

# Opinion



## Other Viewpoints

### Turnpike Authority just keeps going...

It's one of those things that happen on a regular basis in Kansas, like the roads filling up with combines and tractors during the planting and harvest seasons.

Every now and then, a lawmaker makes a push for the state government to take over all or part of the turnpike.

And unfailingly, the Kansas Turnpike Authority rebuffs the proposal and goes right on its merry way.

This year's version of the turnpike takeover plan comes from Rep. Bill Feuerborn, D-Garnett, who introduced a proposal to abolish the authority's powers and shift the organization's functions to the Department of Transportation.

No doubt, the move would make a dent in the \$1 billion budget deficit the state is facing next year. The turnpike generated \$79 million in tolls during 2007, and Feuerborn surely isn't the only Kansan who'd like to see some or all of that revenue being pumped into state coffers to reduce the burden on taxpayers.

But just as surely, history suggests Feuerborn will face a steep climb — maybe an impossible one — in trying to tap into the turnpike's millions.

The KTA has turned back numerous attempts to make inroads into its operations. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius is among those who have tried and failed, as she made a bid two years ago to raise turnpike tolls to pay for infrastructure improvements at state universities. Her proposal died after drawing opposition from the authority and over-the-road trucking interests....

The turnpike's supporters say the agency should be left alone because it provides a major asset in the state's highway system — a safe, well-maintained, 236-mile corridor that connects the state's three largest cities — efficiently and without using state tax dollars.

So why mess with a good thing? they ask.

For more than 50 years, lawmakers have failed come up with an answer compelling enough to spur a takeover.

True, the legislation that created the turnpike authority in the 1950s said the road could revert to state control, but the general attitude among lawmakers has been to leave well enough alone.

Of course, most years haven't been like this one in terms of the state's budget woes. So perhaps Feuerborn's proposal will gain traction where others have merely slid off to the ditch.

But considering how bulletproof the Turnpike has been through the years, lawmakers' time might be better spent looking for other avenues to resolve the budget crunch.

— the Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press

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## Civilization means supporting the weak

I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder during the spring of my sophomore year in high school. It turned my world upside down and sent me on a downward spiral that I wasn't sure I would ever recover from.

Instead of living each day to the fullest, I just tried to survive with a little bit of my sanity left intact. I was always on edge, worrying about things normal people would never worry about. My parents said I always had a "deer in the headlights" look on my face. Sometimes I didn't think I would ever get better.

Over the years I have learned how to cope with this disorder. It still causes me problems from time to time, but it doesn't prevent me from living my life. But obsessive-compulsive disorder is like a roller-coaster ride that you never get off of, and I'm always worried about having a setback when I least expect it.

But my struggles with this problem has left me ingrained with me a deep sympathy for anyone whose been dealt a bad card in life.

If my disorder has taught me one thing, its that rugged individualism and self-reliance are not the perfect antidotes for all the world's problems. There are times when people need help. I shudder to think what my life would be like if hadn't received the love and support of my parents and grandparents when I wasn't even well enough to attend school. All I know is it would not have gone well.

Whether people want to admit it or not, a



Andy Heintz

### Wildcat Ramblings

lot of what happens in our lives is due to luck. Some people are born into rich families, others into families that are dirt poor. Some people happen to be beautiful and other people don't get so lucky. Some of us our born into loving families and others into abusive families. Some are born with disorders or diseases and others are perfectly healthy.

I was lucky enough to be born into a loving middle class family who helped get me back on my feet when my life had come undone. But there are so many people out there who don't have anyone to lean on when they are faced with an obstacle that they cannot overcome alone. They are left to struggle with demons they are incapable of fighting off.

As a society we simply cannot allow this to happen. Every society or country in the world should be judged by how they treat their most vulnerable, not how they treat their most affluent. We fail as a country every time we neglect or ignore someone who desperately needs a helping hand.

It is easy to become immune to the suffering of others. We hear one horrible thing after another on the news. Many people just shrug their shoulders and thank their lucky stars that they have avoided the minefields that have left some of their fellow citizens drowning in a cesspool of despair. But we cannot let ourselves be desensitized to the struggle of our fellow human beings.

Whether its a wife being abused, a child in poverty, a schoolmate without any friends, a woman trying to recover from rape, a friend battling schizophrenia or a soldier trying to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, all these people need society's help to keep them from falling into the clutches of depression and hopelessness.

Life is short. We only get so many trips around the sun. People shouldn't spend their time on this earth miserable and alone.

American society needs to always extend a hand to those who can all too easily be forgotten in the midst of the hustle and bustle of everyday life. It's time for this country to create a truly inclusive society, where no ones life is left to shrivel away in the darkness.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

## Sebelius should decide about Washington

There is some evidence that Gov. Kathleen Sebelius would take the position as the new head of the Department of Health and Human Services if President Barack Obama names her to the post.

This comes after former Sen. Thomas Daschle had to remove himself from the nomination owing to failure to pay taxes on \$140,000 in compensation received from the use of a car and driver. Daschle's withdrawal led to the vetting of Sebelius. Action is expected soon, and as of Monday, at least, she was said to be at the top of the "short list."

If the governor takes the position in Washington — if indeed it is offered — it will come only one month after she swore to stay in Kansas to fix our budget problems, something she helped create in her stewardship of Kansas government. If she departs, the budget problems will be solved by the Legislature (which is doing the work anyway) and her successor, Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson. Some in the Legislature have said they would welcome her departure.

What would Sebelius bring to the table in Washington? What does she have to show for her efforts regarding health care in Kansas?

For one thing, she is an able bureaucrat, presiding over the creation of the massive, yet ineffective, health reform agency, the Kansas Health Policy Authority in 2006. The authority has been an advocate of expanded government health care and more Medicaid, both of which it may get from the recent stimulus package, which awaits congressional reconciliation. With a friend like her at Health, one may suspect the forces of government-run health care will expand their reach. Washington will dictate more to the states, which have been laboratories for reform — at least those states headed

### Gregory L. Schneider

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by governors amenable to reforms which aren't defined as bailouts from Congress.

But after four years of the authority, what has changed in Kansas health care? Not much. Medicaid is still a mess. The fiscal health of the government-funded health system in the state is helping to drag down the budget, and it will only get worse with the massive infusion of cash — some \$112 million coming from the stimulus.

There has been no substantial effort by the authority, and by extension, the governor, to address the fundamental problems in Kansas health care — including cost of care and continued inadequacies in the Medicaid system. Their major proposals last year, such as premium assistance and other reforms contained a Senate bill, were blocked by the Legislature. Their proposals this year — a smoking ban and tobacco taxes to pay for expanded health care spending, may not pass either.

Instead, Sebelius has discussed how vital it is for Kansas to get the money coming from the federal government. Kansas, she claims, needs it to expand Medicaid eligibility. Whether that is a wise idea given the fiscal straits the state and the nation are in at the moment, or whether it is sustainable for future generations, is beside the point. There is never any discussion of reforming Medicaid, or of helping move

people from government to private insurance.

If Sebelius gets the job, she will fit right in with the climate of big spending inside the Beltway, something she learned on the job here in Kansas. If it turns out she doesn't get the job, the Topeka-beltway government-health gravy train will roll on with the stimulus adding millions to the spending.

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