

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Campaign reform locked out again

The latest effort to force groups that sponsor campaign "issue" ads to report their donations and expenditures created some tension but, unfortunately, no action in the Kansas House last week.

In the kind of maneuver that's not unusual at this point in the session, Rep. Pat Colloton, a Leawood Republican, attempted to add a campaign finance amendment onto a bill that came to the House floor as a measure about the mistreatment of dependent adults. House Majority Leader Ray Merrick then moved to cut off debate of the amendment in the middle of its consideration.

In an unusual move that perhaps is indicative of support for the campaign reform measure, the House rejected Merrick's motion. The House then "stood at ease" while its leadership convinced Colloton to withdraw her amendment. The bill was banished back to committee, where it will lie for the rest of the current session.

It's unfortunate this debate didn't take place. It's even more unfortunate that members of legislative leadership don't understand the importance to the public of the legislation Colloton was proposing.

Too many special interest groups manage to walk the current legal line that allows them to sponsor issue ads without reporting their expenditures or their donors. These ads supposedly address issues without expressly advocating for a candidate's election or defeat, but in most cases it is perfectly clear which candidate the ads favor.

Money can pour — and has poured — into Kansas from out-of-state sources to finance campaign commercials that seek to swing Kansas elections. Almost always, that money comes from national groups with a narrow political agenda that want to discredit and defeat candidates who differ with their point of view. Their slant often is sensational in a way that borders on dishonesty....

Kansas has taken some significant steps in recent years to try to provide better campaign finance reporting, but the ability of these campaign "issue" groups to fly under the reporting radar still is a gaping hole. Plugging that hole would benefit Kansans and could be accomplished at minimal expense.

It would be a great investment in democracy. State legislators should take the energy they spend blocking this measure and put it into getting some legislation passed.

— *The Lawrence Journal-World, via The Associated Press*

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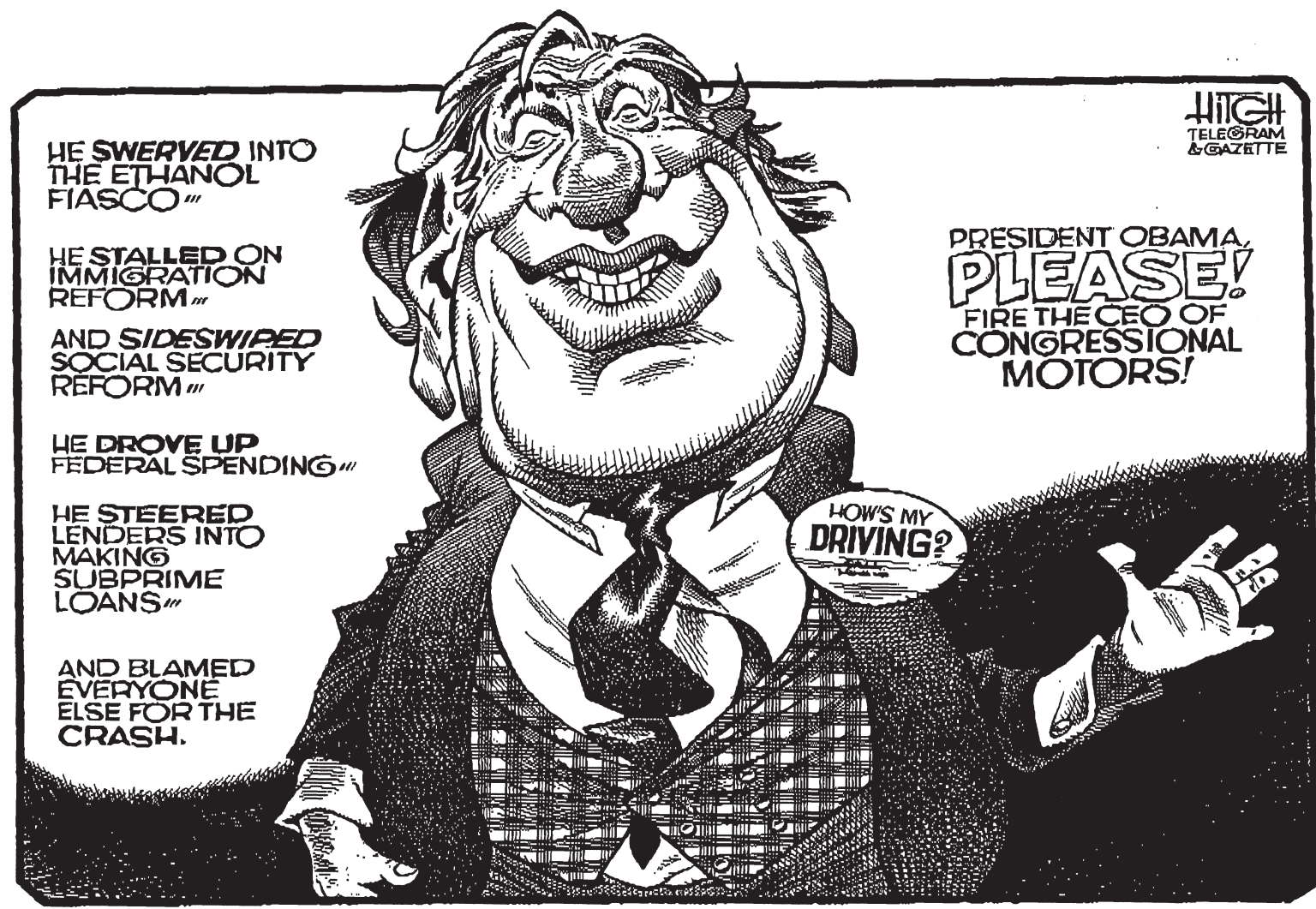
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Coffee junkie is on the wagon

I fell in love with Starbucks coffee at first sip.

I don't remember when our first meeting was, but I will always remember the first time I entered that café. The sweet smell of coffee beans and syrup, low lighting, folk music playing softly in the background — they had my heart at the initial taste of that white chocolate mocha.

Unfortunately, I was unaware of where my relationship with coffee would take me.

See, this caffeinated beverage has always been there for me. When I'm feeling depressed, tired, uninspired or bored, coffee is just around the corner. Also, it's always available when I'm excited, motivated, blissfully happy or if I just want a means to socialize. I can always count on coffee.

But since our first encounter, I have developed an unhealthy relationship with coffee. I often cannot function without it. My friends have pointed out how I depend on the caffeine that gives me a boost of energy. They also say I am suffering physically through the headaches I seem to constantly be dealing with.

Coffee is also draining my bank account. I don't have the money to support my relationship with the drink. Even the regular house-brewed coffee is a daily subtraction of a few



Michelle Myers

• A Moment with Michelle

dollars every day. And if for some reason I have cash on my hands, I immediately exchange it for coffee.

Really, I'm not the most coffee-addicted binge drinker in history. Voltaire, one of the leaders of the Age of Reason, supposedly drank 50 cups of coffee a day. Compared to him, I am doing pretty good.

But after much convincing, encouragement and a bit of bribing from my friends, we came to an agreement: Coffee and I need a break from each other.

So for the next month, I am detoxifying my body from caffeine, especially coffee. Thirty days of a caffeine-free diet. No more white-chocolate mochas, caramel macchiatos or cinnamon dolce lattes. No more walking into the campus café at 7:50 a.m. to order a house-brewed coffee.

And if I want a coffee-date, I'll have to or-

der a caramel apple cider or something called a steamer. Or I'll have to drink herbal tea, taking in its dissatisfying, jolt-less ingredients.

Not only that, I am banned from taking certain kinds of medicine (some contain caffeine that amounts to two cups of coffee), eating chocolate or drinking black and green teas.

Basically, I am going cold turkey.

At first, it sounded like it would be doable. Then the side effects of withdrawal started to kick in. According to medical experts, symptoms include headaches, tiredness and fatigue, decreased energy, decreased alertness, drowsiness, decreased contentedness, depressed mood, difficulty concentrating, irritability and feeling foggy, all of which describe my last few days.

I know it's not easy to give up something you truly love. But if there is something that is hindering your body, your relationships, your way of life, it's time to re-evaluate its position on your priority list. And kiss it goodbye.

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.

Spring burn a tradition with purpose

Every spring, this ritual continues. Viewed by day or night, prairie fires are riveting.

Across the vast, open grasslands we call the Flint Hills, fires can be seen for miles. Flames lick at the blue Kansas sky as the brown, dry grass crackles, cracks and bursts into orange.

But these fires aren't a recent phenomena, and they aren't strictly for the viewing pleasure of those traveling up and down our highways. Long before civilization invaded the prairie, fires were ignited by lightning storms and the prairie was charred to restore the health of the native grasses.

The artificially ignited controlled burning of the tallgrass prairie in east-central Kansas is an annual event designed to mimic nature's match. It has become a tradition, part of the culture of the communities and the people who inhabit this region of our state.

Fire is an essential element of the ecosystem. Burning these pastures is one of the best management tools for restoring forage health and preventing weedy and woody species in this native prairie.

Burning of these pastures every three or four years for forage health is vital to this state's beef industry and helps cattle gain weight during the grazing season. It is also essential to stockmen in the southern and southeastern states that place cattle in the Flint Hills to graze each spring and summer.

This annual pasture burning only occurs for a few days each year. It is not a procedure that is drawn out and lasts for weeks.

Not every cattleman burns his pastures each and every year as is sometimes portrayed. Instead, individual farmers, ranchers and land-owners survey and decide each spring, which pastures will benefit and produce a healthier, lush grass for livestock after burning. Often neighbors plan and burn together, giving them more hands to ensure a safe, controlled burn.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

Kansas has been extremely dry since last fall. Fires have raged across Texas, Oklahoma and some in Kansas during late winter and early spring with the onset of windy weather.

Recent rains and snow have eased drought conditions enough for some burning of native grass range across the state. With additional moisture in the near-term forecast, this may lessen the wildfire hazard later in the spring, when dry and windy conditions could return.

"It's important for grassland owners and operators to burn during this open window of opportunity," says Steve Swaffar, director of natural resources for Kansas Farm Bureau.

Ranchers are being encouraged to burn breaks around farmsteads, barns and other agriculture buildings to protect those areas in case of wildfires.

Spring burning is also one of the easiest and most effective methods of controlling the eastern red cedar, Swaffar says.

"There's nothing better for the control and eradication of this extremely invasive tree than to run a fire through the grassland every two or three years," he said.

Kansas State University experts recommend burning take place when wind speeds are between 5 and 15 mph, relative humidity is from 40 to 70 percent and temperatures in the range of 55 to 80 degrees.

Landowners in all counties are required to notify county officials prior to planned controlled burns. This notification is a key to pre-

venting planned burns from turning into accidental wildfires and ensuring burning is OK under the expected conditions.

The farm and ranch community is tuned into ever-changing weather conditions and will continue to keep its controlled burning of the tall grass prairies confined to a minimum time period. This process is part of the culture of the rural communities that dot the Flint Hills region.

Prairie fires help Mother Nature rejuvenate the grasses that carpet her fertile hills. That means good things for cattlemen, for agriculture, for rural communities and the Kansas economy.

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.

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.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

