes" rejectees?

Also, what many of us ordinary riff-raff fail to understand is that while the rich have so much money, it costs them a bundle to live. Were you aware, for example, that there was a 10 percent

hike last year in the price of a Sikorsky S-76C helicopter with VIP options? No, I dare say you were not. Also, the price of six-passenger Lear jets is by up to \$350,000 this year - and you don't even want to know about the cost of housing in the Hamptons!

Yes, while Jesus focused on the poor and the wretched, he also kept a wary eye on those who chose to serve mammon. And so should we. Blessed are the rich, for they will inherit the fate they so richly deserve.

Jim Hightower is the best-selling author of "Thieves In High Places: They've Stolen Our Country And It's Time To Take It Back." Distributed by MinutemanMedia.org.

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Mallard Fillmore
 • Bruce Tinsley

