



Free Press Viewpoint

Drivers won't change habits for texting law

This week, the Kansas Senate passed a law to ban texting on cell phones while driving.

The bill proposes a \$100 fine for the first time someone is caught texting. After that, they would face a misdemeanor charge, as would drivers who cause accidents while texting.

It's a laudable goal. The U.S. Department of Transportation says 6,000 people died in distracted-driver accidents in 2008, and those are the worst kind since they are usually preventable.

The Kansas Department of Transportation says there were 394 accidents and four people were killed in Kansas in 2008 because of cell phones. Young people are statistically more likely to get into distracted-driver accident.

Kansas already has a texting ban on the books for learners and intermediate license holders.

Unfortunately, if this bill passes and becomes law, we can't consider the problem solved.

The law is not really going to keep people from texting while driving; it'll just mean harsher punishment if you're caught. The law can't disable the texting option while the phone is in a car. People can and will text in the car.

You can't legislate common sense. We have speed limits in this country, and yet every year, hundreds of thousands of people are pulled over for speeding. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says half of all fatal accidents take place at 55 mph or faster. We have seat-belt laws, and yet in 2008, 215 people not wearing seat belts died in crashes in Kansas. We have laws against drunk driving, yet of all the people killed in wrecks in 2007, one-third of the deaths were alcohol related.

Simply put, people routinely violate just about every traffic law there is.

Does this mean we should give up? No, but it does mean the message isn't getting through. We need to change tactics.

Texting is just one of many kinds of distracted driving. Can we make laws against eating, changing music disks or just looking at the scenery? All three have caused accidents. There are just too many of them to make laws against. We need to focus on methods that actually do change behavior, and one of those is community action.

One of the best ways to reach people is through community organizations. Rotary Kiwanis clubs, the American Legion and many others could have programs for young people and adults involving distracted driving. We have an excellent organization in our schools here called Students Against Destructive Decisions. This is right up their alley.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has a web site, www.distraction.gov, which has suggestions for drivers, parents, law enforcement officers, employers and others.

The traffic safety administration has a distracted-driver campaign that provides videos and other materials to organizations that want to put on driver-education seminars.

FocusDriven, a non profit organization dedicated to helping raise awareness of distracted driving, was formed in January by the National Safety Council to try and change attitudes.

But in the end, laws don't change minds. People do.

— Kevin Bottrell

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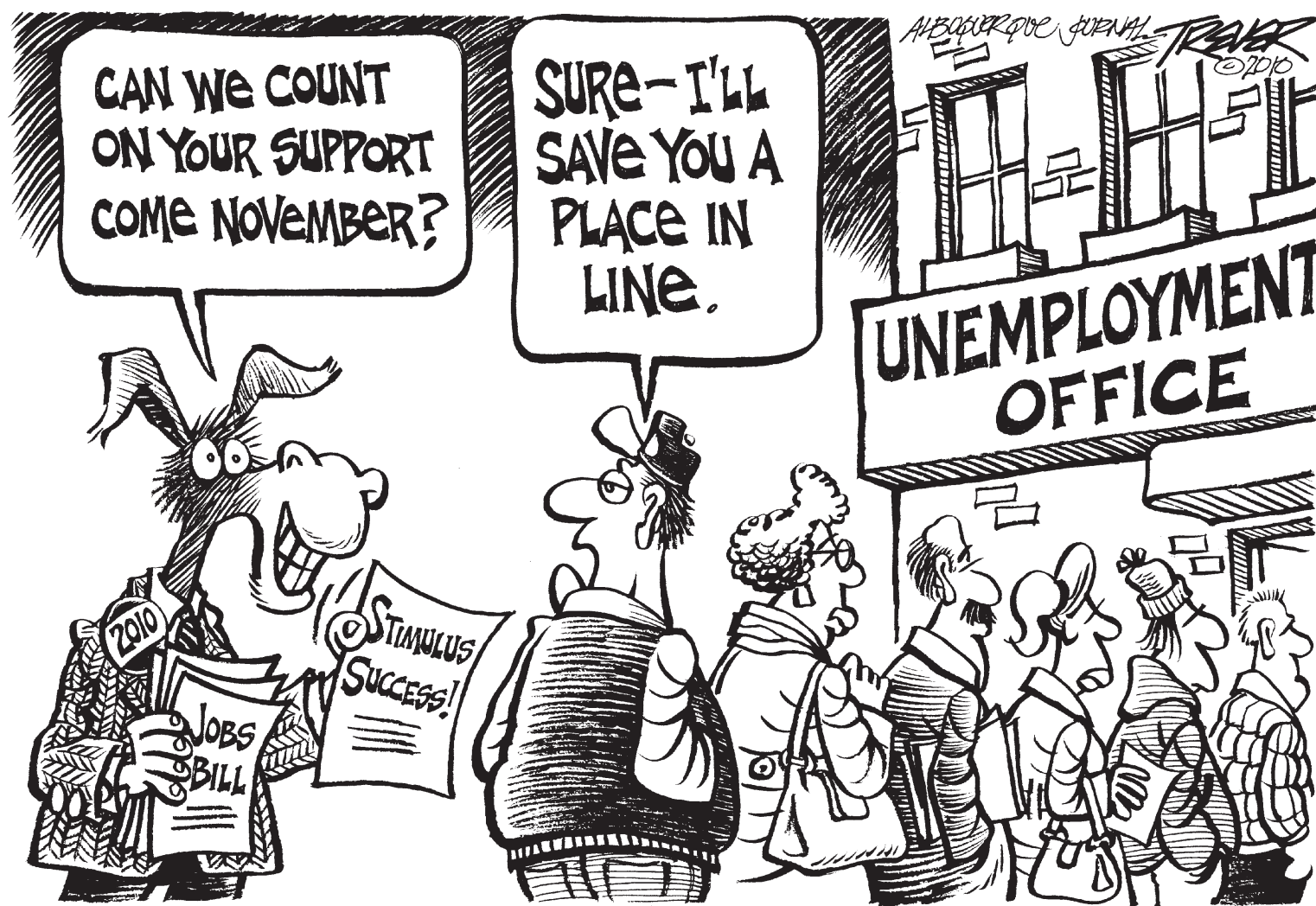
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Spring cleaning yields some treasures

A funny thing happened on the way through the office this morning.

First of all, an update. After the basement of the *Free Press* flooded last month, we moved the front office staff into the newsroom, and began the process of cleaning up. At first, this was a matter of throwing out wet stuff, drying out damp stuff, sweeping, mopping up – big obvious things like that.

Then we got to the repair phase. The furnace in the basement drowned, as did the vacuum. Wallboard needed to be replaced, providing a welcome chance for a little new paint.

Then came the floor. Most of the carpet had to be taken out, and the project got expanded to include the front office as well. With Murphy's Law – everything that can go wrong will – and at the worst possible time – we are still housing refugee ad representatives in the newsroom, we are still all torn up and the promised carpet is still not quite a reality.

Meanwhile, the disruption means that piles of papers, forms, and – let's face it, STUFF – have been unearthed from corners where they were comfortably stashed. Some of those piles were stashed, I'm sure, back when Heck was a pup, as they say. No one now on staff is willing to claim them; that's for sure.

The fact of the matter is, a newspaper office collects a lot of – paper. Not just office paper, but newspaper. Files of old newspapers. Piles of old newspapers. There's a reason why they call files of old newspapers "the morgue." It's old dead stuff, waiting to be buried, or at least neatly stored on shelves where it can be found



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

in the unlikely possibility that someone wants it in the future.

Then there are things like jammed staplers, nearly empty pencil boxes, not-quite-dried-up markers – the things that tend to collect around an office.

The word has come down that it's time for spring cleaning, time to clean out and clean up.

One of the areas that's been easy to ignore is the coat hooks. That's a good place to put things you don't know where else to hang. Out of curiosity, I took an inventory today. I found:

- Two safety-orange vests to wear when reporting on accidents.
- A printer's apron, presumably left over from the days when we actually had printing presses in the Colby office. The paper has been printed elsewhere since about 1997, according to publisher Steve Haynes.
- A cheap raincoat, presumably for reporting on accidents in the rain, or possibly ship launchings.
- A windbreaker, unclaimed by anyone now on staff, and the real kicker ...



VERA SLOAN/ Colby Free Press
Andy Heintz modeled his archeological discovery at his desk on Friday.

• Two red-velvet-and-white-faux-fur "Santa's helper" mini-dresses. Now how long do you suppose they've been there?

(The boss said they hired to young women to wear them in a "Santa's Helper" promotion before he got here.)

Oh, I left out the real prize. Sports Editor Andy Heintz staked a claim on a colorful straw sombrero unearthed somewhere in the process. It's provided a note of light relief in the office today. I just hope he doesn't hang it back on the coat hooks. After all, we have to make room for a new collection to – stuff.

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.

'Social media' an opportunity to tell story

It's happened. It's come to pass – for some the personal letter has gone the way of the dinosaur or the Edsel.

For those of you too young to remember, the Edsel was an upscale Ford built by committee. This car had no beauty, no lines – the profile was completely chopped and clunked together, and the push-button gear selector was located in the middle of the steering wheel where the horn should have been. One word best describes this car – awful.

Wait a minute. This column was supposed to be about a new way of communicating. Let me begin again.

Technology continues to change the way we communicate. Few things have changed as quickly and rapidly.

As a youngster, we read the daily newspaper and weekly magazines, including *Look*, *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. We listened to the radio every morning and capped off our evening by watching the 10 o'clock news on television.

The preferred personal methods of communication were a letter or a phone call. If you chose to write a letter, you wrote it in your best penmanship, licked a five-cent stamp, stuck it on the envelope and dropped it in the nearest mailbox.

If you were inclined to place a phone call, you called the operator, told her the number you wanted to call and waited for her to dial it. If you can even reach an operator today, I'd be interested in knowing how you do it.

As we move into the 21st century, newspapers and magazines continue to battle radio, television and video for a few minutes of our ever-shrinking time. Cellular phones, e-mail,



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

Twitter and Facebook also take their slice of the communications pie.

Used to be when driving your car, windshield time was spent thinking, dreaming and planning future work projects or events with the family. Today, most people conduct business by phone, or even hand-held computers – some while speeding along at 75 mph. The phone, computer and e-mail are effective tools, and they're here to stay.

Farmers and ranchers should be willing to use "social media" like Facebook because it is the way many, especially those under 35, prefer to communicate and learn. Like some of the other communications media, it can be a powerful tool for building influence. An example of this was the 2008 presidential race, where candidates used it to attract supporters and campaign contributions.

The power of social media continues to grow. According to one source, in one year, the "microblogging" service Twitter grew 1,382 percent. Facebook grew 228-percent and now has more than 350 million users.

There's no question using social media is another way to connect with friends, especially the younger generations. Even though Twitter and Facebook ask users to tell what they're doing at any given moment, most of their online

friends or followers don't really want to know. The key is to be interesting, be helpful – or be quiet.

Share information, ask and answer questions and build connections. Information may be text, photos, videos or audio files. Today's technology allows users to post or tweet from anywhere. Smart phones are simply computers that take calls.

Social media provides farmers and ranchers with one more avenue to tell their story to the nonfarm public. It's important to commit to learning new social media tools.

Yes, today there are countless ways to deliver the message about farmers and ranchers who supply the healthiest food in the world – and the ways continue to grow. Some people prefer to read newspapers, others like to surf the net and still others watch their news on television in the comfort of their easy chair.

Regardless of the way we wind up delivering our message, we will all have to figure change into the communications equation. Change affects most people in one of three ways – it excites them, scares them or fills them with hope. Regardless of how it makes us feel, change is continual. Always has been, always will be.

To be successful, we must anticipate change and adapt quickly. We must be wise enough to incorporate change that will help us and continue to use tried-and-true methods.

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

