

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### Why give them more opportunity?

**The Lawrence Journal-World**  
It would take some convincing to sell most Kansans on the idea of a full-time Legislature, or even a move in that direction. An Associated Press story ... indicated that some Kansas legislators are looking at extending the session primarily as a way to trim the state budget. Considering the cost of paying legislators and staff for longer periods each year, that seems counterintuitive, but they say if they had more time to dig into the state budget, they would be able to better control increases in state government spending.

That's a laudable goal, but our experience with the U.S. Congress seems to indicate that having a body of full-time lawmakers doesn't necessarily make for more thrift in government. In fact, it appears to be just the opposite.

Despite having the full-time attention of Congress, the federal bureaucracy continues to grow. A year-round Congress — give or take a few dozen holidays — just seems to give lawmakers more opportunities to dream up new ways to spend taxpayer money. We also wonder how long it would take the Kansas Legislature to resolve many issues if it didn't face its annual adjournment deadline. Although the legislative session starts in January, it always seems that lawmakers don't get much done until March and invariably leave many major issues on the table until their "wrap-up" session. Some of the actions taken in the closing days of the session may be hasty and require correction the next year, but without that deadline, one wonders how many issues would just cycle from one year to the next without meaningful action.

The AP story cited a ranking by the National Conference of State Legislatures that puts state legislatures into categories based on which ones were best paid and put in the most time on their jobs. The 11 states at the top of the list had lawmakers who spend at least 80 percent of their time on the legislature and make large enough salaries that they didn't need to hold outside jobs. Predictably, most of those states were among the nation's largest, with a workload that may justify their extended roles.

Kansas was among the bottom 17 states with lower paid "citizen" legislators who spend about half their time on the elected jobs and, naturally, get paid less.

... Maybe a full-time Legislature would attract a more qualified or well-motivated group of candidates, but there's no guarantee that a full-time Legislature would provide a significantly better service to the state than the current 90-day session, paired with various committees that meet throughout the year.

Many Kansans probably would say legislators spend too much time bickering and playing politics already. Why give them more opportunity?

#### 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.

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

### 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.

**John Van Nostrand - Publisher**  
[jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com)

#### NEWS

**Patty Decker - Editor**  
[pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com)

**Tisha Cox - General Assignment**  
[tcx@nwkansan.com](mailto:tcx@nwkansan.com)

**Jan Katz Ackerman, Area Reporter**  
[ackermanjk@ruraltel.net](mailto:ackermanjk@ruraltel.net)

#### ADVERTISING

**Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director**  
[crystalr@nwkansan.com](mailto:crystalr@nwkansan.com)

**Kristi Powell - Advertising Sales**  
[kpowell@nwkansan.com](mailto:kpowell@nwkansan.com)

**Emily Wederski - Advertising Sales**  
[ewederski@nwkansan.com](mailto:ewederski@nwkansan.com)

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

**Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building**  
[japplegate@nwkansan.com](mailto:japplegate@nwkansan.com)

**Everett Robert - Circulation, Classifieds**  
[erobert@nwkansan.com](mailto:erobert@nwkansan.com)

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**  
[support@nwkansan.com](mailto:support@nwkansan.com)

#### NOR'WEST PRESS

**Jim Bowker - General Manager**

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Jim Jackson, DeLisa Allen, David Erickson, Betty Morris, and Dana Huthansel

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 \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.

BRACKINS RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH 4/07



## I don't feel that bad anymore

Misery loves company. Last Tuesday morning, editor Patty Decker, reporter Tisha Cox and I were talking in the newsroom when a bright flash of lightning struck and loud thunder smashed through Colby.

The next day I realized it smashed the home of Fred and Marvia Miller (see April 25 Colby Free Press front page).

If you remember that story, Fred was right. He was very fortunate his house did not catch fire, seeing the evidence of what that lightning strike did.

A tree was damaged. The power through the tree was so great it damaged his underground water sprinkler system and flooded his backyard. Inside, electrical infrastructure was in pieces, things hung on the wall fell to the floor and broke, appliances' electrical systems were ruined.

Fred showed me where one electrical outlet on his garage wall was fried and a portion of the surrounding wall was seared.

Fred was right, the house should have caught fire.

Fred's attitude about the situation was wonderful and encouraging. He is that way with life. In fact, Fred made me feel better about the situation I was in at the time.



**John Van Nostrand**

#### Line in the Dust

Just the week before, my father spent some time with me to help me build a new 10x12 lawn building in my backyard. I wanted to replace the one that came with the house when we purchased the house. The rust was bad and spreading. Some of the wall panels were flapping in the wind. The doors had fallen off.

Oh, that wind. It's still tough to type that word.

After my father dismantled the old building, we started on the floor foundation for the new building. The troubles started when we installed the wall panels. The wind picked up strength and shifted the building just enough to not make the building square anymore.

The more we progressed, the more the pre-drilled holes did not line up to secure everything together.

I had to go Topeka Thursday that week and dad said he would do as much as he could before he had to go home. Bless his heart.

Last Tuesday, after the lightning struck Fred's house and the thunder scared Sacred Heart kids out of their seat, the wind was strong enough to topple one of the new walls of my shed. Wife Jennifer told me what happened over the phone. With that tone of voice from your spouse, you know those phone calls are not good.

I was able to put the wall back up and, temporarily, keep it in place. After some phone calls to some friends, one said he had an idea to secure the roof and walls. It sounded feasible to me. He won't be able to get to it until later this week.

After passing the story to my father, he had a similar idea. My mechanical knowledge is limited. I look for the "on" button on the hammer.

Fred flirted with losing his entire house, his stunning pictures of his kids and grandchildren — things not replaceable.

I just lost my temper.  
— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

## Your turn

## Other physicians deserve recognition

**Jim Smith Colby**  
Editor Patty Decker's article on the medical situation concerning this area and the plight of Dr. Victor Hildyard was very good.

It was informative, but I think recognition of Dr. LaDonna Regier, her physician assistants, nurses and the entire staff of Colby Medical and Surgical Center is in order. They worked many extra hours taking care

of Dr. Hildyard's patients while he awaited reinstatement of his medical license.

My hat is off to them and if anyone gets a chance, tell them what a fantastic job they did.

## Internet hoaxes make people vulnerable

**Rod Thomasson Colby**  
I have been a user of the Internet since it had no name back in the late 1980s. With the advent of the World Wide Web (WWW) in the early 90s came the phenomenon of E-rumors and internet hoaxes.

Of course these silly rumors didn't start on the web, but it made their spread much easier and faster. The majority of the hoaxes play to our most primal fears or desires and therefore seem entirely plausible to some.

Many of us grew up in a time when we tended to believe that if it appeared in print it must be true. Of course that was never the case and with the massive expansion of cyber-space it is even less true today.

It isn't uncommon for new users of the web to spread these rumors without first checking out their authenticity, but I have to admit I was shocked when I read one printed in the editorial section of the *Colby Free Press* by one of that paper's reporters, who even claimed to have sourced its reliability.

This particular E-rumor is one of the most venerable. Various versions of it have been around for more than 20-years. Generally it claims that gangs (pick a name Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, etc.) are initiating members by having them drive with their headlights off. If an

innocent passing motorist flashes their headlights to warn the oncoming car (the hoax goes) the gang members spring into action and attack the hapless driver.

This particular rumor comes and goes as the years pass. At one time it was so prevalent that police departments and other law enforcement agencies issued official warnings based solely on rumors. If the reporter had checked with any of the dozens of "hoax-busting" web sites [www.truthorfiction.com](http://www.truthorfiction.com), [www.hoaxbusters.com](http://www.hoaxbusters.com), [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) she could have read the long history of this hoax. Quoting the "Truth or Fiction" web site:

"One version that came up in 2005 says that September 23 and 24 are "blood initiation weekend" and that police departments across the nation are being warned to stay on the alert. The message claims to be from the Drug Abuse Resistance Education, also known as DARE program. The folks of that program deny that this E-mail ever originated with them and on their web site at [www.dare.com](http://www.dare.com) they brand the warning as a hoax. The Department of Justice has issued a news release on the subject, as have several noted gang trainers for police departments ([www.gangsonus.com](http://www.gangsonus.com)) and many major newspapers have written articles on the hoax (see the "Houston Chronicle", September 2003). The rumor persisted to the point that authorities in

Wichita think a shooting there some years ago was a "copycat" crime based on the hoax, quoting the "Knight-Ridder News Service"

"Wichita, KS- A weekend drive-by shooting was probably prompted by a nationwide hoax, police said Monday.

The hoax states that street gang members are driving around with their headlights intentionally turned off and when a motorist flashes his or her lights as a courtesy warning, the gang members shoot. The hoax, falsely attributed to the Illinois State Police, has been fed to police agencies and media organizations—the Buffalo police and the Buffalo news included—by fax and teletype. In Saturday's shooting, a 38-year old woman was shot at after flashing her lights at a pickup that had its lights off, police said. Neither the woman nor her car was hit.

The hoax has prompted police in many cities to avoid flashing their lights at other vehicles. Dan Albright, "looks like we got our first copycat" case."

It's bad enough that these hoaxes circulate as fact from sources we should always view with skepticism, but when they are printed as fact in a newspaper, that paper loses journalistic credibility and the hoax is just planted a little deeper in the culture. Checking your facts is a good idea, whether you're a reporter or simply an e-mailer passing along a juicy tidbit.

## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

