

Other Viewpoints

Public smoking is public health issue

With 40 percent of the U.S. population now covered by public smoking bans, it's getting harder to find places to smoke. Meanwhile, it's getting harder to justify treating tobacco use as an individual liberty rather than a public menace.

Kansas legislators may not be able to hold out much longer on a statewide ban — nor should they resist what would be an effective way to promote public health and save the state the cost of treating tobacco-related illnesses.

According to new studies by researchers at the University of Kansas School of Medicine and the University of California at San Francisco, jurisdictions that have passed smoke-free laws since 2004 have seen their rate of heart attacks decline — at least 15 percent after one year and as much as 36 percent annually after three....

Then there are the potential savings in tax dollars, given that illnesses related to secondhand smoke cost as much as \$6 billion a year nationally and more than \$700 million a year in Kansas.

One important question for Kansas, both in areas with no bans and in cities with weak bans such as Wichita, is whether it makes sense to let some smoky businesses continue to put their workers at risk....

The Legislature has considered a statewide smoking ban the past three sessions. Next year, it will be high on the short agenda of Gov. Mark Parkinson to get it through not only the Senate, which approved it twice this year, but also through the House.

Parkinson does not want a statewide ban that, like Wichita's, lets certain businesses opt out.

"I would support a robust public smoking ban that would override the local ordinances and make it very difficult for a local community to opt out," he said.

That said, the Legislature should resist emerging efforts to pass a weak statewide ban that would pre-empt strong local ordinances.

The desire to let communities, businesses and individuals variously make their own decisions about smoking still stands in Kansas for now. But the data increasingly argues for a strong, consistent statewide smoking law.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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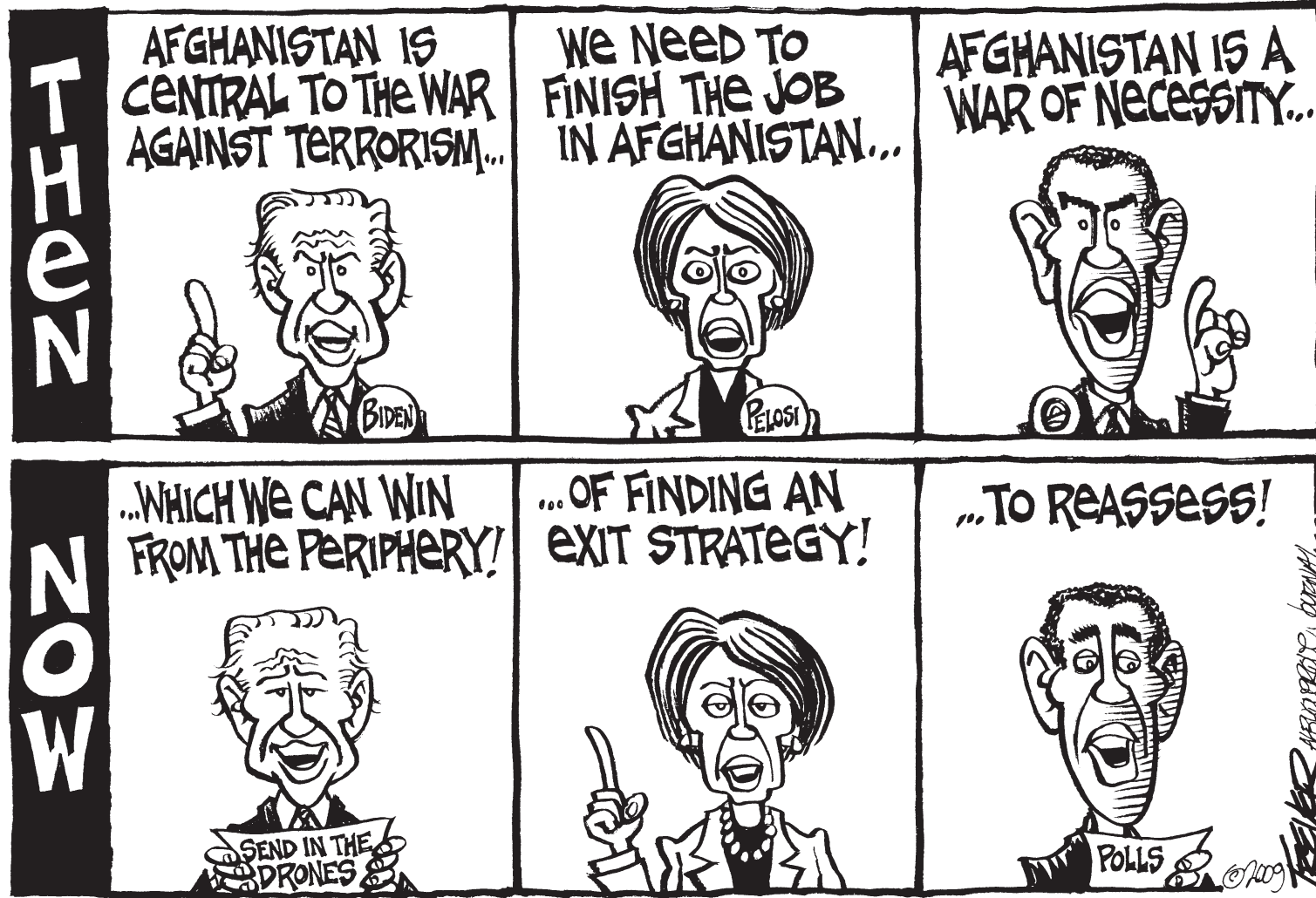
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Prying Census makes us nervous

A couple of books have been sitting by the side of my desk for several days. Depending on the mood of the hour, I think of them as promising or threatening.

One is "Changing U.S. Demographics." The other is "Kansas Statistical Abstract 1999." Heavy reading, but useful references for all sorts of things, at least in their time. Ten-year-old statistics don't count for much in today's fast-paced world.

Come to think of it, 10-year-old statistics were not particularly useful when the U.S. Constitution was written, either. For that reason, a once-a-decade census was required, so that changing demographics would be taken into account in governing a growing country.

Humans do occasionally learn from their mistakes, after all, and the damage done by ignoring changing demographics, first in England and later in its colonies, must have made an impression on those responsible for the blueprints of our own government.

Now, the U.S. census is coming to your neighborhood. It counts the number of people in a town or a state, and determines how many members of the House of Representatives we have. It counts other things as well, from bathrooms to telephones to cars. Conspiracy theorists look at it with dread. Marketers look at it with glee. The rest of us tend to have mixed emotions.

Statistics of all sorts serve a useful purpose



Marian Ballard

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in our lives. Highway fatality statistics help in the development of safer roads, safer vehicles and safer traffic laws.

Medical statistics point the way to more effective treatment of disease and injury. Statistics on nutrition lead to better standards in food packaging.

Statistics on cost lead to lower costs in the same packaging, though some of those changes drive me nuts. Whatever happened to packages that actually survive the trip home?

Marketers use statistics, as well. If there is a part of the country where income and number of computers per household is out of balance, there's a good chance an advertising campaign for computers will be aimed at that area. If there's a place that could use more widgets, it will be found through the census.

The real area of controversy, of course, is that the count goes beyond how many people there are and becomes something more intrusive. We all want to be represented fairly by our government. We are less anxious, how-

ever, to have the government know the details of our lives. This is, at least in part, based on experience.

The more details a government entity has about how you live, the more opportunities it has to develop a bureaucratic regulation to complicate your life.

Government isn't malicious in its regulations; it simply seeks to manage the connection between all those statistics. Lots of cars on a road connects statistically to lots of accidents. Lots of accidents connect to lots of injuries.

The government doesn't want to see people hurt. This may be humanitarian. It may also be pragmatic — hurt people cost society in general and don't produce anything. That's not totally true, but since when do bureaucracies base reasoning on absolutes. They operate on probabilities — statistics — which brings us full circle to the census.

The census, along with the numbers it produces, is a necessary part of our nation. It's OK to be skeptical about some of the question. It's certainly not wise to give out too much personal information (and anyone asking for Social Security numbers or similar information is not a legitimate census worker). But remember, every voter is a statistic, and needs to be. Get counted.

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press.

Two-room school gave solid foundation

The school I attended for the first eight years of my life was in western Sheridan County. The town was Seguin, population 50. It was a German/Catholic community. Heck, we didn't have a "non Catholic" in our two-room school until I was in the sixth grade.

Our school was different than the typical one-room country school. While mostly made of wood, the structure had a stucco coating on the exterior. Seguin Grade School didn't have a bell tower. Students took turns calling us to class, announcing recess and signaling the end of the school day by ringing a large, handheld brass bell with a black wooden handle.

The Sisters of St. Joseph provided us with a solid foundation during our early years of education. The main subjects included reading, writing, arithmetic and English. The last subject was one I enjoy even to this day. I especially liked to diagram sentences on the blackboard when I wrote as neatly as I could with a piece of long, white chalk.

Because we lived in the sparsely populated western part of Kansas, we looked forward to school. It was fun to be with other kids.

After attending mass at St. Martin of Tours, we walked about a half mile across buffalo grass to our school, which was at the north-western corner of our small prairie town.

We entered through double doors and climbed the stairs to our classroom. Huge, double-hung windows covered the west side of each classroom. These rooms were on the second floor of the building.

On a clear day, we could see for miles — as far as the elevators in Colby, 24 miles to the west. Often, we would open the windows and let in fresh, western Kansas air.

Each room contained 20 or so wooden desks, Each with a hole in the upper right-hand corner to hold a bottle of ink.

A large American flag stood in the right cor-



John Schlageck

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Kansas Farm Bureau

ner, near a blackboard that stretched the entire length of the north wall. A portrait of George Washington hung on the left side.

Every day, we began the day with the Pledge of Allegiance. We included the phrase, "One nation, under God" and each one of us stood at attention with our right hand over our heart.

My first day at school was memorable. Once seated in my desk, I promptly began to whistle. I'd grown up listening to Mom whistle while she worked around our house, so I just naturally began whistling at school.

This resulted in a visit to the cloakroom, where we hung our coats and stored our lunch boxes. The door was closed behind me and I spent the next few minutes crying aloud. How was I to know a happy student wasn't to whistle while he worked? Seemed right to me.

Well, that bad experience hardly proved a bump along the school highway. I loved attending school — always did.

Throughout my eight years in Seguin, enrollment at my two-room school never exceeded 35. I can't remember a class with more than five children.

With such a small enrollment, each room combined classes. First and second grade studied the same subjects while third and fourth had their own curriculum. Because we were in the same room, I could listen to and learn from both classes, something I did with gusto.

As a youngster and throughout my 18 years of education, I was a sponge — absorbing ev-

erything. Learning and listening always came naturally for me. I don't think it hurt that our teachers were strict. Talking in class resulted in an automatic ticket to the cloakroom, or time spent at the chalkboard after school.

One of my favorite periods during my formative years at Seguin was the 15 minutes immediately following lunch. That's when one student was selected to read aloud from a book from our extensive library.

Don't scoff about the number and quality of books that might have been found in our small, rural northwestern Kansas community so many years ago. The book I picked out during my fifth year in Seguin was Lorna Doone by R.D. Blackmore.

This was the first book I couldn't put down, and I have read it several times since. It's a simple tale of the outlaw Doones who lived and pillaged in the depths of Bagworthy Forest. The main characters are the beautiful, hapless heroine Lorna Doone and the man she weds, John Ridds, whose father was killed by the Doones on his way home from market. Quite a read, if you haven't.

The next best thing to reading was recess. What youngster would ever argue with that?

We enjoyed three periods, about one hour of playtime each day. We played games called circle, pom-pom pole away, fox and geese, Annie, Annie Over and of course, every one of us turned into a monkey on the steel playground equipment.

Life was good. Things were simpler. Time moved much slower in our little two-room school back in the mid '50s.

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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

