



Other Viewpoints

Distracted driving demands attention

A national summit about the dangers of driving while using cell phones and text messaging devices begs a question to Kansas lawmakers.

RU paying attention? Here's hoping state legislators took note of the Distracted Driving Summit ... and will beef up restrictions on the use of mobile communications devices by motorists when they convene in January for the 2010 legislative session.

In previous years, the argument against cracking down on texting or phoning while driving was that there was too little evidence the activities posed a safety problem.

That argument has vanished in a storm of twisted metal, shattered glass and broken bodies.

The body of evidence about the hazards includes studies showing that texting or talking on a cell phone creates an attention level in the brain similar to driving while intoxicated....

Kansas has taken some action on the issue, but not enough. The state is among 18 that have adopted some restrictions on use of cell phones and texting devices, but so far the law in Kansas only applies to teen-aged drivers....

This year, it's a no-brainer for lawmakers to adopt a comprehensive texting ban.

There are numerous indications that motorists would support such legislation, including a survey commissioned by Ford that showed 93 percent of drivers were in favor of a texting ban. Several businesses and industry groups, including AAA, also have called for action on the issue.

The support is there. CU in January, lawmakers.

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

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

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

ADVERTISING

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager
jstewart@nwkansas.com

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales
hwoofter@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Graphic Design
kballard@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Kris McCoil

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



Perspectives don't stand alone

Our office is an interesting mix of people, some with deep roots in Colby or northwest Kansas, and others who are relative newcomers. Needless to say, they also have a diverse set of opinions on almost any topic you could mention.

Many opinions mean many discussions – some humorous, some heated – on almost everything. Health care and football, kids and old folks, the field is wide open. We've got many perspectives here.

One thing I've noticed, though. It's easy to focus on a single area and exclude everything else. That disturbs me. No area of modern life exists in a vacuum. Take school budgets, as an example. The football budget and the band budget affect each other. Class size affects learning, but so does nutrition. Teacher education is important, but so is a child's willingness to learn, which is affected by the parents' example, which is affected by the parents' experiences both in and out of school.

Health care is a big issue right now. It doesn't exist in a vacuum, either. Staying healthy is cheaper than getting back to health from illness, but no one pays you to take vitamins and eat your vegetables.

Clean air and water matter to health care. Deciding what "health" is can be a factor in health care. Being healthy is more of a continuum than a dichotomy. It varies with the individual. An Olympic athlete with a broken leg may be more healthy than a farmer with all working parts who has some arthritis, some hearing loss, and the like. I'd rather be the farmer, with two working legs – at least that's the choice I'd make this afternoon.



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

In fact, any of today's hot issues can be examined in more than two ways. That's what makes them hot issues. If health means 20/20 vision, many don't qualify. If health means optimal weight, the first question is whether you go by today's charts or those from a few years back. The next question is, are you 10 pounds over, or 11? The difference of just a few ounces could change your status from "normal" to "overweight."

Of course, the whole debate about "health care" – how much it should cost and who should foot the bill – is really about sickness care. The hard part of the debate is not economic but ethical.

Fixing the broken leg of an otherwise healthy Olympian is a relatively inexpensive proposition. The really big-ticket items, with fuzzy ethical boundaries, are things like a heart transplant for someone who is chronically obese and who will continue in the behavior which caused the problem in the first place.

How about sick kids and schools? How does the swine flu – sorry, H1N1 – affect the school budget in terms of absenteeism? What should the childless household do about it, other than stay away from sick kids? Should school activities be cancelled?

How does the budget choice to stop in-town busing affect the rate of illness? It has certainly affected the way parents must schedule their days. It costs parents more to drive kids back and forth. Those costs in time and family budgets will undoubtedly be reflected in other changes.

I'm not a person who gets terribly excited about what's going on in Afghanistan or the Middle East, or even in Washington, for that matter. I believe in delegation, and those areas have been delegated to others. For the most part, these big issues require big interventions to change, somewhat like turning an ocean liner.

Yet there are moments when an ordinary person, in an ordinary place in life, has an extraordinary chance to make a difference. For that reason, us ordinary folks will continue to debate big issues, to keep our understanding sharp. We will seek to understand, and to share our understanding with others.

We will decide for ourselves whether it is more ethical to support football or the band or hiring another special education paraprofessional. We will decide whether we feel Grandpa should have surgery for cancer when he's liable to die from sheer cussedness before the cancer kills him anyway.

What we think may not affect the way the world gets from day to day. But then again, it might.

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.

Nothing compares to a steak

The headline jolted me from my chair: "Being a Vegetarian (the 'i' in this word was illustrated as a carrot). Clever, but the message in the story – how to eliminate meat from your diet – didn't leave a good taste in my mouth.

Be honest, have you ever thrown a couple of pounds of linguine on the grill and watched it cook while you sipped a fine burgundy or single-malt scotch?

Don't get me wrong. I love vegetables. I eat them with every meal, but I consider them a side dish – essential, but for me the main course is meat, whether it is beef, pork, lamb or chicken. I love fresh fish, too.

When it comes to eating, the truth is, nothing compares to the smell, sound and taste of a steak sizzling over an open fire.

Kansas City Strip. T-Bone. Porterhouse. Rib Eye.

Thick. Juicy. Delicious. Fist-sized pork chops aren't bad either. And don't forget a grilled leg of lamb. Superb dining.

Unfortunately, a widespread general consensus on red meat today can be summed up in two words: "Eat less." This has triggered a decline in the consumption of red meat and a drop in income for livestock producers.

When it comes to making decisions about the food I eat, I prefer to consider the findings of someone who has conducted scientific research on what makes a healthy diet. The question here is whether the concerns about red meat are scientifically sound.

Government dietary guidelines are supposed to tell us what we should eat for good



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

nutrition. Numerous organizations have been issuing their own guidelines, and these recommendations don't always agree.

America is made up of individuals who need to adjust their diets to allow for their own states of health, risks of chronic disease and personal tastes.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture suggests eating two to three servings of meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts each day. The key is to choose lean cuts of meat and trim the fat before or after cooking.

No matter how you cut it, all lean meats are high in nutritional quality. Beef, pork and lamb have been recognized as healthy sources of top-quality protein, as well as thiamin, pantothenic acid, niacin and vitamins B-6 and B-12.

Red meats are also excellent sources of iron, copper, zinc and manganese – minerals not easily obtained in sufficient amounts in diets without meats, according to department food guidelines.

One widespread misconception about red meat centers on cholesterol. Meat is not high in cholesterol.

Meats of all kinds, fat or lean, are low in cholesterol (about 70-90 milligrams per serv-

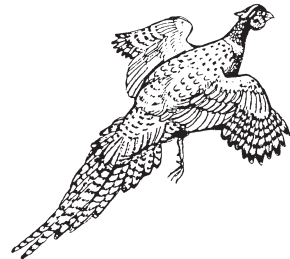
ing), the department reports. This amount is too small to have a significant effect on the blood or serum cholesterol of most of the U.S. population. This includes those with normal cholesterol levels and who are not genetically inclined to respond abnormally to dietary cholesterol.

Confusion about cholesterol arises when doctors or nutritionists speak of a cholesterol-lowering diet. They are referring to any diet that lowers blood cholesterol, not specifically to a low-cholesterol diet.

Lean meats eaten in moderation as part of a varied diet, including lots of fruits and vegetables, are not now and are not expected to become a cause of heart disease or cancer. Beef steak, pork roast and lamb chops are healthy and are here to stay.

Fire up the grill!

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

