



## Other Viewpoints

### Kansas stats slip on drunk driving

Kansas bucked a national trend last year, but this was a case when setting ourselves apart from the crowd wasn't good.

In fact, it was deadly. While the drunken-driving fatality rate dipped 7 percent in the U.S. last year, it skyrocketed 36 percent in Kansas. Those figures were reported recently by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, based on the number of fatalities per 100 million miles driven.

So what's the matter with Kansas? A state official chalked up the massive increase to a statistical anomaly. The federal agency reported that the number of fatalities caused by impaired drivers jumped from 109 to 145, which translated to a 36 percent increase when measured against the miles driven.

"One year does not make a trend," said Chris Bortz, grants manager for the Kansas Department of Transportation, in a *USA Today* story.

True, but such a whopping rise in drunken-driving deaths is definitely cause for concern, especially when considered in light of the national trend toward fewer alcohol-related fatalities.

It's also disturbing to know that 2008 marks the second straight year when fatalities went up; the number rose from 103 in 2006 to 109 in 2007.

What's more, Kansas was one of only seven states where the rate rose in 2008. Oddly, Oklahoma and Colorado were also among those seven. And in Missouri, the level decreased only 6 percent.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood said that in states where the rate fell, tough law enforcement should be the key to the reduction.

"In states where they don't have tough law enforcement, or they don't do it as aggressively as other states, the numbers are not that good," he said.

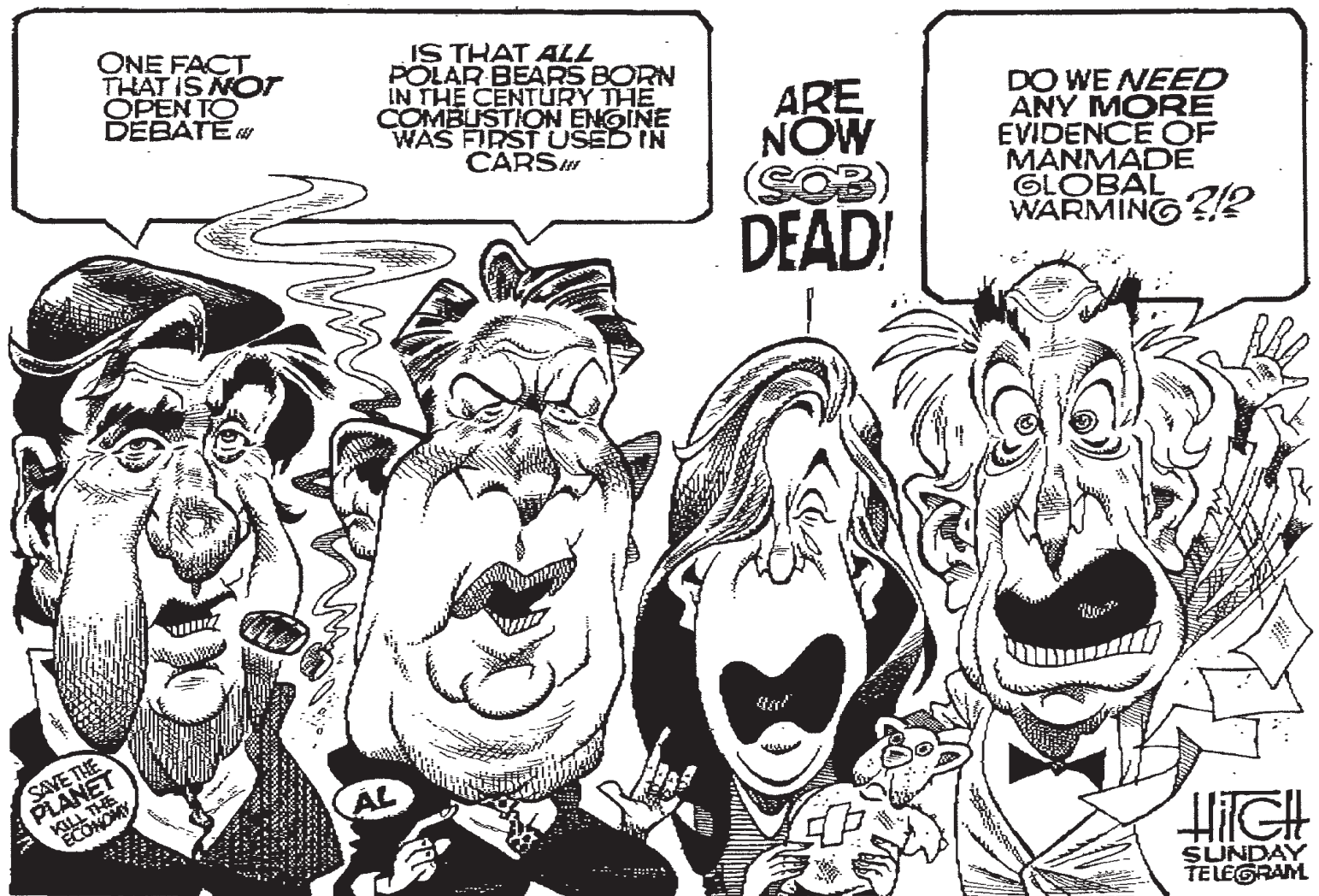
LaHood's reasoning makes sense, but it's too early to knock law enforcement officials in Kansas for the rising number of alcohol-related fatalities. They have made efforts to crack down on drunk driving and spread the message through newspaper, television and radio ads and public relations campaigns that officials will do their best to catch and prosecute motorists who drink and drive.

That message will be repeated over the next few weeks as authorities make their annual push against drunk driving over the holidays.

The recent state-by-state figures on the problem suggest a crackdown is needed, and not just through New Year's Eve.

When it comes to reducing drinking and driving, Kansas is going in the wrong direction.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press*



### Insensitivity hurts more than PC pitfalls

People talk a lot about political correctness these days. I'm not sure what the exact definition is, but basically it means adhering to an unwritten law that promotes avoiding controversial topics that could anger people of a certain ethnic group, race, gender, culture or religion.

People promoting multiculturalism are often blamed for today's political correctness. They are accused of causing a rise in cultural relativism, moral nihilism and hypersensitivity on these issues. Some of the criticisms have some merit, while others seem kind of silly.

But, all joking aside, political correctness is an important issue in this country, and if we knew for sure what the term means, it'd be easier to deal with. I'm personally uncomfortable with the words because many people would consider me politically correct on some issues.

There are some words I just won't say. I will never make fun of people for being overweight and I wouldn't ever call someone retarded. This alone makes me politically correct in the eyes of some people. But I don't really care.

I've been accused of being too sensitive, but I think the problem is too many people have been taught that's its OK to be insensitive. My big worry is that the huge backlash over



**Andy Heintz**

#### • Wildcat Ramblings

political correctness will allow people making racist, sexist and homophobic remarks to portray themselves as rebels battling arrogant thought police. The anti-political correctness movement could become a bigots' paradise if we decide to deal with this issue in a simplistic manner.

I believe in self reliance, but I don't think its right to mock somebody for have a weight problem. Some people who are overweight because they have chosen to eat unhealthy foods, but that's not the case with everybody. Some people are overweight for genetic reasons. Plenty of people have have gone on every diet known to man and still failed to lose weight. And they don't need anybody to remind them about their problem.

I have known some people who work out every day. They spent countless hours at the gym or on the track. All the men and women either

had a crush on them or were jealous of them. Many of these people have turned out to be some of my best friends, but others were self-absorbed jerks. They had a great work ethic, but they looked down on people who didn't.

These folks may be treated like kings by society, but I don't think too much of them. If I have to choose between spending time with a weight-room junkie who happens to be a huge jerk or a fun-loving couch potato who eats one too many donuts, I'll take the latter.

I worked at a camp in Kansas City for special-needs children for three years. I grew to love some of those kids. And I always sympathized and respected the challenges their parents had to deal with. Every time I hear someone get called retarded, I think of those kids.

I know people don't mean to insult these kids or their parents when they call their friend a retard, but I just don't think its a word that should be thrown around.

Political correctness is certainly a problem, but I just don't think a widespread acceptance of insensitive behavior is the solution.

*Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.*

### Write us

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### 'Extra' programs important, too

To the Editor:

I was sitting at the fifth through eighth grade band concert the other night and it really hit home about what affect the state's budget cuts are having and going to have on our schools. That concert was exactly the type of program that is in jeopardy.

Of course, a lot of people around the state think that would be just fine, to cut out any or all the "extra" things like music, art, sports, etc. Their rationale is that we're going through some tough times right now, and we'll have to do without for now. Too bad that the kids in school right now happened to be born when they did.

Sorry, I don't accept that type of thinking.

All the programs and extracurricular activities are offered in an attempt to give students the opportunity to try different things. We're all different, and what interests some may not interest others. But any of these programs can open doors for a young person when they find one that interests them. No, they aren't part of the testing or assessment process that federal and state money hinges on. But no one can dispute the power they have for keeping a student interested in and involved in school when they're part of a group.

Schools around the state are already starting to shut down sports programs and activities. It's inevitable, I suppose, as long as our legislators are content to continue making cuts and not look at trying to increase revenues. But if you are like me, and want to see these programs continue to survive and thrive, please contact your legislators and let them know how you feel.

There are legislators who are pro-education and want to do the right thing, but they need the support of the general public to help fight their battles in Topeka. If no one says anything, I'm sure they'll feel that continued cuts are OK with people because no one is saying anything different.

Article 6 in the Kansas Constitution reads,



#### Free Press Letter Drop

#### • Our readers sound off

"The legislature shall provide for intellectual, educational, vocational and scientific improvement by establishing and maintaining public schools, educational institutions and related activities which may be organized and changed in such manner as may be provided by law." Notice it doesn't say anything in there about "only when times are good," or "only when enough funds are available."

Think about that the next time you're at a ball game, or a band concert, or an art show, or a school play. If you care about the young children today, make your voice heard.

Tracy Rogers, Colby

Note: Mr. Rogers is a member of the Colby School Board.

### We need option

To the Editor:

This is in reply to an editorial by Tom Dreiling which appeared in the Nov. 30 issue of the *Colby Free Press*:

Frequently, I listen to what President Barak Obama has to say and trust his motivations implicitly. I know that he is a United States citizen. His birth certificate was shown by Chris Matthews on television - MSNBC. As a matter of fact, his mother and her parents lived in a small town in Kansas.

Concerning the health bill: we have to have a public option to keep the insurers honest. Since everyone will have to buy insurance,

the insurance companies are delighted because they can raise the cost of premiums as they please.

As I see it, an option would be Medicare, but if a person already is paying an insurance company, that person cannot enroll in Medicare. However, if one has no insurance and wants to enroll in Medicare, it can be done. There should be an extension of the ages eligible for joining Medicare when the bill passes.

Most ordinary working people cannot afford insurance for themselves, their children and babies. Furthermore, health care is a right, not a privilege. It is disgusting that such an injustice is occurring in the United States.

The House of Representatives have already voted for a public option. As of this writing, the Senate has not voted for a public option, and I do not think that all members of this Senate realize how the people in this country are suffering or they would not remain the political party of "no!"

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

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**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.

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

