

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### It's how much?

Lynn Jenkins, CPA

Kansas State Treasurer

Consider this: the AAA reported for the last week of May the average price for a regular gallon of gas in Kansas cost \$3.87. Yes, you read that correctly - \$3.87! I remember the "good ol' days" when a gallon of gas cost less than \$1 and a full tank cost less than \$20! Thinking back on those days, I had no idea how good we had it!

The Labor Department estimates that gasoline accounts for only 4 percent of household spending. As we all are discovering - the 4 percent we have set aside for transporting our kids to school or day care, ourselves to work, and enjoying regular family outings is NOT going as far as it used to.

Many folks I've spoken with recently are wondering how they can continue to meet their basic needs when gasoline prices are so high. The price of fuel has a "multiple effect." Increased gas prices impact the cost of groceries, retail prices, transportation costs and even utility prices. Unfortunately, there isn't a simple solution to lower the price of oil. To financially cope, a combination of measures needs to be implemented from energy conservation, private business development and government involvement.

The U.S. department of Energy offers tips on ways to reduce the amount of gasoline you use. Visit [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov) for a full list. However, some of the tips include driving sensibly, not aggressively; removing excess weight from your vehicle; avoiding excessive idling; maintaining proper tire inflation; changing your car's air filter; and even trading your current vehicle in on a more fuel-efficient vehicle.

Recently, a Kansan was sharing with me her success with conservation. Each day she drives at least 66 miles to get from home to work and back - putting a total of at least 330 miles on her car during an average work week. With simple measures she has managed to get one more 66-mile trip out of her gas tank. Most importantly, she slowed down. She now sets her cruise control from 60 to 65. She doesn't speed "off the line" at stop lights anymore and puts the car in neutral when going down hills and approaching stop lights. Now, she drives smarter by combining errands and not making unnecessary trips. Over a month's time she has saved herself an entire tank of gas, which equals approximately \$45, or \$540 a year!

Because of rising airline prices or gasoline, many of you have cancelled summer vacation plans or have plans to stay within the state. Find other creative ways to cut back or save money. For instance, if you are going to take a summer vacation or even a day trip, throw a cooler in the back of the car. Fill it with sandwiches, water, fruit, and other healthy snacks. You'll save money by not stopping at fast-food restaurants and you'll feel healthier!

It's going to be a long, hot Kansas summer, but hopefully with a few "belt tightening" methods, your family can still enjoy themselves and spend quality time together despite the rising fuel costs. As always, have a safe and enjoyable summer with family and friends!

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## COLBY FREE PRESS

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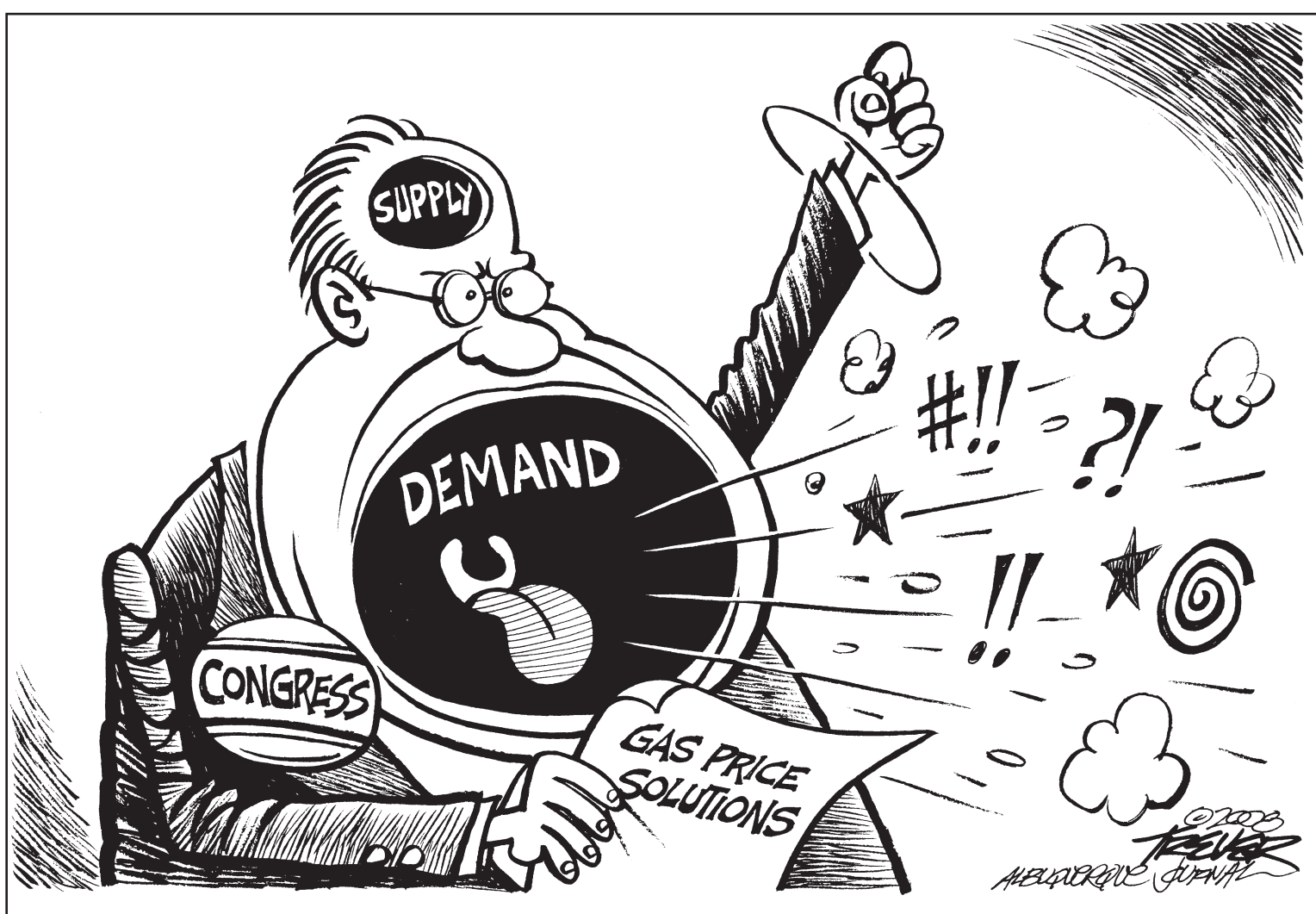
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## For the good of the cause



**John Van Nostrand**

### • Line in the Dust

Tuesday, the Republicans killed the Democrats' idea of taxing the oil companies' profits as a possible way to reduce the cost of gasoline. Republicans feared the taxes would do the opposite - increase gasoline prices even more.

That situation complements the issue and finger-pointing we've heard for years now. Every so often some oil company will announce some bajillion dollar profit over a certain amount of time. The people who put the nearly \$4 gasoline in their car plead and beg, and maybe with a hint of anger, to lower the price by giving back some of the profit. But giving up power and money, in cases like this, is really not the American way.

I'm not defending the oil companies and their business practices, but what they are doing is the American way. They have a product that is in demand. They profit because of the demand. In principle, it's no different than selling jeans to teenage kids or advertising space in newspapers.

I do want to defend the oil companies this way, though. Some people have thought a better way to boost the economy is have the oil companies lower the cost of gasoline at least \$1 a gallon. That way more people may be more motivated to take the vacation, which would result in money being spent at hotels, restaurants and tourist attractions. (If you are going to a tourist attraction, I highly recommend Stone Mountain on the east side of Atlanta, Ga. Stay for the laser show at night. Trust me.)

But why just put the oil companies in this arena? Why not ask doctors to lower their office visits which would encourage more people to go to the doctor and have more consumable cash? Cost is a strong reason why people avoid doctors, even when health care is needed. Why not ask hospitals to lower cost of services?

Why not ask UPS or FedEx to lower their fees so people and businesses could spend and

send more? Why not ask cable TV companies to lower subscription fees so more people can watch and maybe spend more by what they see on the commercials. You get the idea.

Before we ask the major corporations and their stockholders (who really make the decisions) to make a sacrifice for the good of the cause, maybe us, as consumers, have not done enough, first.

These days remind me of the Amana Colonies located in eastern Iowa. During its time, from 1855 to 1932, the Amana Colonies were a large group of Germans who chose to live in a commune. What that meant is everybody produced, used and owned everything for the colonies. Don't confuse it with Communism. That's a little different. The people in the Amana Colonies still had a level of accountability. The colonies were as strong as the weakest person. No one was forced to stay and live there.

Fast forward to 2008 and I'm not quite sure what a present-day Amana Colony would look like in Colby, but I've got an idea.

In a typical residential block, rather than there be at least two vehicles at every house, there might just be a determined number of vehicles for everybody in the block. One would have to be a large-passenger van as people would carpool to work. The other vehicle would probably be a full-size pickup. Schedules would have to be made when to go to the stores, kids' school events and who gets to drive to those things.

People wouldn't be saving and spending money for their own vehicle. That money would be saved and spent on the community vehicles' needs when approved. We would be giving up our personal choices, but get to know ourselves, and our neighbors, on a much deeper level.

Multiple, adjacent backyards would have to be sacrificed to create massive, diverse gardens that, again, everybody helps with growing and maintaining. Rather than spend all food money on traditional groceries, some of the money saved because of the garden would be intended for purchasing whatever is needed to maintain each other's houses. You wouldn't need to call the plumber or carpenter - you learn how to do those things. During the Amana Colonies era, only a select few students were sent to college to learn how to teach or be doctors and other professional skills.

The Amana Colonies were not immune to the rest of society or the world. Historians claim the troubles the country had during the Great Depression also impacted the colonies. The products the colonists made, from wool clothes to beer, were sold outside the colonies. Amana products were top-of-the-line.

At the same time the country was in the economic dumps, the colonists showed they were really no different than anybody else in the states. Some strived for their own individual goals. The colonies eventually ended their way of life.

We can yell all we want at the oil companies for their titanic-sized profits. General Motors can shop for a buyer for their gas-guzzling Hummer line. We can pay surcharges on items delivered to our front doors, but until we show this so-called global economy we are serious about making some serious changes in our daily routines and lifestyles, like the colonists did, don't expect the American way to change.

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

## Disappointment

By Chairman Robert T. Stephan

Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board

Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius' Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board is concerned that perpetrators of domestic violence may evade being known because the act is a part of a crime charged that has no apparent connection to domestic violence.

For two years the board researched the above concern and prepared proposed legislation to provide a domestic violence designation. House Bill No. 2910 was the vehicle to bring this needed cause into law.

Under the proposal, any crime committed where the underlying factual basis is an intimate relationship, there would be a domestic

violence tag noted on the arrest face sheet and all subsequent legal documents through disposition.

As an example: boyfriend and girlfriend have an argument and he smashes the windshield on her car. Under current law he may be charged with criminal damage to property. But, under proposed legislation the charge would be criminal damage to property with a domestic violence tag.

The domestic violence tag will require courts to order a domestic violence offender assessment and complete all recommendations. The court may order the assessment prior to sentencing to assist the court in determining a sentence, if it deems necessary.

A person charged with committing a crime, the underlying factual basis of which includes

an act of domestic violence is not allowed to plead guilty to an offense that does not include the domestic violence designation.

Any sentence that is imposed upon a person for violation of any criminal law that includes the domestic violence designation shall be ordered to undergo a domestic violence evaluation and complete all recommendations.

It is the belief of the review board that the intervention will result in positive changes in many domestic violence perpetrators.

Unfortunately, House Bill 2910 did not even get a legislative hearing. Maybe next year - but still a disappointment.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or know someone who is, call (888)-END ABUSE (1-888-363-2287) to find resources for help.

### 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

