



Free Press Viewpoint

Drug war hurts all

Everyone decries the growing drug-gang violence in Mexico, especially when it starts affecting U.S. interests.

American media made a big deal out of the murder, apparently by drug gangs, of an American woman who worked at the U.S. consulate in Juarez and the husbands of two State Department employees after a child's birthday party.

Shoot-outs between Mexican troops and the gangs garner attention, but in the U.S. we shake our heads, then cry out for better border security. No one bothers to ask why the violence is rampant in Mexico, as it has been for years in Columbia.

But if you want to know who's to blame, it's us.

American drug laws, founded on the fallacy that the failed and discredited policy of prohibition will somehow work a century later, have nearly ruined the peace, democracy and stability of Columbia. Now they threaten our neighbor, Mexico.

Why?

It's simple. What people want is what people want. Making it illegal does not change that, but it changes the economics of the business. Criminal gangs latch on to supplying anything illegal, because if people want it enough, they'll pay any price.

That's what made the Mafia and other immigrant gangs of the early 20th century so rich and powerful: prohibition of alcohol gave them a perfect opening to supply demand for a substance that many people saw as relatively harmless.

As a nation, we recognized this mistake and moved on. We abandoned the idea of prohibition, except for our own kids. We figure it didn't work for us, but it would work on children.

About the same time, society began to recoil from the supposed threat of marijuana and other drugs, largely unregulated until Prohibition. Even after repeal, the U.S. kept its drug laws despite a lack of proof that the substances were any more harmful than legal items, including tobacco and alcohol.

Scare tactics by early drug-enforcement types, aimed at building up the drug-police bureaucracy as much as anything, and lurid movies fed public hysteria. Because drugs and drug users were still viewed as weird, it was easy to outlaw them.

Fast forward to the 1960s, when a questioning generation defied advice and started trying the old drugs — and some brand new ones. Since then, antidrug laws have grown apace, along with the number of Americans in prison.

The result? Nations nearly destroyed. Drug use in this country ever increasing.

The growing popularity of cocaine through the 1980s has made once-quiet Columbia a hotbed of violence, with assassination of judges and legislators commonplace. Government officials were kidnapped, offices bombed. Our response: give the police and Army more weapons to pursue the fight.

Now, we have exported our home-grown methamphetamine and marijuana business to Mexico, with disastrous results. We made it harder to make meth or grow marijuana here, so the Mexican gangs saw an opportunity to make big money.

We backed the Mexican government in trying to suppress these gangs, but law enforcement alone cannot end the drug "problem." That can only come from curbing demand, and only treatment programs can do that.

Interestingly, the Mexican Army has proved more effective against the gangs than some. Still, honest judges, police officers and public officials have to live in constant fear of murder — or worse. Whole families sometimes are wiped out.

Why?

Because we still haven't learned that prohibition does not work. Because we haven't learned to treat the problem rather than the product. Because we still believe in simple solutions.

We spend billions each year to perpetuate the "War on Drugs," while each year the problem gets worse. The only ones who benefit are the drug-police bureaucracy and the gangs.

Whole nations lose their lifestyle in this game. When will we learn? — *Steve Haynes*

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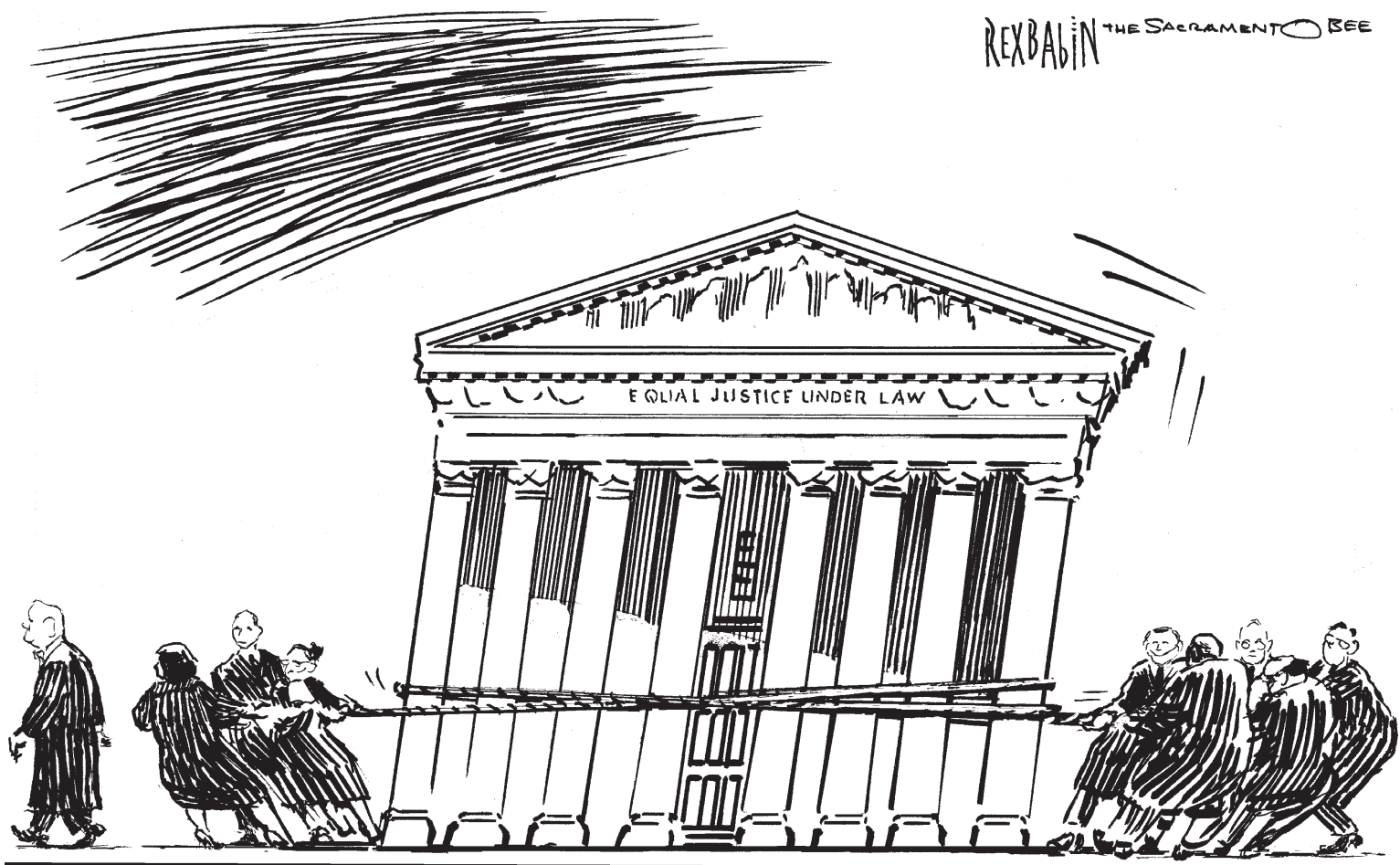
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Neat garden inspires envy

I've had a bad case of garden envy, so this year I'm going to do something about it.

My sister has the neatest garden. Her asparagus crop is enormous. Her tomatoes stand like sentinels, all neatly staked. Her zucchini don't even run all over the yard. They are neat, obedient plants that stay where they are supposed to.

Her worst sin, however, is she can plant a straight row.

I'm a crooked person.

I can't draw a straight line with a ruler. The part in my hair is never straight. I use the whole lane when driving. And, worst of all, my furrows wander all over the garden.

Last year in disgust, I just planted my lettuce and spinach by broadcasting the seeds in the general area where I wanted to grow them.

That worked fairly well until it was time to put in the tomatoes and pepper plants.

My general philosophy is to get as much to grow in a square inch as possible, so I marry the lettuce and spinach to the tomatoes, peppers with the cucumbers — well that analogy isn't going very well. Just say I plant the smaller ones in the spaces between the big ones.

That works well with rows. The plants go in between rows of lettuce and spinach. It doesn't



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

go well if there are no rows and no in-between spaces.

I think I had decided that I would just pull out enough lettuce and spinach plants to accommodate the latecomers.

That didn't happen. I couldn't do it. I couldn't pull out healthy, productive members of my garden. I ended up putting the tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers in the odd holes. This made for a very messy garden. The vegetables were not lined up in neat rows. They were scattered around wherever there was an open spot.

The odd spacing was especially noticeable in the late summer after the lettuce and spinach was all gone.

This year, though, I have a plan.

I went out with stakes and twine and laid out my rows for lettuce, spinach and radishes.

Then I carefully dug my furrows and put my seeds in.

When it's time to put in the bedding plants, there will be space for them.

Now, if I could only figure out what to do about that odd patch of fall spinach that has come up in the middle of the garden. No matter what I plant around it, it's going to be in the way.

Logic says pull it. By the time I'm planting the larger part of the garden with corn and squash, my newly planted greens will be coming up, and we can eat off of them.

But, I know in my heart of hearts that won't happen. I won't be able to mow down the lovely little plants that have provided me with salads in March and April.

I'll just have to figure out how to plant around them.

Maybe I'll call my sister for some advice. Her garden is always so darned neat.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

Unclaimed property still accessible

To the editor:

It is a special honor for me to serve as your state treasurer, and one of my favorite parts of this job is the opportunity to visit towns across the state, meeting so many great people along the way.

I enjoyed the opportunity to visit Colby on April 7. Thanks to Holly Whitaker at the Chamber of Commerce for providing us with a great location as we returned property to the people who showed up to check in their names or the names of family members.

For those who were unable to attend our unclaimed property return, you can still check to see if you have any by visiting our website kansascash.com or call our toll-free line at (800) 432-0386.

There are 1978 unclaimed properties valued at over \$207,321 in Thomas County alone being held by the treasurer's office, so I would encourage everyone to take a couple of minutes to see if any of that property belongs to you or someone you know.

Ad Astra Per Aspera.

Dennis McKinney, Topeka
Kansas state treasurer

Solving child abuse takes a community

To the Editor:

When peeling back the layers of our community, child abuse and neglect is an underlying presence that most wish wasn't there. Unfortunately, wishing away child abuse and neglect is not a realistic solution.

Instead, it will take community-wide efforts to reduce it. If each adult took the responsibility to report child abuse and neglect and get involved in a child's life, our children would live in much safer homes and communities.

This April, please take on the responsibility to make children safer in your neighborhood



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

and community.

Be a voice in your community. Advocate for healthy children and help reduce child abuse and neglect.

Take a stand for prevention of child abuse and neglect in your community. Practice Prevent Child Abuse America's five "R's." You can be part of reducing child abuse and neglect in your community.

Remember that children are the future. Early years have an enormous impact on their future health and success.

Recognize prevention is a shared responsibility. We are responsible for ensuring parents and families have access to support, information and services.

Raise the issue of prevention. Call or write elected officials, talk with others, encourage schools and churches to support programs for parents.

Reach Out to kids and parents. Be a good neighbor, baby-sit, donate, be supportive and kind.

Recommend ideas that your community can use. Facilitate friendships and support, strengthen parenting, respond to family crisis, link families to opportunities.

As an outward sign of your support, I urge you to wear a blue ribbon — the symbol of child abuse prevention efforts. If you do not have one, you can get one by contacting Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, 140 W. Fourth, Colby, Kan., 67701, (785) 460-8177.

Paige Campbell, Colby program director

Security, learning important to kids

To the Editor:

The week of April 11-17 is the "Week of the Young Child," set aside to recognize the importance of the early learning years.

Child development professionals have identified the first five years as a time of explosive growth, mental, emotionally and physically. The early environment children experience can help them reach their full potential.

This year's theme is "Early Years are Learning Years." As a child's first teacher, its parents play a huge role in preparing their child for a lifetime of learning.

For a child to flourish and learn, it must feel secure. Parents provide security by meeting not only the physical needs of their child but by providing a nurturing environment where he or she feel safe to express their emotions, explore their world and mature at their own rate.

Children need the security of knowing that their feelings are recognized and valued, their autonomy is encouraged and they can explore within a safe environment.

Parenting is the most important job any of us will ever have, and yet there is little to no training which prepares us to navigate these challenging years. In days past, young parents had extended family to learn from. In today's society, families are more spread out and healthy families are harder to find.

Providing a nurturing environment is more than just common sense. It takes concentrated effort to ensure that a child grows up to be an emotionally healthy and productive adult.

For information, contact Smart Start Northwest Kansas at (785) 465-9103.

Karen Merryman, Colby Professional Development Coordinator
Smart Start Northwest Kansas

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

