



Free Press Viewpoint

Inadequate law worse than no law

Even though we hope they're focusing on the yet-to-be-resolved state budget, it seems the state Legislature has some time left over to pass some other things, namely a law that would allow police to pull people over for not wearing seat belts.

The bill, approved by the Senate on Saturday, would have Kansas join the 30 other states with so-called "primary" seat belt laws. Currently, officers can only give people tickets for not wearing seat belts if they are pulled over for something else. Kansas today does not require adults in the back seat to buckle up.

The new law would require everyone to wear seat belts, but would make it a secondary offense. Officers couldn't pull you over for it, just ticket you if you're already stopped.

It's all well and good to have a primary seat belt law; after all, seat belts save lives and people should wear them. In this area, the majority of people in fatal or disabling car accidents weren't wearing seat belts, and many of them could have survived if they had been.

The problem with this bill comes when you examine the penalties. If the law is signed and published, the penalty for violating it would be a whopping \$5. After a year, it'll make a huge leap up to \$10.

If we are going to make laws, we need to make them stick. Laws like this one are meant to be a deterrent, they are meant to change people's behavior. But a \$5 fine isn't going to deter anybody.

The conference committee, a committee from both houses that brings the bills they pass together to make final versions, reduced the fine from \$60. The current fine is \$30, but just for an adult in the front seat.

The only way these small fines would be effective is if they stack up with other fines against the driver. However, if you get pulled over just for not wearing a seat belt, you might not have broken any other laws, in which case you get a \$5 slap on the wrist and the slight delay of having been pulled over. Granted that's enough to intimidate some law-abiding folks into good behavior, but a lot of people are just going to shrug that right off.

The governor should veto this bill and demand that the Legislature send him one that will actually get people to wear their seat belts. This bill is a token effort by the Legislature to secure \$11 million from the federal government, money the state can only get by having a primary seat belt law. Getting back our federal money is fine, but doing so this way is a waste of the taxpayers' time. — Kevin Bottrell

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May buzzes with busyness

It is May.

I realize this seems like a fairly obvious statement, but do you comprehend the full impact of those three little words?

Simply turning the page on a calendar seems to throw everything into disarray.

Mother's Day was this weekend. As a mother, I have to admit I think it's overrated and commercialized. Of course, where I grew up, Mother's Day weekend was also college graduation weekend, which means our little town filled up with parents, grandparents, and parties. Forget taking Mom out to dinner — even with reservations, it's a losing proposition. She's likely to die of old age long before dessert.

But the disruptions of May don't end there. High schools have graduations. Kindergartens have graduations. These are undoubtedly important, valuable recognition of success at a particular point in life. They are also a scheduling nightmare.

Don't forget the seemingly endless round of end-of-the-year concerts/tournaments/art shows/picnics/proms. Some require an audience. Some require sponsors. Some require chaperones. ALL require a spot on the rapidly-filling calendar.

The school year also ends for most non-graduating students during May. That means hauling home stuff that's been hidden at the



Marian Ballard

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bottom of lockers or desks since September. That means finding baby sitters or summer jobs, shaking up family routines until everyone finds a new, vacation-time rhythm.

Then there's the getting-ready-for-summer list.

Sign up for summer recreation programs. There's baseball and softball and swimming to enroll in. Don't forget summer reading programs and Chautauqua events for the whole family.

Get your lawn fertilized and your garden planted, if you haven't got it done yet. Change the batteries in your smoke alarm and the oil in your car. Watch the price of gasoline climb, just in time for travel to out-of-town graduations and tournaments. Postpone getting your air conditioning checked out until the first heat wave, along with everyone else. You can all be hot and cranky together next month.

With all of this happening in May, the list of what you DON'T do in this month of tran-

sitions is remarkably short. Don't — try to do anything normal.

Don't try to schedule an appointment. No one has time for ordinary things like visits to their doctor, mechanic or veterinarian. On the other hand, doctors and veterinarians may have extra flexibility during office hours when all those who should be there don't have time for appointments. Mechanics probably stay busy tuning up vehicles for summer.

Don't try to schedule another party. You will wind up with 15 people standing around in a circle scribbling out lines in their appointment books as first one date and then another gets vetoed. Save it for June.

Don't plan on a week, or even a day, when meals are served on time, chores get done on time, or every gathering that demands your attention goes smoothly.

Don't count on the weather. If you want the sun to shine, it will be cold and damp. If you want it cool, it will be the warmest day of the week.

Finally, though, and most important. Don't forget to enjoy yourself.

After all, it's May.

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.

Outhouse lore generated by pioneers

Several images surface as we dust off the cobwebs of our minds and reflect back on rural Kansas and those days of long ago: Red barns, silver-steel windmills, cream separators, harvest crews, Burma Shave signs and certainly the outhouse come to mind.

While many have tried to describe the typical Kansas (or American) privy, each was as different and original as the men whose job it was to build them. This column is dedicated to those prairie dwellers across Kansas who, in the middle of pioneering this great state, still took time for moments of contemplation.

Kansas outhouses were a reflection of its people — the region of the state where they settled and where they came from back in the Old Country. Each was a classic in its own right, inherent of early settler architecture — the sturdy and inspirational "Little House on the Prairie."

To Midwesterners and High Plains dwellers, the outhouse has always seemed a fitting memorial to the ingenuity and practicality of our forefathers — those restless, imaginative spirits who first caught the scent of opportunity in the westerly breeze. And for all its many charms, the privy has gone the way of the mail-order catalog with which it had such a long and intimate relationship.

Heck, some old timers in the area I grew up in went so far as to label an outhouse the very seat of government — a place where equality of all people was understandable and indeed undeniable.

Built with a few broad boards, wide-sweeping strap hinges and a bold slice cut through the doorway, it was as solidly based as the distant barn itself. Usually a two-seater, it was equipped with flies, hornets, mosquitoes, spiders, corncocks or a Sears & Roebuck.

Outhouses were often located at a safe but convenient distance from the main house, at



John Schlageck

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the end of a cinder path and behind a lilac bush — hence the old expression, "I'm going out to smell the lilacs."

At one time in our state's history, a privy was certainly an interesting topic of discussion. Talk to today's old timers or seniors, and they'll probably break into a broad smile and share an experience or two of their time spent in the privy.

While we always had indoor plumbing, I can remember Sundays at my Uncle Lloyd's in Phillips County. His family still used an outdoor toilet.

I was less than thrilled about doing my business in this dark, dank establishment. To begin with, there was a distinct odor I wasn't fond of. I could never relax while imagining the black widow spiders lurking below me, just waiting to send me to an early grave.

One story I'll never forget involved a certain Volga German who built an outhouse shrine to himself less than a stone's throw from his family dwelling. This structure was built with notched corners, manly hinges and a husky thumb latch.

Strong and solid, this structure was a match for any prairie cyclone. The old gent loved his retreat and spent many an hour in his palace on the prairie. His wife, on the other hand, considered this privy overbuilt, unnecessary and she remarked on more than one occasion that she wished the main house she lived in were as well built as her husband's "s___ house."

One more story I recall became legend in western Kansas. It was told about a special outhouse named "Granny's Glory." Built by Grandpa, who adored his bride of 50-some years, this wonderful little privy faced the eastern Kansas sky and included a nice southern window that cast a soft light on Granny's reading material.

The dear old dame made and hung the curtains herself. When the couple died, the grandchildren couldn't bring themselves to tear down the decaying monument.

Yessiree Bob, the outhouse is a part of our rich Kansas heritage we will never flush away.

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.

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