

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Roads would be safer with new laws

Budget crisis and all, Kansas is on track to become a safer state because of some surprising but welcome Statehouse action on bills relating to teen drivers and seat belts.

The good news so far: The House voted 103-16 last week for a three-tier graduated driver's licensing system for teens in Kansas, one that proponents in and out of the Senate likely can live with. Learner's permits and farm permits could still be obtained at age 14, but the learner's permit period would last a year, followed by a restricted license for 15-year-olds (unsupervised driving only to and from work or school) and six months of restrictions on a full license for 16-year-olds (no more than one nonsibling, minor passenger, and no driving after 9 p.m. except for school or work). New teen drivers also would be banned from using wireless communication devices behind the wheel, and would face tough 30-day to one-year license suspensions for violations of the law's driving limits. ...

Meanwhile, the Senate voted 23-17 to require seat belts for all vehicle occupants, not just those in the front seat, and to hike the fine to \$100 from the current \$30. One benefit of this long-sought "primary" seat-belt law — which would allow law enforcement to stop cars because of unbuckled occupants — is that its passage would entitle Kansas to \$11.2 million to \$13 million more in federal transportation aid it's been passing up until now.

Now, officials need to see these initiatives through to full legislative passage and onto the governor's desk. ...

Leaders also need to be cautious about risking public safety by potentially pricing students out of taking driver's education. Because of state budget cuts, for example, the Wichita district will now charge a student fee of \$216 for driver's ed, up from \$108. Other districts in the state are talking about more extreme measures, such as dropping driver's ed entirely.

While it's true that budget pain must be shared across the board, young drivers need the benefit not only of more supervised time behind the wheel and more restrictions but also affordable, accessible driver's ed.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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 or 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: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (7785) 296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963 Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Marj Brown, Vera Sloan - Society Editors
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
jstewart@nwkansas.com

Heather Wofter - Advertising Sales
hwofter@nwkansas.com

Tyler Zolinski - Graphic Design
tzolinski@nwkansas.com

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk
jestes@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Tammy Withers - Office Manager
twithers@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

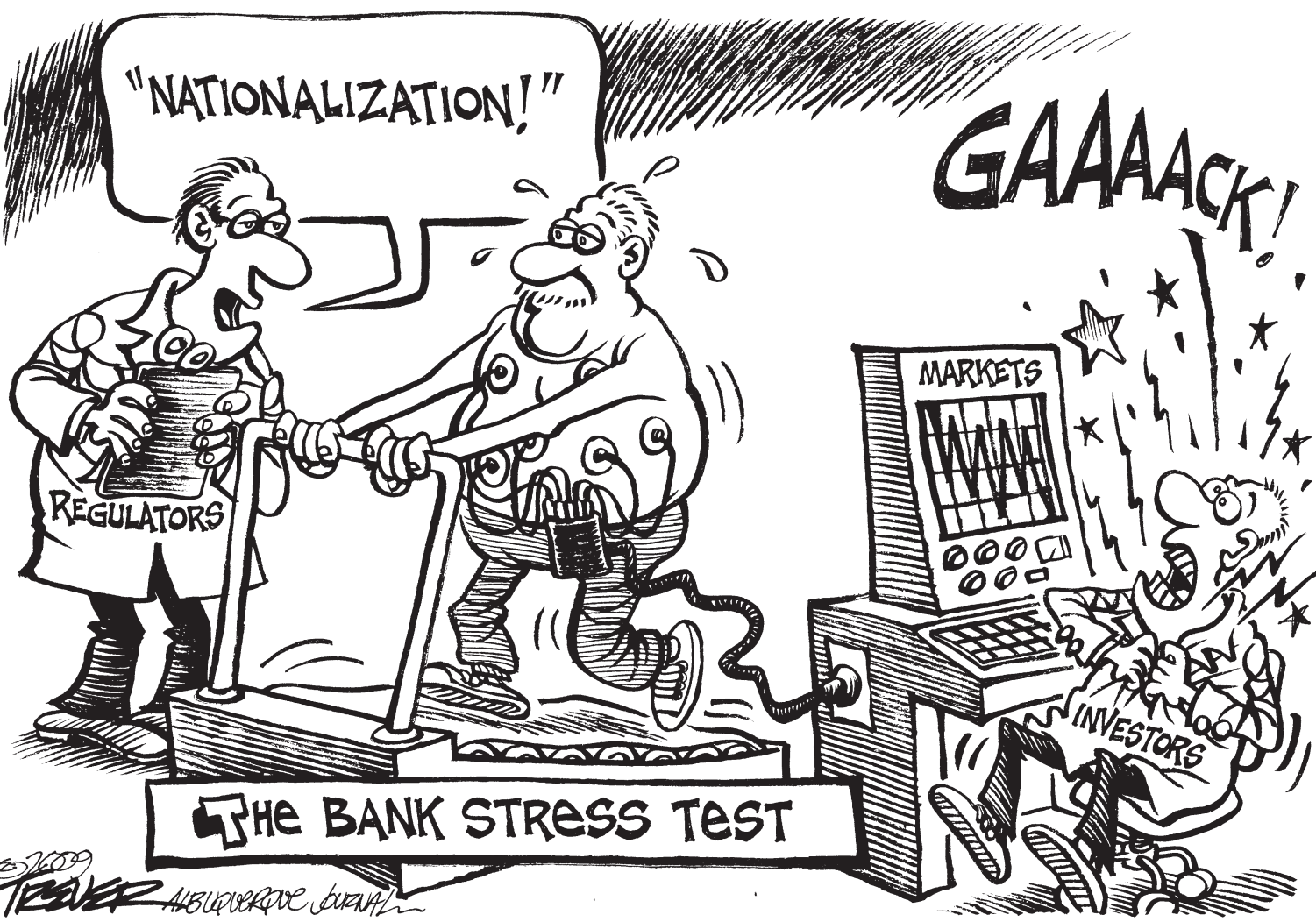
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Troops won't protect from foreign policy

It's time that politicians and the media quit playing a game of political football with American soldiers. They are people, not tools to be used to further some ideologue's self-absorbed, me-centered agenda.

The right and the left are equally guilty of knowingly and unknowingly using American troops to push their policies down the throats of the American public.

Many on the right use our troops as a shield to protect themselves from any criticism directed at U.S. foreign policy. If you criticize American foreign policy, be prepared to be labeled as anti-American or unpatriotic.

Bill O'Reilly will smear your reputation and true believers like Sean Hannity will rake you over the coals for having an opinion that differs from his own. This blustery rhetoric serves to silence alternative thought, prompting Americans to censor themselves. It's an anti-democratic way to crush freedom of speech.

Using the troops as a tool to demonize anyone who opposes an American war is a slap in the face to those of us who want to live in a participatory democracy where ideas can be freely exchanged and people can disagree with the government without having their reputations smeared.

There are plenty of past and present examples of why our government's foreign policy should be carefully scrutinized. The weapons of mass destruction in Iraq were never found, the military budget is gigantic, torture has been used by both the Army and the Central Intelligence Agency, many of our troops have received inadequate treatment when they have returned home with physical and mental scars that may never fully heal, and Halliburton has



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

behaved in a shady manner in Iraq while making millions. All these issues should be discussed out in the open.

Having said that, it's important not to forget about our troops fighting overseas or their loved ones nervously waiting at home when criticizing our country's military actions in Iraq, Afghanistan or anywhere else. While citizens shouldn't be ostracized from society for protesting U.S. wars, their criticism should be done in a respectful manner that in no way degrades the men or women in uniform.

This doesn't mean that soldiers are immune from criticism. But it does mean people should keep in mind that these men and women have been through things many of us will never have to see because they believe in the ideals our country is supposed to stand for. When it comes down to it the real argument being waged by people on both sides of the war debate is whether the ends justify the means. And there is no clear answer to that question. It is a matter of opinion.

The left deserves criticism for concentrating on the frightening number of soldiers who have not received adequate medical attention after returning home from foreign wars and the depressing number of veterans who are now homeless in America, while conveniently

forgetting about soldiers who have returned from present and past wars to raise families and lead successful lives.

While shining a light on the unjust ways the government and society at large have treated our troops is a noble undertaking, to ignore all the soldiers who have come home from wars to lead prosperous lives makes liberals look like a group willing to ignore facts that don't conform to their political agenda.

The one thing citizens of this country should be bipartisan about is supporting soldiers who return home mentally or physically scarred and lending a helping hand to their loved ones when people are serving overseas. We should be active in causes that provide troops overseas with letters, food or any other form of entertainment that makes their lives a little bit better.

One of the big problems with the War on Terror has been that it has been fought by 5 percent of the country while the other 95 percent has been at the mall or watching *American Idol*. This tiny portion of our population has been asked to make huge sacrifices for this country while nothing has been demanded of the rest of us. This needs to stop.

Whether citizens are for or against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we should all be pro-justice and pro-fairness. And supporting our troops when they come home and helping their loved ones when they are abroad is the just and fair thing to do.

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.

Disabled services can't wait on economy

To the Editor:

The State of Kansas is in the midst of a major crisis. For more than 12 years, inadequate funding for organizations that serve people with disabilities has created waiting lists that are out of control.

What was once a system with no waiting lists at all has been allowed to grow to over 3,800 children and adults with disabilities. The 2008 Kansas Legislature appropriated only enough money to serve of 34 of these 3,800 people statewide.

Unfortunately, simply providing adequate money for these individuals does not solve the problem; serving those who are waiting is important. Attracting and retaining qualified care providers also requires keeping up with cost of living and salary requirements.

Service providers like Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas face a constant battle with high turnover and staff shortages because they can't pay reasonable wages. Currently, these workers are paid on average more than \$5 less per hour than those doing comparable work in a state institution. This challenge is not the result of the recent economic downturn; rather, it is the result of decades of being terribly underfunded.

Adequate funding would mean those who provide the care that keeps Kansans with disabilities out of costly institutions would finally be paid a competitive wage. Because these providers depend on state and federal money,



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

an increase is their only hope for offering more competitive wages. Our legislators know of these needs and their budget people have made recommendations to address them.

I am writing with the hope that you will join me in urging our legislators to take necessary action. Small steps have been taken along the way, but, the Legislature has not made appropriate funding the priority it should be.

For Kansas children and adults with developmental disabilities on the state's waiting lists, a day without services is a day lost forever.

I urge you to go to the website invisiblekansans.com to show your support for people with disabilities. This site explains how Kansans with disabilities are being made to feel invisible by being forced to wait years for services. Anyone visiting this site can send an e-mail to his/her legislators. It is simple to do. Just type in your zip code and the site will walk you through the process.

As Kansans, we take care of our own. It is a

matter of justice. Persons with disabilities are counted 'among the least of these.' Taking care of our most vulnerable, through full funding for community services, must be our priority and responsibility.

Yeyette Houfek, Hays former chair, Governor's Commission on Autism former member, Kansas Autism Task Force

Babies can't choose

To the Editor:

Condemn the doctor, condemn the mother, but the fact is, there are 14 innocent children out there with no choice of their own.

I certainly don't begrudge my tax dollars being spent on them.

Lon Sowers
Gem

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

