

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Seat belt safety can only improve

Two different rankings, two different results. On the same day Kansas scored a No. 3 ranking on a national economic health index, the state finished near the other end of another survey. That one came from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and it ranked the states in terms of safety belt usage.

Kansas landed 13th from the bottom. The survey showed 77.4 percent of motorists in the Sunflower State buckled up in 2008. The good news is the percentage climbed 2.4 percent from 2007, but the bad news is Kansas lagged behind the national average of 83 percent and fell woefully short of 14 states that had rates of 90 percent or better...

The state is among several where failing to wear a seat belt is not a "primary" violation, meaning motorists can be ticketed for failing to buckle up only if they're pulled over for another violation, such as speeding.

We've resisted the push to change from a secondary violation, as we're not comfortable with the idea of the government making a decision that currently lies in the hands of free-thinking and independent adults as to their personal safety.

But there's no question safety belts can save lives and prevent injuries, which is why we would encourage anyone who's not using them to start.

Nationwide, highway deaths last year fell to their lowest level since the Kennedy administration — a trend that we all undoubtedly would like to see continue.

...The fatality rate, or the number of deaths per 100 million miles traveled, was a record low 1.28 in 2008.

Experts said it was no coincidence the fatality rate hit an all-time low when seat belt usage went to a record high.

Regardless of the debate about seat belt laws, that's something well worth considering for any driver.

— Topeka Capital-Journal, 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, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkans.com

NEWS

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkans.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkans.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkans.com

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
jstewart@nwkans.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales
hwoofter@nwkans.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design
kballard@nwkans.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Tammy Withers - Office Manager
twithers@nwkans.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkans.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Daniel Spillman

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President's press secretary on the go

Robert Gibbs is a busy guy these days. He comes to work in the wee hours and often stays well past dark.

Still, the president's press secretary makes time to "brief" a group of country editors who've come to Washington for a conference. The group clears security and is escorted into the Old Executive Office building. The structure — just west of the White House — first housed the departments of State, War and the Navy in a day when the government was much smaller.

The editors wait 20, 25 minutes, then hear that Gibbs is meeting with the president, who's just back from a brief vacation. Finally, an aide comes in, says Gibbs is delayed. Deputy Press Secretary Bill Burton will come in his place.

About that time, Gibbs, looking cool and collected, strides in. He apologizes for keeping the group waiting.

"It's hard to separate all the challenges we've faced in the first 60 days," Gibbs said. "Our big focus has been on getting this economy turned around."

He reels off a list of other pressing issues: the budget, the G-20 economic summit, financial aid package, "seeing that what's been on the news hopefully doesn't happen again."

An editor asks about a money-saving postal labor provisions the White House supposedly put in the budget, then took out when unions



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

objected. It's a question planted earlier by a Republican senator, and Gibbs obviously has no idea. He says he'll check and get an answer. (So far, though, none is forthcoming.)

Asked about Iraq and Afghanistan, the press secretary says the administration plans to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq over 18 to 19 months while slowing giving more responsibility to the Iraqis.

"And to do so in a way that represents a safe and responsible strategy for the coming day that will build on this decision," he adds.

In Afghanistan, he says, while sending more troops, "the president believes the situation can't be solved by military means alone."

Gibbs, a quiet Alabamian, says he looks at five to six newspapers each morning, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, and the White House has a clipping service that surveys papers across the country.

"There's not a lot of people where I'm from who read the *Washington Post*," he said. "To

find out what's going on, you need to look at what's in other papers."

The White House gets up to 40,000 letters and messages a day, he said, and the president gets about 10 of those a day to get a sense of the causes and concerns people have on their minds.

"He responds to about half of those letters each day," Gibbs added.

President Obama, he said, sees four to five newspapers a day, sometimes more.

Though he's taken on some big-shot television critics, Gibbs said he sees his job as to provide as much information to the media as possible

"I look at it as how can we best serve the customer," he said.

The president, he said, "has an amazing confidence in the American people."

Then he takes his leave, off to finish arrangements and prep for an Obama interview with "60 Minutes."

It may be there's no rest for the wicked, but at the White House, it seems, there's no time to rest.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Overhaul of federal tax code overdue

This is the season when you and I struggle to find receipts, understand tax forms and get to the post office on time.

Tax season always stirs a memorable quote, "A fine is a tax for doing something wrong. A tax is a fine for doing something right."

Be that as it may, our federal tax code needs an overhaul.

Congress is studying numerous tax reform proposals, including one called the "Fair Tax." This legislation would replace taxes on what you earn with taxes on what you buy. All corporate and individual income taxes, payroll taxes, self-employment taxes, capital gains taxes, estate taxes and gift taxes would be repealed.

The Fair Tax would do away with the Internal Revenue Service, enable workers to keep their entire paycheck and bring transparency and accountability to tax policy. Reform is needed to address the complexities of our broken tax process.

As taxpayers, we deal with a system that is complex, confusing and burdensome. It im-



U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran

• Capitol Notes

pedes our nation's economic growth and rewards those who are able to manipulate it to their goals. It punishes productivity — if you make more, you are taxed more. Americans deserve better. The Fair Tax Act is the right answer to simplify the process.

The IRS estimates that individual taxpayers and businesses spend 7.6 billion hours each year preparing and filing their taxes. In perspective, that's 3.8 million employees working full time for an entire year. We desperately need a common-sense tax system that is simple and growth-oriented. However, instead of tax simplification and tax relief, Americans this year will be facing the same broken sys-

tem and a budget proposal that increases their taxes to pay for more spending.

During my time in Congress, I have been a strong advocate of lower and fairer taxes. The Fair Tax is a simple and honest tax. In this time, where our nation's debt is soaring, a transparent process that is applied fairly across the board to businesses and families may be a solution for our economy.

Americans are struggling and we need to get the country moving. The Fair Tax could provide an environment to encourage savings and stimulate the economy by promoting new investment. Reducing the burden on America's taxpayers is a priority

An overhaul of our federal tax code is needed to address the complexities of the current tax process. Kansans are working hard every day to get by during these difficult economic times.

We need to reform the tax process and implement the Fair Tax so that individuals, families and businesses have the resources they need to prosper.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

