

Opinion



Another Viewpoint

New website will help voters

At long last, the residents of Kansas will have the information they need to pass judgment on the magistrates and justices who sit on Kansas courtroom benches.

Starting Aug. 29, the state Commission on Judicial Performance will unveil a Web site, www.kansasjudicialperformance.org, that will contain evaluations and grades for many of the state's judges.

A 13-member commission appointed by the Kansas Judicial Council — a group including at least six non-lawyer members — will evaluate the state's judges, using surveys completed by people who have had professional experience with those judges.

The information is as useful in judicial districts in which judges are appointed as in those districts with partisan elections. In districts where there are retention questions for district judges, plus the State Court of Appeals and Supreme Court, voters often have no information to make an informed decision. There's usually no campaign at all.

A retention question on the ballot doesn't include any information about the judges' rulings, his or her bench-side manner or how he treats witnesses and clerks in the courtroom.

But the ratings will contain that information — much of it gathered confidentially from firsthand observers and compiled by an independent firm. Eventually, the ratings will include information about all 236 trial judges and the senior judges who work part-time.

The new surveys are the result of a bill passed in 2006, which established authority for the commission and issuance of a Kansas Judicial Report Card.

This information is vital for Kansas voters who want to make informed decisions about the people they vote into or retain in office. It never has been enough simply to ask whether someone should keep his or her job.

This information, while not comprehensive, at least will give voters some information before they head to the polls. — *The Hutchinson News*

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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, Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwks.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwks.com

Jan Ackerman - Reporter
jackerman@gmail.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
j.stewart@nwks.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales
hwoofter@nwks.com

Steifon Matthews - Graphic Design
smatthews@nwks.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping
japplegate@nwks.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwks.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Becky Foster, Jim Jackson, Kris McCool, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Cheryl Holub, and Amanda Campbell

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Defending the standard a good idea

It's important. It serves a vital purpose. It provides substantial economic benefits.

It's the federal renewable fuels standard. And now, thanks to an Environmental Protection Agency decision, implementation of the standards will continue as adopted in the Energy Policy Act of 2007.

This decision ensures consumers will continue to benefit from an expanding supply of domestically produced renewable fuel, which is helping to lower gasoline prices.

Those savings at the pump are considerable — as much as \$500 per year for the average family, according to estimates by Merrill Lynch, Iowa State University and others.

The Aug. 7 decision is an important win for American consumers.

People are justifiably focused on pocket-book concerns in today's economy. Ethanol is one of the few things helping families save money.

For months, opponents of ethanol have been telling those foolish enough to listen this renewable fuel is responsible for high food prices.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry led the charge by arguing the federal mandate — now mostly met by ethanol made from corn — was raising the price of livestock feed and otherwise upping prices at the grocery.

Perry demanded the Environmental Protec-

tion Agency do something.

The agency did something, all right. It denied the Texas governor's request. Texas had requested a 50 percent waiver of the national volume requirements for the renewable fuels standard.

As a result, the renewable fuels standard stands pat. The target for 2008 is nine billion gallons of renewable fuels, including ethanol and biodiesel. That goes to 11.1 billion gallons in 2009 and 36 billion gallons in 2022.

Following extensive analysis, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson said the Texas request had not shown the standard is causing "severe economic harm," which is the legal requirement for suspending it.

To the contrary, Johnson argued, the law is "strengthening our nation's energy security and supporting America's farming communities."

And this federal mandate can in no way be considered heavy handed. While nine billion gallons of biofuels a year may sound like a huge amount, it's only 3 percent of the 300 billion gallons of oil the United States burns each year.

There is no doubt prices for farm high commodity are having some economic impact, but it's far less than food processors would lead you to believe.

Today, wheat sells for around \$7.50 a bushel in Kansas. A bushel weighs 60 pounds, enough to bake about 60 loaves of bread.

That means the Kansas wheat farmer received 12 cents for the loaf of bread that cost you \$3. The rest goes to the middlemen for baking, milling, labor, transportation, packaging advertising, taxes and finally, profit.

If you want to single out the main culprit behind higher food prices, I don't think anyone would be surprised — it's higher oil costs.

Most Kansans support the EPA decision to continue using alternative fuel sources such as ethanol. This strategy will lessen our dependence on imported oil.

The agency made the right call on this one. This nation's farmers have long, and strongly, supported renewables, including but not limited to ethanol.

The renewable fuels standard was good policy when it passed in Congress, and it's just as good today.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

The plot thickens

The political scene gets more interesting every day. I was bitterly disappointed with the news on John Edwards.

However, McCain's infidelity, although long past, should be a warning signal as to his idealistic moral approach to life. We all have contradictions between our lifestyles and our professed piety. When scrutinized by the political strategists, we are all, most likely, dwelling in glass houses.

I am a little concerned with McCain's, pragmatic punch you in the nose, attitude that brings short quick answers and solutions to all questions about his stand on issues. (Too much like Bush and you all know where I stand there.)

I much prefer Obama's nuances and thoughtful approach that indicates he is open to consideration of other approaches and toleration of the diversity of modern cultural changes and standards.

He seems to be willing to state where he personally stands on most of the given issues, but doesn't declare that to be the only

Letter Drop

Our Readers Sound Off

stand a Christian and democratic society can or should support. He hasn't made any brash promises of specific changes, which indicates to me he is well aware of his limitations to deliver without the cooperation and support of the total system of our government.

We have a democratic republic form of government. That does not allow dictatorial power of any single branch of our governing system, nor does it allow any perceived majority in society to trample on the freedoms and rights of a minority.

Let's not abandon the principles stated in the Preamble and Bill of Rights (first ten

amendments) that are protected by our Constitution.

Obama appears to me to be more willing to accept the cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity of our great nation.

That diversity has served us well, for over two hundred years.

No, he is not the 'great messiah'! But, his charismatic inspiring messages are a breath of fresh air that can replace the stale and belligerent message and attitude of our present administration.

Ken Poland
Gem

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

