



Other Viewpoints

Political baggage relevant to voters

The defining political contest of 2010 in Kansas may not be for governor, Congress or even attorney general but, of all things, secretary of state.

Suddenly, a job sometimes viewed as one of bookkeeping is a hot property. At the center of attention is Kris Kobach, the University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor who helped write Arizona's controversial ID-check law.

Kobach isn't the only Republican trying to wrest the job from Chris Biggs, who was appointed by Gov. Mark Parkinson after the resignation earlier this year of longtime Secretary of State Ron Thornburgh.

Shawnee County Elections Commissioner Elizabeth Ensley and Salina resident J.R. Claeys also are in the GOP primary. On Aug. 3, Democrats will choose between Biggs, a formerly Kansas securities commissioner and Geary County attorney, and state Sen. Chris Steineger, D-Kansas City.

But Kobach is setting the agenda for the race. If he wins, he's sure to make the office serve his personal quest against voter fraud and illegal immigration.

"I would be transforming the model somewhat," he said this week, "from a ministerial model to more of a law-enforcement model."

But voter fraud is not a big problem in Kansas, no doubt because it's a felony that carries harsh punishment and offers no personal financial gain.

And if Kobach wants to be in law enforcement, he should be running for attorney general or district attorney.

Kobach also wants a Kansas law like Arizona's ID-check legislation, as well as immigration-related measures on hiring and voting.

"Every state is a border state now," he said last week.

It's one thing to vow to promote voting and safeguarding the integrity of the state's elections, as well as to streamline the operations of the secretary of state's office and improve services to the small businesses that rely on it. All candidates for the job pledge to do those things. It's something else entirely to try to redesign the statewide office around a narrow ideological agenda — something Kansans recently experienced during the term of anti-abortion crusading Attorney General Phill Kline.

Voters also should hold Kobach accountable for his troubled chairmanship of the Kansas Republican Party in 2007 and 2008. When a preliminary Federal Election Commission report this week revealed appalling problems with accounting and record keeping, Kobach tried to deflect blame for all but a "very bad hiring choice."

But like the baggage of his immigration work, his past executive experience, including hiring, is relevant to his campaign.

As the candidate filing deadline gives way to the summer and fall campaigns, Kansas voters will need to watch this contest closely and vote with care.

— The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press

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Train trip leads back in time to horse cab

There was the John Hughes movie, "Trains, Planes and Automobiles," but we may have gone that one better last week.

We started out simply enough, driving from Oberlin to the Amtrak depot in McCook. That was the easy part of the trip.

We caught the Zephyr about 12:45 a.m. and crawled into our berths. Woke up the next morning somewhere in Iowa, more than an hour late because of thunderstorms and flash-flood warnings overnight — the rules require a train to proceed at "restricted speed," no more than 25 mph, in a "critical area" susceptible to flooding — but at last we were rolling along.

Cynthia and I enjoyed breakfast in the diner and the first of several conversations with people seated across from us at the table. There's no such thing on Amtrak as a "table for two," but meeting and talking with people is fun.

We started to worry a little about our two-and-a-half-hour connection in Chicago, but there wasn't much we could do about it. We figured the "pad," the extra time schedulers build into the end of a trip, should allow us to make it.

Track work slowed us further. Lunch came rolling down to the Mississippi and out across the Big Muddy, where the railroad is building a new drawbridge to replace a swing span dating to 1896. Then we took off across Illinois, trying to make up some time. Coal trains backed



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

up trying to get into Chicago got in the way, but we made it.

In fact, at Union Station, we arrived at 4:45, plenty of time to catch the 5:35 Pere Marquette to Grand Rapids. Lucky for us, it was on the next track. I even had time to go upstairs to buy some popcorn.

Grand Rapids, reached at 10:30 p.m. after an easy, relaxing trip across parts of Indiana and Michigan, was as far as we could go by train. Chill, cloudy weather kept us from getting any good view of the sandy beaches around the southern tip of Lake Michigan, but there were plenty of soggy blueberry fields along the tracks.

In the morning, we had to go to the airport to get a car so we could drive to the far tip of the Lower Peninsula at Mackinac City, around 240 miles up U.S. 131. That kept us from visiting the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum across from the hotel.

Michigan is pretty, in a damp, green sort of

way. Lots of trees, lots of water. It's surrounded by deep, blue water, and the state claims more lighthouses than any other. Who would have known?

At Mackinac (pronounced Mackinaw) City, we parked and caught the 6 p.m. ferry to Mackinac Island, a state park in the middle of Lake Huron where the only automobiles are a fire truck and an ambulance. Otherwise, you walk, ride a bike or catch a horse-drawn cab. Even the UPS man has a team, brown, of course.

And the cab took us past the quaint, if touristy, downtown. I didn't count the fudge shops, but the street was lined with them, about one for every T-shirt or clothing or trinket shop.

Up the hill awaited the Grand Hotel, built in 1887, and one of the largest surviving Victorian resorts. The dining room is said to seat 1,500, and we had three days of meetings there to look forward to. Not just the press was here, either, but the state's lawyers and a couple of other groups. It's a big hotel.

So, car, train, train, car, ferry, horse-drawn cab, a trip back in time, but no airplanes. Maybe next time.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Celebrate flag by protecting Old Glory

One sure way to light up the American Legion's switchboards is for an overzealous homeowners association to ban the display of Old Glory.

While these disturbing incidents seem to be on the rise in recent years, I find it completely ironic that while a ban can exist on flying the flag of our country, no such ban is allowed to exist on desecrating it.

"Sorry, Mr. Veteran, you're not allowed to fly the flag on your private property, but the Constitution says you can urinate on it, spit on it, and burn it all you want," is what the government seems to be telling us.

The American Legion finds this unacceptable. In fact, for 21 years now, dating back to the Supreme Court's flawed *Texas v. Johnson* decision, we've been pretty fired up about it. In that case, a narrow 5-4 majority ruled that flag desecration was permitted by the First Amendment.

A margin of one Supreme Court justice invalidated flag protection laws enacted by 48 states and the federal government. The high court removed from the people the right to protect their nation's foremost symbol — a right that the people have enjoyed since the birth of this nation.

Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens and the late Chief Justice William Rehnquist usually voted on opposite sides, but they were

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• Clarence E. Hill American Legion

both right about flag desecration.

"In my considered judgment, sanctioning the public desecration of the flag will tarnish its value — both for those who cherish the ideals for which it waves and for those who desire to don the robes of martyrdom by burning it" Stevens said. "That tarnish is not justified by the trivial burden on free expression occasioned by requiring that an available, alternative mode of expression — including uttering words critical of the flag ... be employed."

Rather than "free expression," Rehnquist compared flag desecration to an "inarticulate grunt," and wrote, "I cannot agree that the First Amendment invalidates the Act of Congress, and the laws of 48 of the 50 states, which make criminal the burning of the flag."

Fortunately, there is something we can do about it. Measures sit in both the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives that would allow for a narrowly drawn constitutional amendment which would return to the people

the right to protect Old Glory. It simply says "The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States."

Flag protection amendments have passed the House of Representative six times in the past, only to fall short of the necessary two-thirds supermajority required in the Senate.

While the Constitution is supposed to protect us from the tyranny of the majority, a strong case can be made that protecting flag desecration as free speech represents a "tyranny of the minority." Polls repeatedly show that Americans support this amendment. Fifty state legislatures have called for the amendment's passage. Overwhelming majorities in Congress have passed it in the past, and the amendment fell only one vote short last time in the Senate.

By encouraging Congress to support House Joint Resolution 47 and Senate Joint Resolution 15, we can make the statement that our flag is important and that "We the people" matter. You can reach your members of Congress by calling the U.S. Capitol, toll free, at (877) 762-8762. It's time to make somebody else's switchboard light up.

Clarence E. Hill is national commander of the 2.5 million-member American Legion, the nation's largest veterans organization.

Where to write, call

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

