

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Fewer teens are smoking, drinking

From The Hutchinson News
Fewer teens are drinking and smoking, but what can be done to continue this trend?
The state is doing something right.
An annual school survey shows that fewer teens in south-central and southwest Kansas are smoking or binge drinking.
It is a downward trend over the past several years that experts expect will continue.
The data comes through the annual Kids Count survey produced by the Kansas Action for Children. Not every school participates, but the 2006 data is based on the highest participation rate ever, with 78,000 students taking part.
Unfortunately, the state doesn't know exactly why some areas are doing better than others. Worse yet, the positive trend does not apply to three counties — Reno, Barber and Seward all show upward trends since 2002 for smoking and binge drinking. ...

While it is encouraging the problem is improving overall, work remains to be done locally.
Two questions substance abuse officials should try to answer: First, what exactly has caused teens to drink and smoke less? Second, what needs to be done to ensure continued improvement? Without isolating what works and what doesn't in prevention and education programs, it will be difficult if not impossible to find a solution for the areas struggling with the problem.
So far, substance abuse officials believe that prevention programs are helping, as well as more work on the part of retailers not to sell to minors.
But this does not provide an answer as to why Reno County is worse off than some other counties in Kansas.
One theory is that poverty rates may affect the trend because poverty is considered a high-risk factor for such behavior.
There is no easy answer, except to continue the efforts in place and do more research. The improving trend is nationwide as well as statewide.
There could be a key there to more answers. ...
In the meantime, school and substance abuse officials can congratulate themselves for the positive change.
But they must be ready to take the next step.

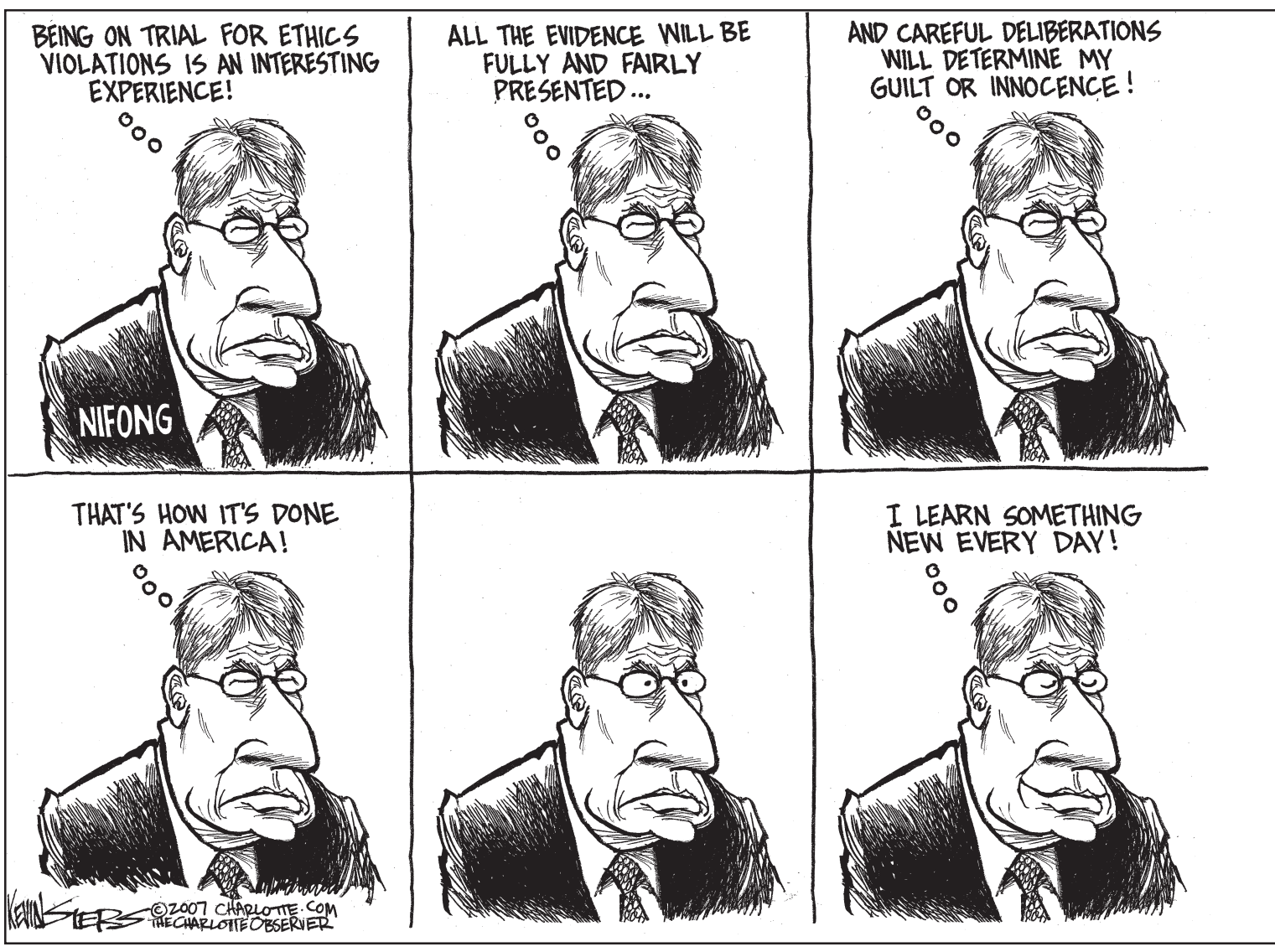
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Off to a good start



John Van Nostrand
• Line in the Dust

I don't hear it as much as I used to, but when I attended a banquet and someone received an award, they thanked their Little League baseball coach for the positive impact he made on his life.
You never know. What these kids learn this summer playing baseball may have big dividends when they are adults — and not just baseball skills either.
Today is the last day of the season for Colby Recreation Department's T-ball program. Both my kids played on the same team this year. Son, Grant, played last year. This was daughter Kari's rookie year.
I really like Colby Recreation Department's strategy with T-ball. Each player is given two easy pitches from their coach to see if they can hit the ball. If not, they are then given the T to hit from.
I wish I would have had that when I played T-ball. I played in summer recreation baseball leagues through junior high.
I quit because I had a hard time hitting and knew it would be even harder during high school baseball.
Thanks to some practice pitches at home, both of my kids have had hits at T-ball games. Grant hit a neat one straight down the third-base line this year. Kari connected with one too. That's a great way to develop hand-eye coordination with little kids.
I know that because my kids' coach, Brad

Wildeman, asked me to pitch to the team during games this year.
Brad's wife, Amy, had her own hand-eye coordination lining up the kids when it was their turn to bat.
Those easy pitches and hits may be all it takes for kids to keep their enthusiasm in the game and to keep trying, trying and trying again.
Hitting, and baseball, is also a great way for kids to connect with success mentally. At younger ages, playing team sports can be an ideal way for kids to learn about teamwork, social skills and knowing who is good at what. That sounds like pretty deep stuff for 10-year old kids to comprehend, but in their own special ways, kids pick up on those personality traits.
All of that can be the foundation for what they use during the teenage, and eventual working years, as they develop interests and careers.
Sometimes, Little League coaches won't forget who their players were. I met one of my Little

League coaches in a surprising way years after I put away the bat and glove.
During high school, I asked a girl who was in my Spanish class out for a date. She was a year younger than me. When I went to her house to pick her up, her dad — my little league coach — answered the door. He knew who I was before I realized who he was.
After some small talk, my date and I were out the door. And like my hitting skills, the relationship soon struck out.
When I was a kid, my neighbor once coached his son's Little League team. I've told this story before. His son is older than me.
My neighbor told me, one season he told the entire team they would clean up the field and bleachers after the game as a way to thank and respect the people and sponsors supporting the baseball program.
A mother of another player approached my neighbor after one season and thanked him for instilling some maturity and respect into her son. She said he needed that. The kid had a hit — and it did not involve a bat and a ball.
I thank Brad, Amy and all the other coaches of Colby's recreational baseball teams this year for their time, effort and interest in our children.
I hope an audience hears your name one day too.
— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

It's all Greek



Jay Kelley
• Speaking my mind

Editor's note: Colby Church of Christ preacher Jay Kelley is spending a month in Athens, Greece, on a Christian teaching mission.
As I write this morning, I'm watching a freighter enter the Bay of Athens, looking out over the city from the home office I'm borrowing from the Dean of the Athens International Bible Institute in Athens, Greece. I will be here for the next month as a visiting instructor.
I arrived on Thursday morning after a relatively painless trip. I say relatively because my middle-aged joints didn't like sleeping on the plane or in Heathrow International in London nearly as much as they did 20 years ago.
School starts Sunday with a public speaking class before services, which are in the evening. Most of the students (and all of my students) speak English as a second language, so I won't need a translator. I have two more classes as well: The Distinctive Nature of the Church and the Minor Prophets. They will be done in four sessions of nine hours each over the next month, so that our students, many of whom are immigrants to Greece, can provide for their living the rest of the week.
One thing that has amazed me is that, while technology has changed, many things haven't. The money changers on the street corner have been replaced by ATM machines and credit/debit cards and the styles have changed (there's more denim than before,) but it hasn't taken me long to acclimatize to a foreign country again.
It has been about 20 years since I was last over-

seas and more than that for Mediterranean Europe, but seven years of sea duty apparently served me well. Crazy traffic, foreign money and unfamiliar surroundings haven't been all that bad so far.
Of course the real test will come next week. Right now I'm staying with Ron and Diane Kret. Ron is the dean of the school and is showing me around.
After next week, the visiting instructor's apartment will be open and I will have to find my own way to school. Fortunately, the trams and bus instructions are in English as well as Greek.
I've already had a chance to do some sight-seeing as well. Friday, Ron and I took the train to Corinth, where one of the Athens congregations was holding a retreat. The hotel in which they were staying was great, though we only stayed for the day.
Before we left, one of the ministers for the church, Dino Russo, took us on a tour of ancient Corinth. He is also a licensed tour guide, so it was very informative. There were also some

short-term workers from Smyrna, Tenn., and some college students from York, Neb., there as well.
We went to the ruins of Cencrea, which hasn't been excavated nearly as much as Corinth. We couldn't, however, find the barber shop (Bible students will understand.)
During the train ride, we were able to see the harbor of Salamis, where the combined navies of the Greek city states under Themistocles defeated a much larger Persian force in 480 B.C.
I'm hoping to get to some other places as well, but I'm here to work, so I won't go everywhere I'd like.
The sights of Athens, Marathon and perhaps a visit to the shores of Salamis are definitely possible.
Right now, high temperatures are in the 100s with no relief expected until late next week. Air conditioning is limited or non-existent, so one learns to suffer companionably. Large windows, fans and cool sea breezes make evenings bearable.
Modern Greek culture is fascinating as well. Every Greek is a philosopher and mythology is taken as seriously as history, so fact and fiction are sometimes difficult to separate. Dino, our guide, told me, "If you have two Greeks, you have three opinions."
There will be more to come — stay tuned
Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

