

## Other Viewpoints

### Abuse of inmates just has to stop

The Kansas Legislature is on the right track with proposals to increase penalties for sexual misconduct by corrections officers and others assigned to work with criminal offenders.

Among the proposals is a bill that would increase to at least one year in prison the presumptive penalty for conviction of sexual misconduct. Currently, it's presumed that violators will receive probation.

The bill covers prison employees, parole officers, workers at juvenile centers and teachers.

The proposal and others addressing the subject may need some fine tuning, but there's no question that harsher penalties are worth adopting.

That point has been made clear through reporting by *The Topeka Capital-Journal* and a report from the Legislature's auditing arm stemming from sexual misconduct in the Topeka Correctional Facility.

The stories uncovered a sex-for-contraband scandal in the women's prison, including one case in which a plumbing instructor who was employed by the facility was charged with raping an inmate. The inmate became pregnant and had an abortion.

The Division of Legislative Post Audit recommended changes that would require individuals convicted of sexual misconduct to register as sex offenders and would beef up penalties for both sexual misconduct and trafficking contraband.

The legislative auditors also called for greater consistency in investigations and discipline of staff in instances of undue familiarity, sexual misconduct and trafficking of contraband.

The audit, combined with the results of an independent examination of the correctional facility by the National Institute of Corrections, prompted legislators from both parties to voice concerns about administration and oversight of the facility.

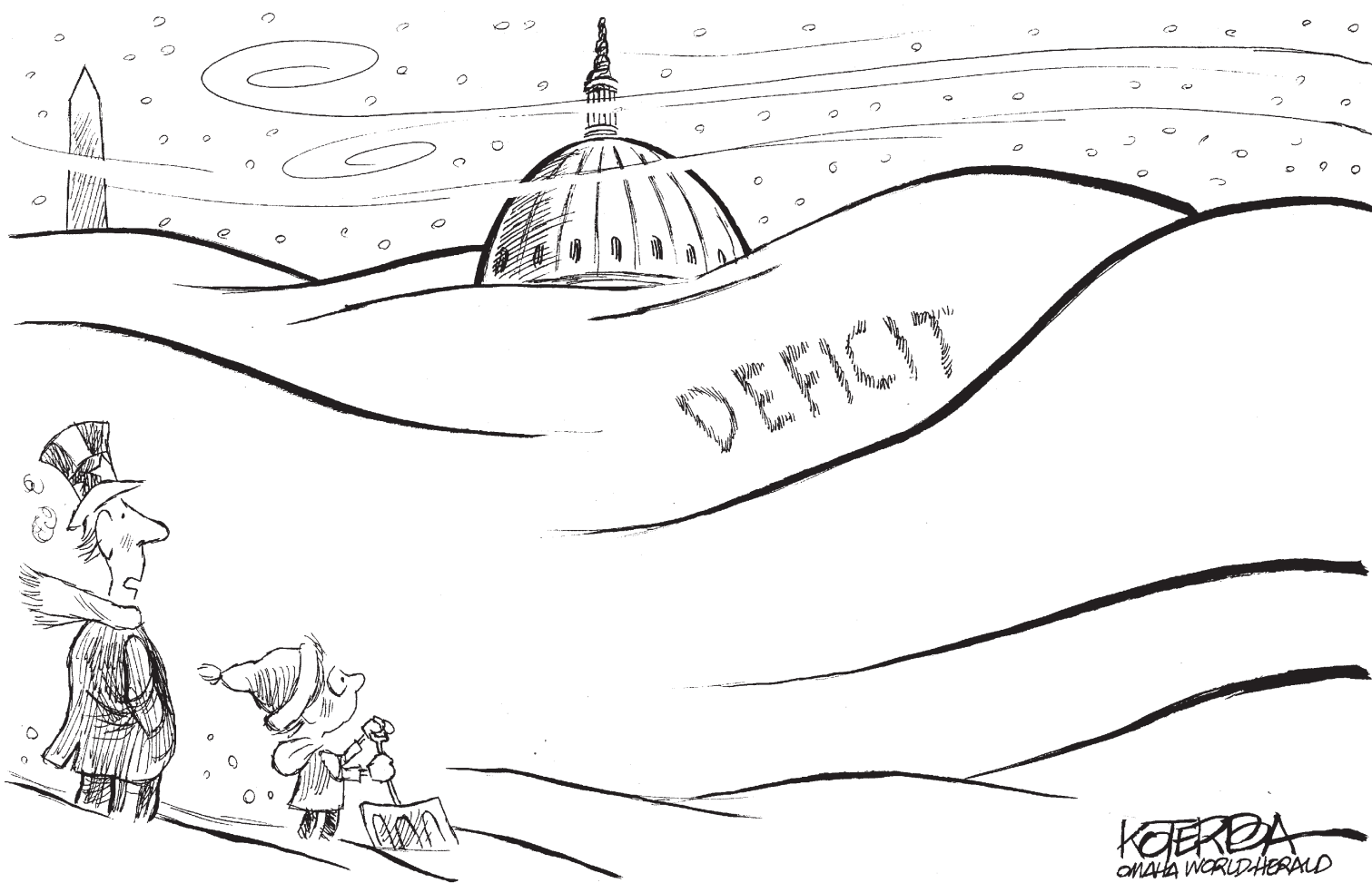
Senate Majority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, was particularly blunt, saying, "the institution, I think, was out of control."

Based on what Kansans have learned about the facility in the last several months, it would be hard to argue with Hensley's assessment.

While former warden Richard Koerner has been reassigned to a position in the Department of Corrections central office, concerns linger about the situation.

Stronger penalties for staff who take advantage of inmates would help the state regain control. Lawmakers have met part of their responsibility by submitting bills that would address the problem. Now, they need to go the rest of the way and approve new laws.

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



"THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT MAYBE ONE DAY YOUR KIDS CAN HELP YOU DIG OUT... AND THEIR KIDS... AND..."

### Party-line voting not the way

I am wondering if it might be time to eliminate political parties.

It seems to me that they are getting in the way of progress. When a congressman votes one way or the other on a bill just because that is the way his party is voting, whether he actually agrees with it or not, that has always seemed wrong to me.

I have never understood why we allow party caucuses. A caucus is when members of a single party get together to decide how they will all vote on a bill or issue. That has never made sense to me.

Shouldn't each congressman read the bill for himself and make his own decision, considering what would be best for the people who elected him?

A caucus is also when parties decide what their platform will contain, and if someone wants to be a member of that party, they are to abide by that platform. I must admit that some officials have the strength to separate themselves from their party's platform if they feel it is the right thing to do, but for the most part, members abide by their party's guidelines.

Because my sister has retired from her posi-



**Marj Brown**

• Marj's Snippets

tion as a representative in the state of Washington, I feel I can now discuss her experience with caucuses. She sometimes disagreed with decisions made by her party members and voted another way if she thought it might be better, and she was often ostracized by her colleagues for those decisions.

I must say that I admire her for having the strength and will power to stand up for what she thought was right. At one point, she even got up and walked out of a caucus meeting because she felt they were asking her to vote the wrong way.

I am also appalled at the fact that some of our congressmen don't even bother to show up for work some of the time, and when they do, some are playing video games on their laptops or sending e-mails when they should be listen-

ing to whoever is speaking.

If a business owner had an employee who didn't show up to work or who was wasting time at work, he would fire that employee. Maybe some congressmen should be fired if they aren't doing their jobs, or just voting yes or no on a bill because they are a member of a certain party without ever reading it. Perhaps there should be some sort of a test they have to take to see if they even know what the bills really contain.

We have always had political parties, and probably always will, but maybe we should start looking at the candidates who are running on an independent ticket — and start listening closely to what they are saying they stand for — before we vote next time.

However, we have to be sure they are truly independent and not just making a statement to get our vote, because there will always be those wolves in sheep's clothing out there.

*Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.*

### Legislature looks at health care freedom

The Kansas Health Care Freedom Amendment was introduced last Tuesday at a press conference that included Congressmen Todd Tiahrt and Jerry Moran.

The amendment simply says that the cornerstone of any future health care reform must be the preservation and protection of the right of individuals to make their own health choices.

This is about preserving the ability of Kansans to dictate how and where they receive their health care without any penalties for not utilizing a Federal system. Although the national health care plan may be faltering, it is important that Kansas get out in front of this to prevent further erosion of our citizen's rights.

This proposition would not affect which health care services a provider or hospital is required to perform or offer. It would not affect which services are permitted by law and would not prohibit care relating to workers compensation or state employee-benefit programs.

By passing this proposition, the Kansas Legislature would be giving the citizens of Kansas an opportunity to vote for their own health care sovereignty. Any person, employer or health-care provider would have the right to be free from any rule or law compelling participation in any health system.

It would protect Kansas citizens from any penalties or fines resulting from choosing their own doctors. Employers would be free to buy lawful health services directly from a provider and there would be no law to prevent a provider from accepting direct payment for services.



**Jim Morrison**

• Capitol Review

This resolution will go before the voters of Kansas if approved by two-thirds of the elected members of the Kansas Senate and two-thirds of the elected members of the Kansas House. Once approved, the resolution would be placed on the election ballot in 2010.

**K-2 Ban Approved by House:** HB 2411 amends the Kansas Uniform Controlled Substances Act to include the drug known as K-2 and other synthetic cannabinoids and chemicals that work together to produce an experience that mirrors that of ecstasy.

The ban was passed on the House floor by a vote of 111-4. It is now in the Senate Judiciary committee.

**Selected Bills Introduced last Week**  
**HB 2439:** Prohibits the sending, reading or writing of text messages while operating a motor vehicle, with exceptions for emergency personnel.

**HB 2441:** Prohibits text messaging while operating a moving motor vehicle and establishes involuntary manslaughter while driving and texting as a severity level 4, person felony.

**HB 2442:** Establishing the Kansas Stream-

lined Government Commission; providing for an independent review of state agencies; prescribing powers, duties and functions for the commission and certain other state agencies.

**HB 2516:** Kansas Expanded Lottery Act; relating to racetrack gaming; creating the Kansas Agricultural Opportunity Act — Revisits allowing slot machines at greyhound and horse-racing facilities in Sedgwick County.

**HB 2519:** relating to streamlined sales and use tax agreement conformity.

**HB 2537:** Provides for the sale of single-strength cereal malt beverages at all authorized retailers.

**HB 2541:** The Kansas Illegal Immigration Relief Act.

**HB 2556:** Restricting the use of certain wireless communication devices while operating a moving motor vehicle

**HB 2622:** Use of public funds for lobbying — No taxpayer funds shall be used for the purpose of employing or contracting for the services of any person whose duty and responsibility includes lobbying for a tax increase.

**HCR 5028:** Establishing a three-year moratorium on new tax exemptions, tax credits or economic development incentive programs involving employer withholding taxes

It is an honor to serve you in the House of Representatives. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my staff or me.

*Rep. Jim Morrison, who represents the 121st District in the Kansas, can be reached at jmorriso@ink.org or www.morrisonfamily.com.*

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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.

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