

Opinion



**Free Press
Viewpoint**

Why do drunks keep on driving?

If keeping drunks from driving were as simple as passing a law, Kansas' highways and streets would be drunk-free by now.

But the horrific crash last week in Wichita that killed Claudia Mijares and her 4-year-old daughter Gisele should compel legislators to try again next session to deal more effectively with people repeatedly convicted of driving under the influence.

Many were rightly outraged to learn that Gary Hammitt had a valid and unrestricted driver's license when he allegedly struck the mother and preschooler near Gardiner Elementary School, despite his four DUI convictions dating from 1979 through 2003 and other history of crimes and parole violations.

Under current state law, Hammitt's conviction on a fifth DUI would earn a permanent revocation of his driving privileges. But why should it take five strikes until a drunken driver is out of a license? Why not four strikes? Or three?

Now, Hammitt has been charged not only with a fifth DUI but with two counts of second-degree murder, one count of aggravated battery and one count of reckless driving....

Expert lawmakers also to reconsider stepping up the consequences of being caught driving drunk even once, perhaps with a minimum 96 hours in jail rather than the current 48 — though that idea carries with it a high cost in additional beds for overcrowded local jails.

Should Kansas join the states newly requiring a first-time offender to pay to have a mandatory ignition interlock device installed in his car?

Is the maximum fine of \$2,500 high enough to work as a deterrent?

And shouldn't Kansas also afford repeat DUI offenders the addiction treatment necessary to end their self-destruction for good? ...

— *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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MEANWHILE, FAR FROM WALL STREET AND MAIN STREET...

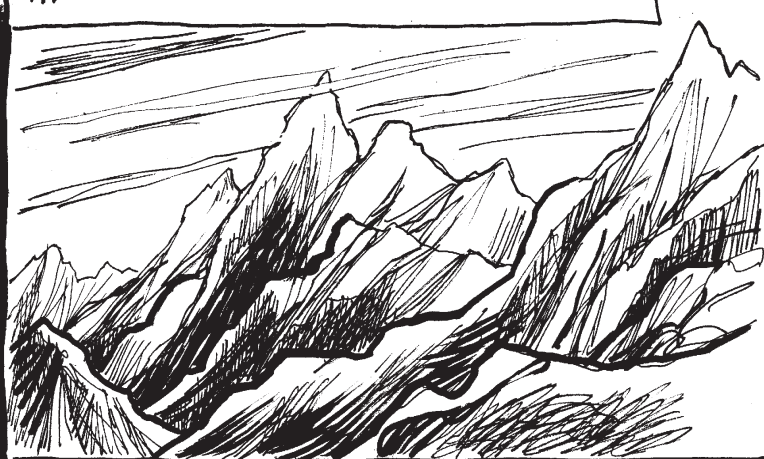


IN A DEEP, DARK CAVE...



SMALL WORLD HERALD KOEBA

SOMEWHERE IN THE MOUNTAINS ALONG THE BORDER OF PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN...



THE WAY THEY ARE WREAKING HAVOC ON THEMSELVES, THEY ARE BEATING US AT OUR OWN GAME!

STILL, IT IS GOOD... ALTHOUGH I DO MISS ALL THE ATTENTION.



Girls' bond larger than friendship

Nine of us girls from my dorm section had a retreat this past weekend, and yes, it seems that we have a lot of retreats to me, too.

We traveled about an hour to one of the girl's houses to spend the night and to do some bonding activities, because that's what we do on retreats.

The main activity of the night consisted of flipping through magazines and cutting out words, phrases and pictures that described us individually. Some of mine included the phrase, "My Dad, My Hero," a box of chocolates, the word "Writer" in cursive, pencil lettering and two quarter-sized pink dots. We then glued each piece to a large mirror. In the end, we had created a colorful collage of words and random pictures.

But, there's more to it than that. The collage symbolized the unity we have as a dorm section. Even though each of us is different and offers various things to the group, there is unity in our hall. There has to be. We all have come in from diverse backgrounds with a variety of dreams and expectations. Some of us are quiet and introverted while others add their outspoken behavior to the mix. And that's OK. How boring would it be if we were all the same?

It reminds me of music. When we feel like singing, most of us sing the melody. Someone who has the talent of singing can make a song sound beautiful all on their own. But how



Michelle Myers

• A Moment with Michelle

much more beautiful would it be if the singer added another voice to sing harmony? Or even more so, a choir would sound much more angelic if it included four-part harmony instead of 100 voices singing the same notes.

If the singers are not unified, the song will be a disaster. The beauty of harmony is that it does not collide with the melody when there is unity. It enhances it, giving a silver lining to something that is already beautiful.

My roommate and I are a perfect example. While we both are comfortable being quiet, I'm very girly and she is — well, not. I like going to bed early and she is usually up for hours after I've gone to sleep. She spends all of her time studying outside while I prefer coffee shops or the library. I grew up on a farm; she grew up moving around while her dad was in the military.

Yet, among all these differences, we get along really well. In fact, we have a lot of fun together. We like going to Taco Bell late at

night to take a break from homework or waste time by going to coffee together. The time we went to a store in search of a hula hoop for our friend's birthday was especially entertaining for both of us. And I always like volunteering her as my "model" for my photography class because she's open to all of the crazy ideas that I have.

As the semester progresses, I have developed a care for my roommate, the girls in my dorm section and the men in my "brother" section. That's where unity begins. At the base of unity is a care for each other.

But we can't forget that part of being unified requires us to be transparent (to an extent) with each other so we know how to serve each other. We won't know how to serve someone if we don't know them.

If we don't know a person's needs, desires, what makes them happy, what makes them cry, how will we know what to do? And like I've said before, we can't really serve someone if we don't love them.

"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." (Colossians 3:14)

Michelle Myers, a Colby native, is a student at Multnomah University in Portland, Ore., majoring in Bible and journalism. She enjoys the 32 Starbucks found within five miles of her campus.

Hold on, but plug the holes in the boat

In spite of numerous bailouts by Washington and the massive infusion of capital — nearly \$1 trillion — to Wall Street, conditions remain far from rosy.

If you listen to economic experts, the infusion was necessary to keep many of the larger banking and insurance institutions from collapsing. They say this rescue helped prevent a ripple effect and many additional failures.

So what do we make of the continuing struggle on Wall Street and the continuing decrease in commodities?

The current situation gives us a glimpse of the dire situation in the global economy, along with our own U.S. economy. Economic experts say all signs point to a rough ride for some time until the credit markets crank up again.

Only this time, the economy is going to continue to suffer, and while the economy suffers, this means lower commodity prices and lower prices on Wall Street.

"This shows just how bad the current situation is," says veteran banker John Thaemert of Citizens State Bank and Trust Co. in Ellsworth. "It's common to hear people say this was a bailout for bad deeds done on Wall Street, but there's enough blame to go around for everyone."

Whether U.S. citizens like it or not, we're all connected to the financial system. And with credit still locked up, this situation must be corrected and this nation's and the world's confidence restored.

"What we're seeing today is the fear factor ... and it's continuing to grow," Thaemert



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

says.

The 52-year-old banker also farms in Lincoln County, where he was born and raised. He started farming in '74 and has been in the financial business for 22 years.

In spite of the credit crisis and the bludgeoning on Wall Street, Thaemert said he believes the rural economy and banks in Kansas remain on solid footing. For many farmers, the last two years have been good for them, their communities and Kansas in general.

"Our loans are solid and our customers are in good shape," the Ellsworth banker says. "That said, some small businesses are getting messages from their product providers that they may have different terms to deal with as a result of this economic crisis."

For example, with the tightening of credit, a seed dealer may no longer have 30 days to pay for a seed order. It may be cut to 15 days, or the wholesaler may ask for cash in advance.

"Even though some businesses have a long history of doing business with a vendor, they may soon have to come up with letters of credit from the bank," Thaemert says. "This in essence means securing a loan up front that as-

signs money to the vendor and says the bank will guarantee the funds."

The Ellsworth banker acknowledges there are hints of this on Main Street in his community and others across Kansas. It's not rampant or an unnerving situation, he said, but everyone knows emotions move markets more than anything.

"In this instance, we in the heartland are on an island of prosperity," he says. "We're looking at the coasts, and they are trying to get to higher ground."

Today, with Wall Street in crisis and commodity prices tumbling to nearly half of their earlier highs, people remain cautious and concerned.

This is not a good time to sell grains or oilseeds, Thaemert says, and cattle prices have been hammered. He urges his customers not to be driven by emotion.

This is hard to do in these times, but hang in there. This too shall pass.

It's crucial this country's economy starts moving in the right direction. This will take time — months, maybe even years.

But we should do everything possible to prevent the crisis on Wall Street from becoming a crisis on Main Street.

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

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

