

## Free Press Viewpoint

### Yes, Virginia, there is a western Kansas

The Kansas state treasurer dropped by this week. Dennis McKinney has been touring the state talking about unclaimed property, trying to find people and give them back money they didn't even know they had. This is a pretty good service, and what we appreciate most is that he came himself with a few staffers. He didn't send a proxy, instead touring all over the state, hitting small towns as well as the cities.

We don't get a lot of state officials in this end of Kansas. It's understandable; it's 310 miles from Colby to Topeka. That's a long drive. Once you get west of Salina, there are very few large towns.

State officials get even more scarce once you get past Hays. Many politicians want to hit the largest number of people for the smallest amount of effort, and western Kansas might not seem like a good time investment.

Over the past year, we've seen a few. The governor stopped by a farm in southern Thomas County for about half an hour one day in July. We saw three state Court of Appeals judges sit for a couple days to hear local cases in October. Fort Hays State University President Ed Hammond and University of Kansas Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little stopped in town within a few days of each other.

We've also seen almost every candidate for Jerry Moran's seat in Congress, plus Moran himself in his campaign for the Senate. We haven't seen his chief rival, Todd Tiahrt, but there's still time. Who knows if any candidates for governor will make the trip.

But we haven't seen quite a few of them. There's been no attorney general, insurance commissioner or lieutenant governor on our events list, not in the last year anyway.

It's good to see state officials all the way out here for a number of reasons:

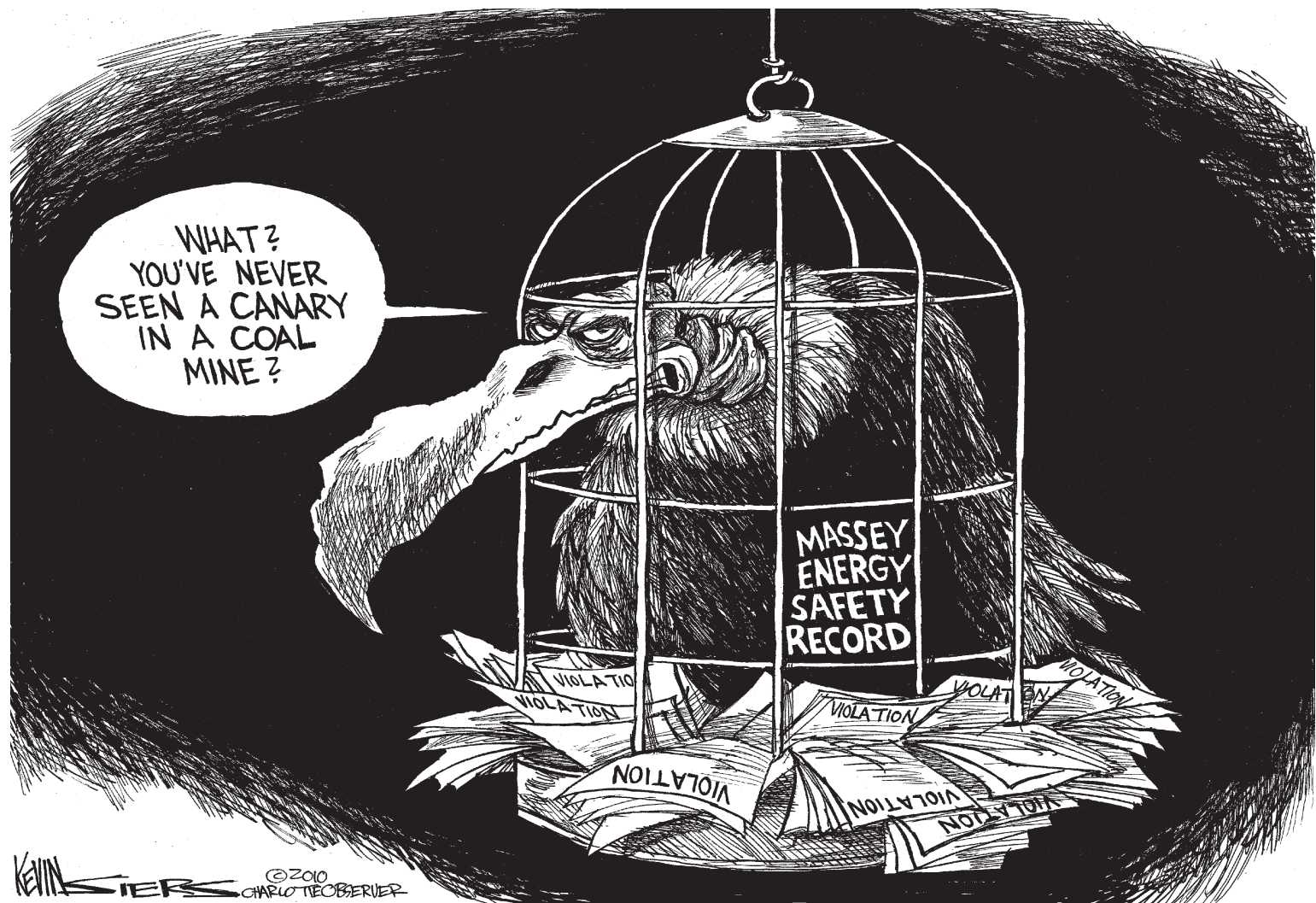
It's good for us because it lets us know that, yes, we are part of the state. We haven't been completely forgotten by the bigwigs in Topeka. We get to tell them what we think and what we want in a personal way. Theoretically, these guys work for us, so it's good that we have their ear.

It's good for them to hear from us. We have different problems than they do in Topeka. We worry about a bad harvest or school districts not having enough kids to keep going. They can't get the kind of insight into rural western Kansas issues by visiting Salina or Hays that they can by visiting Colby.

We're also a huge block of voters that often gets ignored. People in small towns and rural areas are more likely to be the type who want to meet candidates in person. McKinney, who spend 16 years as a state representative, said two former governors told him we're more connected and more liable to vote. But then, he's from Greensburg, in southwest Kansas.

A lot of candidates in the upcoming election have taken that to heart, but not all. Time will tell, but it's likely that those who made the most in-person visits will carry the rural areas.

There's a joke that as far as anyone in the east is concerned, Kansas ends at Salina. We're glad to see any state official who gets the joke. — Kevin Bottrell



### Dads help get over bumps in life

The older I get, the more I've come to appreciate my dad.

People are so complicated, and some situations are so complex that it's hard deal with life all by myself. It has always comforted me that I could rely on my dad, Tom Heintz, when I started feeling like I was in over my head.

I don't mean to infer that my life is abnormally hard. Lord knows, there are millions of people out there who have it worse than I do. But there are days when the amount of stress I can take on is less than normal for one reason or another. It's on these days where my Dad has always been there for me.

I've always admired my Dad's ability to cope with with life's unwanted surprises. His friends and my family have always leaned on him in times of crisis, and he never lets any of us down. He has always been so reliable that both his friends and our family sometime take him for granted. But when I look back on years past, it makes me realize how many times I would have been in trouble if it weren't for the guiding hand of my father.

Like all parents and their kids, my Dad and I have had our disagreements and confrontations over the years. Dad spent some maddeningly frustrating days teaching me how to ride a bike, drive a car and a boat, understand complicated math problems, fish, pitch and throw a football.

We shared some tense and often comical moments as Dad tried to pass on his wisdom to me. The dialogue we shared could make a



**Andy Heintz**

- Wildcat Ramblings

pretty good sitcom.

I still remember when Dad had me start the bass boat and bring it around to the dock to be tied up while he parked the car. This was one of the first times he had given me this responsibility, so I was a little nervous. Unfortunately the motor wouldn't start and the boat started floating out to the middle of the lake as Dad was yelling and shaking his fist from the dock.

I sat in the boat with a perplexed look on my face as I fought the urge to give Dad a wave. Thankfully, my common sense kicked in and I decided it probably wasn't a good time for humor.

Somehow I finally managed to get the motor started, and I drove to the dock to pick up my emotionally fatigued father, who looked too exasperated to properly scold me for the latest catastrophe I had gotten us into. Ten minutes later, we had our lures in the water and all was forgotten.

This was just one of the many unforgettable adventures my Dad suffered through as he tried to help me navigate through life's treacherous

waters. There were plenty of other fiascos I put my father through, such as massive tangles in my fishing line, errant fast balls that smacked him in the knee or bonked him on the head and nights of never-ending, mind-numbing math homework.

Despite all the adventures, he has always stuck with me. While he sometimes looked worn down by my inability to grasp things quickly, he never let it stop him from trying to help.

He taught me that you have to be there for those you care about, even if helping them seems a constant headache. He has always been at his best when I needed him the most.

I have tried to follow my Dad's example by being there for those I care about when they are struggling. I don't always live up to my goals, and I occasionally get so caught up in trying to fulfill my own selfish desires that I forget about the struggles being endured by people I care about. But I always strive to be loyal to my family and friends, even if I don't always live up to my own expectations.

I think if people would just learn to put others' needs before themselves, this world would be a lot more just and friendly. I'm as guilty as anyone when it comes to making self-centered decisions, but I'm grateful my Dad has taught me that I need to keep trying.

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.

### Boys addicted to video games

The percent of men earning college degrees in the U.S. has now dropped to 43 percent. While women have traditionally dominated professions such as nursing and teaching, professors in veterinary, pharmacy and medical schools are now looking out at a sea of women students.

Engineering and math careers are still dominated by men, but women are making substantial inroads across all fields they do not yet dominate. Women's share of doctorates in math has risen from 11 percent in 1966 to 30 percent in 2006. Women only earned 12 percent of biological and agricultural doctorates in 1966 but are crossing to a majority in these field-oriented degrees today.

Women are not forcing males out of the classroom; they are taking empty seats as males fall by the wayside.

The newspapers of record in education — *Education Week* and *Chronicle of Higher Education* — are buzzing with debates. Several books blame recent American curriculum "reforms" for this "boy problem." Conservative radio talk shows condemn the "feminization of the classroom," although there is no evidence that classroom interactions today differ significantly from a century ago.

It is very unlikely that this drop in male academic performance is due to any particular educational reform for several reasons.

Males are dropping out of academics in all developed countries. When I lecture in China's universities, except for the forestry schools, I see mostly women's faces. My colleagues in Europe report the same growing preponderance of female students. Whatever is depressing boy's school performance is cutting across cultural and political boundaries and widely disparate educational systems.



**John Richard Schrock**

- Education Frontlines

More evidence comes from the timing. Boys' and girls' academic performance began to diverge 15 years ago and has accelerated in the last decade. Boys, who traditionally were far better in mathematics, have declined to now be at parity with girls on national tests. This decline in boy's scores coincides with the emergence of video games.

Last year, Douglas Gentile published a survey of Americans 8 to 18, and found 12 percent of the boys were video-game addicted. That meant they had at least six symptoms out of 11, similar to a scale for gambling addiction.

Only 3 percent of girls were video-game addicts. Yet, this study was a correlation and not a proof that video games caused the decline in academics. There was the possibility that boys who were not academic were attracted to video games as a consequence. In science, we have a saying: correlation does not prove causation.

However, the proof that video games cause a decline in academics is now in hand, published in the February 2010 issue of *Psychological Science*.

Robert Weis and Brittany C. Cerankosky of Denison University measured a group of boys' academic baseline achievement and surveyed their parents and teachers for the boys' behavior. They then gave half of the group of boys Playstation videogame units. Boys with video

games saw their academics nosedive. The control group without video games continued on with their solid schoolwork. This nailed the cause-and-effect relationship.

Nevertheless, educationists and computer enthusiasts are in denial, trying to find fault with the study or somehow deflect the damning evidence. In the same manner that computers are being ignored as a major cause of student obesity, educators are reluctant to admit that video games are a major cause of the decline in male academic performance. It is called "Gameboy" and not "Gamegirl" for a reason—most girls are far less addicted to video games.

There are now more women in the American workforce than men, in part due to layoffs. But the academic decline in boys began 15 years before the recession. If we are going to stop this educational slide of men to a minor role in the professions, we are going to have to take the electronic toys out of the hands of our boys.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

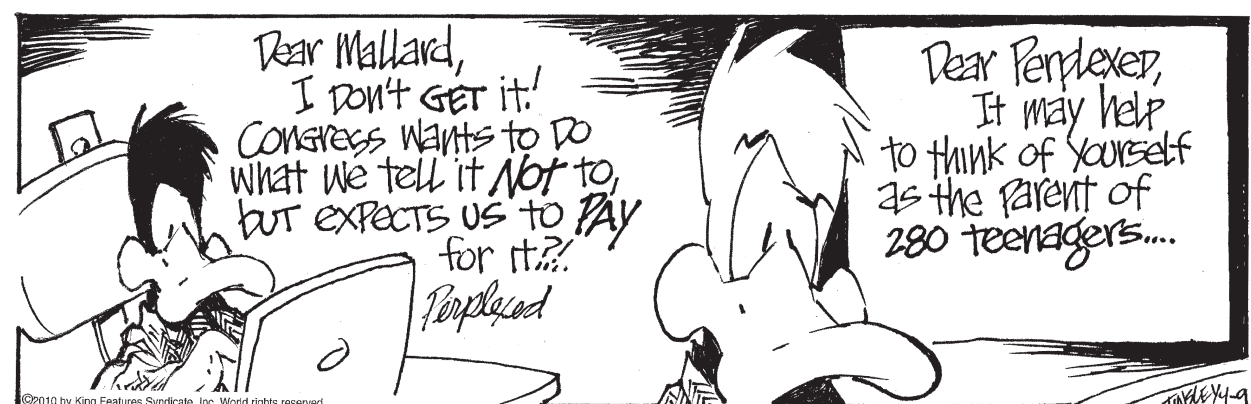
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### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley



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