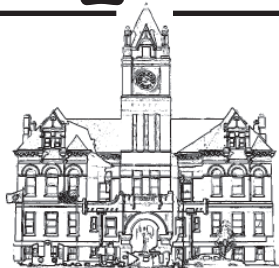


Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

No smoking Kansas

From The Kansas City Star

A statewide ban is the best way to protect Kansans from the harmful effects of smoking in public places.

The Legislature must provide leadership on this issue. It should either approve a comprehensive smoke-free law or give voters the opportunity this November to endorse such a law.

A 2007 poll found that 71 percent of residents supported a statewide ban, which should make this an easier call for legislators.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius backs that kind of law, as does the Kansas Health Policy Authority, a group that recently studied the most effective ways to improve the health of residents.

However, some recalcitrant state legislators are trying to derail a statewide ban.

One less-than-ideal idea recently surfaced: Give voters in each county the right to decide how they want to handle smoking in public places, including restaurants and bars.

That tactic flies in the face of how an increasing number of states are proactively working to curtail smoking.

Already, 13 states have comprehensive laws that apply to places of work, restaurants and bars.

An additional dozen have statewide laws that fall short of being that tough although they cover smoking in most public places.

And some of those latter states — such as Utah and Montana — recently have agreed to make their laws tougher in the near future to cover more workplaces such as bars.

The only option less effective than county-by-county elections is what Kansas has now: a patchwork of cities that have acted on their own to outlaw smoking in public places.

Kansans deserve a statewide ban that's either approved by the Legislature or put to a statewide vote.

Where to write, call

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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, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

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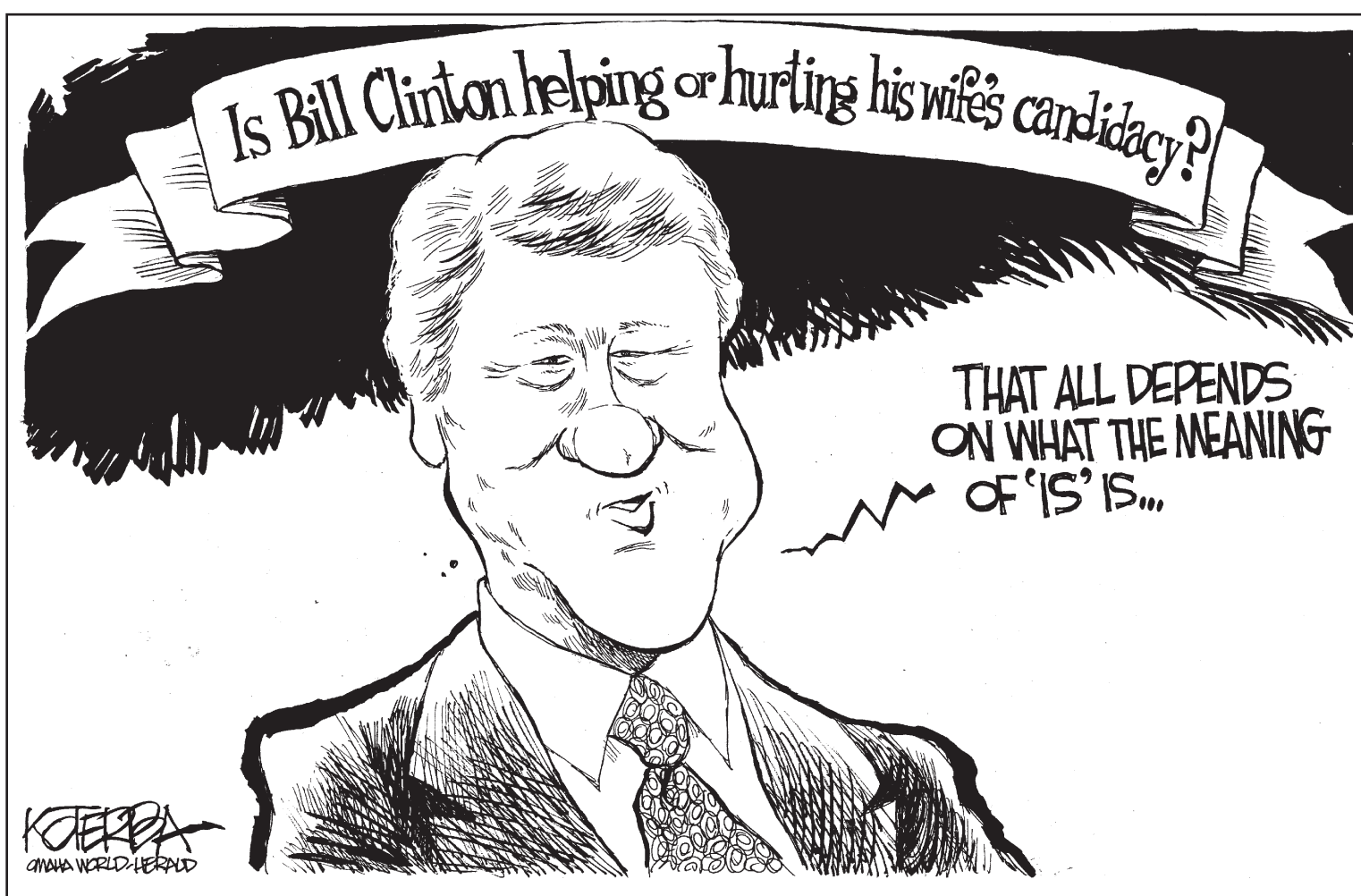
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Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.



What you give up may help others

Goodbye waist-increasing Oreos?

Goodbye time-wasting video games with my kids?

Today is Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, which eventually takes us to Easter. For years and years people have decided to give up something during Easter. I've done that in the past. Lent represents the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert facing the temptations from the Devil.

I think the timing of Lent is intriguing. This year, Lent starts in early February, just a little more than a month into the new year. By this time, many of those new year resolutions may have been tossed by the wayside. Lent may give people a second chance to try again. After another 40 days, the resolution may become habit.

But resolutions and whatever is decided for Lent, does not just have to be a sacrifice. It is also a time to consider taking something on to be a better person. Again, the timing of this is interesting.

The Thomas County Community Foundation is promoting a "Random Acts of Kindness Week" during the week of Valentine's Day, Feb. 10-16.

According to their press release, residents, businesses, individuals and non-profit organizations are asked to perform small charitable deeds for fellow citizens," said Melinda Olson, executive director of the foundation.

"We are striving for 100 percent Thomas County participation," she said. Examples of



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

random acts of kindness could be to host a 'customer appreciation day,' give employees an extra break, longer lunch hour or let them leave early, compliment every person that walks in the door, let somebody go in front of you at the store checkout, or write a note of appreciation to co-workers."

Very tempting, Melinda. But so is playing an hour or so of Pac-Man, the mother of all video games.

Random Acts of Kindness Week is a great idea. There are good things done around here all the time, but it is good to know somebody is making sure those good things will continue to be done. Sure, the recipient of the good deed gets something, but the good deeds go much more deeper than that. Those kind of moments give Thomas County an even better reputation.

Even though the random acts of kindness week is not until next week, there's no reason not to start now. Deeds don't have to end Feb. 16 either. Maybe a person shoveled someone else's snow of their sidewalk late Tuesday.

Maybe another person went to the store for another to pick up some necessities so they wouldn't have to get out in the snow.

I'm reminded to do the good things that people have done for me. Years ago, while driving along a rough, mountain road to get a good view of the scenery, I got the car stuck. The car was really not intended for such roads, but I took the risk anyway. Another man, driving a Texas-sized pickup with a tow rope drove by and noticed my predicament. Without question, he helped me get my car out.

Months later, I left early to go work. While driving through a residential neighborhood, I noticed a man trying to push a car out of the street. In a blink of an eye, I remember the man on the mountain road. I stopped and asked the car owner what he needed. He said he was on his way home and his car finally quit. It had been giving him trouble. He said all he wanted was to get his car in his driveway, which we could see. I carefully matched up my car's front bumper to his and I slowly pushed his car home as he steered.

I never got the man's name or ever learned what happened to his car. I just wonder if he helped someone else in a similar situation.

Thomas County Foundation's random act of kindness week is a splendid idea for all to participate and take to heart.

I just hope someone doesn't offer me Oreos.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

A truckload of concern

Kansas Corporation Commission put in force a new program in January 2006 specifically aimed at regulating Kansas farm vehicles (namely large trucks) used to transport crops.

With this in mind, grain transported by the producer during harvest to the local elevator or feedlot that is processed or consumed in Kansas is considered intrastate commerce and meets K.S.A. 66-1, 129 (1) exemption which allows the farmer to tag that truck and use it "not for hire."

Keep in mind this exemption applies only to the first time that grain is hauled to the bin, elevator, or feedlot. If and when a farmer hauls that same grain back out of the bin, elevator, or feedlot, that falls under the interstate rules, and must be hauled in a truck properly tagged under FCC regulation.

This is a concern for me as I know many family farms that utilize semi-trucks to haul their binned corn to feedlots during the winter.

In the next week I plan to meet with Kansas DOT Secretary Deb Miller, Kansas Corporation Commission, and US Congressman Jerry Moran to encourage them to extend the deadline on this new regulation and have US Congress readdress this issue. We all agree that the safety of all large vehicles is of utmost importance, but this new law seems a bit harsh considering it will negatively impact most family farms.



Ralph Ostmeyer

• Senator 40th Dist.

Keep in mind these farmers do not truck 365 days a year. There will be meetings scheduled throughout Kansas focusing on this issue, and I really encourage all farmers to attend. You really need to voice your concerns in hopes that we can work towards some sort of compromise.

Please feel free to contact me on this issue so I know your thoughts, as well.

I have been appointed to a special Sub-committee to study virtual schools in K-12 education. Virtual school attendance by Kansas students has increased from around 60 students during the 1998-1999 school year to over 2000 students in 2007.

There is concern that virtual school students are not getting enough hours of instruction compared to their public and private school peers.

The committee wants to know:

1.) How many virtual schools are actually operating in Kansas?

2.) What requirements are being enforced by the Kansas Department of Education for all virtual programs?

3.) Any discrepancies in the costs of the different programs. The focus of the committee will be to ensure a consistent level of quality for students utilizing a virtual school program.

The Senate caucused this week to discuss SB - 515, the Sunflower Electric bill. We will begin hearings next week and my hope is that there is enough compromise in this bill to satisfy all groups.

With the many important issues facing the state I feel we need to resolve this issue immediately and move on. The proposed Holcomb plant is no doubt the cleanest and most modern and safe plant in the nation, if not the world.

This affects five utility cooperatives in my district alone, and without compromise it will have a negative impact on the rising costs of Kansas power.

I recognize that my constituents are really busy. Please keep in mind that I need your continued support and feedback on these issues.

Senator Ralph Ostmeyer
40th District
Mary Rowson
Secretary for Senator Ostmeyer
785-296-7399

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

