



Other Viewpoints

Wild West law gives prosecutors guns in courthouse

What is next? Judges carrying Uzis into their courtrooms? With a new law that allows prosecutors to carry concealed guns in the courthouse, it seems Kansas is regressing to Wild West days rather than progressively and aggressively reducing the need for weaponry supposedly carried for protection.... It seems Kansas lawmakers are bent on piling gun legislation on top of gun legislation. But citizens — even those with concealed carry permits — can’t bring their guns into courthouses, which counters the need for prosecutors to pack heat. They are at little risk in the courthouse, and would be at even less risk if counting would invest — as many larger courthouses have done — in a permanent metal detection system. Such devices quickly would root out nefarious citizens attempting to sneak firearms into a courthouse or a courtroom. Metal detectors aren’t foreign at the Reno County Courthouse. They’ve been used occasionally for highly publicized events, such as the 2007 trial for Tracallen Streeter, accused of shooting a Hutchinson police officer. Surely, permanent instead of temporary metal detectors offer better and more consistent protection for the public, courthouse staff, attorneys and judges than gun-toting prosecutors. No system is fail-safe, but it only makes sense that prevention — thwarting an incident at the courthouse doors — is safer and more effective than arming prosecutors. The Reno County Commission could vote to opt out of the new law, but some are betting that commissioners won’t take that route because they don’t want to invest in a metal detection system. But commissioners should at least consider that option. If state lawmakers are bent on putting more guns in more hands, then local officials ought to be investing in safety measures rather than condoning risky business.

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

Send news to: colby.editor @ nwkansans.com

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**Steve Haynes - Publisher**  
s.haynes @ nwkansans.com

NEWS

**Kevin Bottrell - News Editor**  
kbottrell @ nwkansans.com

**Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter**  
aheintz @ nwkansans.com

**Marian Ballard - Copy Editor**  
mballard @ nwkansans.com

**Vera Sloan and Aubrey Spencer - Society Editors**  
colby.society @ nwkansans.com

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Speaking of July storms ...

The storm warnings Friday prompted a conversation around the newsroom, comparing tall tales, and not-so-tall tales, about past storms and near misses.

Summer storm stories are full of thrills. While I’ve always said I’d rather live in Tornado Alley than hurricane country — they come and go faster — it’s certainly scary at times.

Most of us could name some storms that came too close for comfort, though. While I understand there was hail the other day, I always find myself holding any hail storm up against two in my past.

The first came when I was a child. I had been at the pool, and they sent everyone home because a storm was coming. My bicycle was in the garage, and I was just ready to head for the back door when the hail hit. That storm was up-close and personal, with baseball-size hailstones landing on the driveway just a foot or two away from where I stood.

There was another storm when I was older. The aftermath was all I saw, but my mother, who was not easily rattled, was all shook up. It hit early in the morning, large hail and high winds, and did more damage than many tornadoes.

Speaking of tornadoes, I’ve never been sure if I went through one or not. Once when my children were small and I was home alone with them, a blast of wind sent us to the storm cel-



**Marian Ballard**

• Collection Connections

lar. After a while, everything seemed OK so we came out. When my husband and his dad showed up an hour or two later, they asked what had happened to the hay rack. Looking across to the field where it was parked, only then did I notice it was at a perfect right angle to the position it had held in the morning.

On Friday, our new editor, Kevin Bottrell, commented that he had expected Kansas in July to be hot, followed by hot. This was after we had stood at the door to the newspaper, watching low clouds whizzing past town, and shivering as the temperature dropped 20 degrees or so in just a few minutes.

If you’re new to tornado country, both conditions are signs that you should be ready to head for shelter. Our summer weather this year has been anything but typical, with rains — anxiously looked for over the winter and spring — interfering with harvest and other field work. I’m wondering how those with hay to cut are coping.

Our community depends on the weather, because we depend on agriculture. Not enough precipitation, and the land suffers. Too much, and the land suffers.

I’m glad that flooding here in recent years has been scarce and mild. Kansas City spent most of the summer under water one year when I lived there, and the list of things to dislike about that is too long to itemize here.

The effects of flooding on land and people are sure painful and far-reaching. One of the oddest kinds of damage I have seen from a flood is the destruction of a fish hatchery in Crawford, Neb., when the White River flooded. That flood came, by the way, a year after the Soldier Creek Forest Fire swept over much of the White River watershed. Just goes to show — preventing a forest fire might stop a flood in its tracks.

We watch the weather here, but we really can’t do much about it. Here’s hoping it starts cooperating better with farmers, as well as everyone else who expects the Kansas sun to shine in summer.

*Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.*

Rural Kansas needs broadband Internet

In rural Kansas, it’s difficult to keep up. This is especially true of high-speed Internet service.

While the rest of the world operates in blink-of-the-eye communications, many parts of rural Kansas are stuck with dial up, which can be as slow as snail-mail and a thousand times more frustrating.

Dial-up is Jim and Brenda Dooley’s only access to the Internet on their Jewell County farm in north-central Kansas. Their story is the same as thousands of other rural inhabitants across the Sunflower State.

The Dooley’s time on the Internet is limited because it takes forever to download anything. As a result, they are behind the eight ball in obtaining market and other farm-related information in today’s rapidly changing world.

Greenwood County rancher Matt Perrier finds himself in a similar situation. Perrier has given up trying to blog because it takes him an hour and a half to connect. Then his dial-up crashes.

“When I need to send an advertisement or photos to help market our bulls or cattle, it’s a roll of the dice to get that sent to where it needs to go,” Perrier says. “And even if we do, sometimes it takes as long as five hours to get it out.”

With on-line networking rapidly becoming the most effective way to communicate and conduct business, rural Kansans need high-speed Internet service and they need it now. Communication via Internet is no longer a luxury. Bringing broadband access to all rural areas could provide economic and quality of life opportunities for rural Kansans.

Reliable access to rural broadband can also play a significant role in education, health care and access to new markets for agriculture and business. Rural education increasingly depends on broadband access. Health-care providers



**John Schlageck**

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

will depend on it now that our government requires health information to be electronic.

Rural business owners, whether they’re farmers and ranchers or rural small businessmen, often are required to interact with government through the Internet.

Without fast, convenient and affordable Internet service, an entire segment of this nation’s people are being left behind. It’s increasingly important for rural Kansas communities to be wired.

“When it comes to the future viability of rural life in Kansas, I can’t think of a more important area of work,” says Steve Baccus, an Ottawa County grain farmer who serves as president of Kansas Farm Bureau. “In nearly every respect, bringing broadband Internet service to rural areas of Kansas is akin to rural electrification. That technology changed life on the farm and broadband access will do the same thing.”

A new public-private collaborative effort led by Kansas Farm Bureau will provide a vital first step by identifying those communities and households not currently served. This mapping project will work toward taking full advantage of broadband infrastructure grant dollars recently approved by Congress in the federal economic stimulus package.

Farm Bureau and the Information Network of Kansas will also provide some of the mapping money. Connected Nation, a Washington nonprofit organization working to expand ac-

cess and use of broadband Internet, has already begun mapping in Kansas.

Service providers began applying for stimulus money July 14. The time frame for increasing broadband access will depend on the public’s response, how fast the money flows from the stimulus package and how quickly the providers build and service the much-needed networks.

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

Write us

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

