



Other Viewpoints

New law tackles abuses in prisons

A former corrections officer at the women's prison east of Topeka will spend 12 months on supervised probation on two felony counts of having unlawful sexual relations with inmates.

He is a fortunate man, indeed, although he may not think so.

The former officer's transgressions with Topeka Correctional Facility inmates — and reports of similar behavior by other prison employees — prompted the Legislature earlier this year to toughen the penalty for those who have sex with inmates.

Legislators did the right thing by rewriting the law, belatedly. And the former corrections officer sentenced Thursday to probation is fortunate the charges against him were filed when his crimes were still classified as a low-level felony that could be punished by probation. Had the crimes been committed after July 1, the presumptive sentence would have been a prison sentence of 31 to 34 months.

To be sure, the women housed at the prison aren't model citizens. Some have been found guilty of violent crimes. Some have been willing participants in trading sex for contraband or other favors. But that doesn't excuse the behavior of prison employees who had sex with willing, or unwilling, inmates.

Regardless of why they were sentenced to prison, the inmates at this or any other state prison aren't there to be preyed upon by corrections officers or other staff members prone to take liberties with those entrusted to their care.

A series of stories published in *The Capital-Journal* beginning in October disclosed the sexual relationships and contraband trafficking among prison employees and inmates, including actions for which the former corrections officer was sentenced Thursday. The revelations were an embarrassment to administrators at prison and the Kansas Department of Corrections, and to all Kansans who think state employees, especially law enforcement officers and prison employees, should know the laws and obey them.

Legislators weren't slow to react. They passed a bill that strengthened the penalties for consensual sexual intercourse, lewd fondling or sodomy with an inmate, and Gov. Mark Parkinson promptly signed it.

During sentencing Thursday, the former corrections officer told the Shawnee County District Court judge handling the case that he was unaware the law had been revised and anyone committing a similar crime now would be sent to prison.

His ignorance of the law is surprising, given the public attention it and the illicit activities have received since October.

We certainly hope other employees at the state's prisons have been paying attention.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area.

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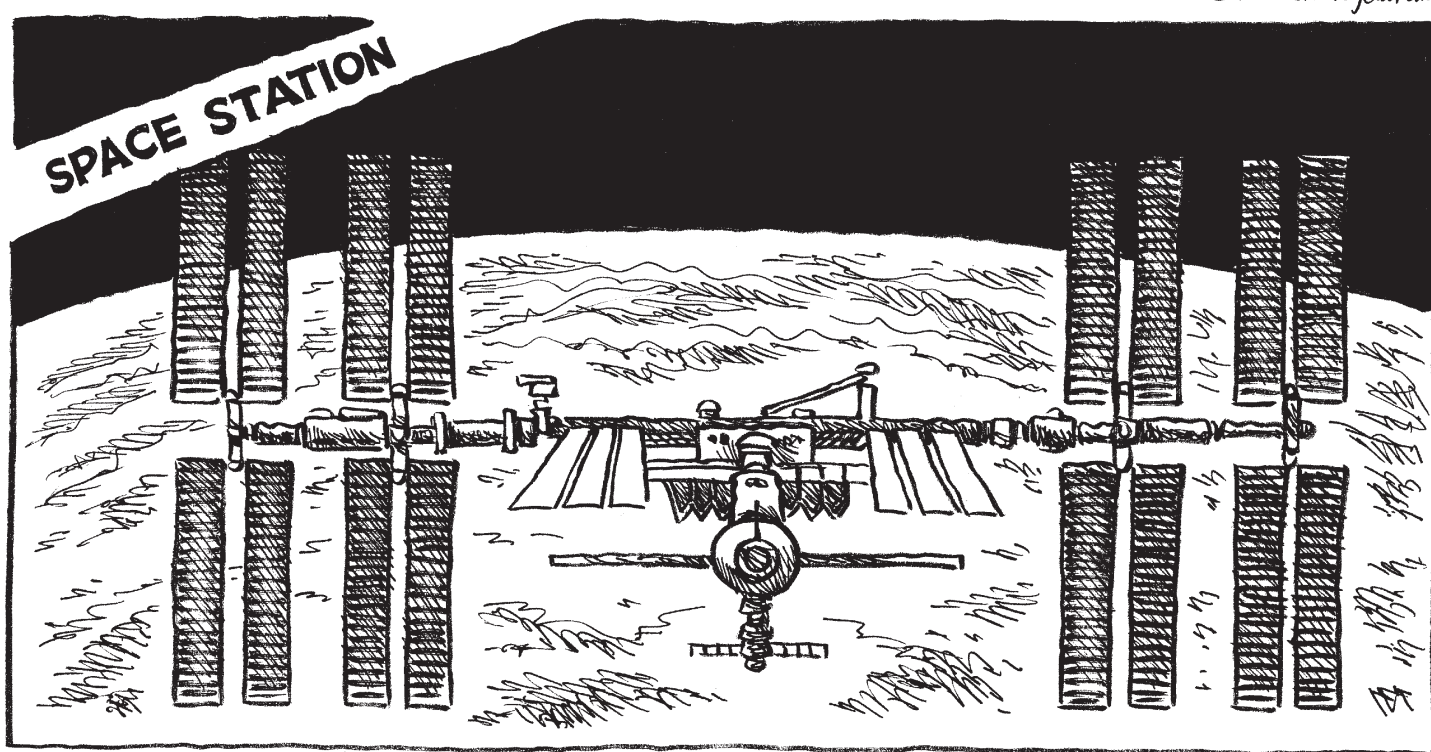
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Risky behaviors place kids in danger

Why can't they be like we are: Perfect in every way. What's the matter with kids today?

These lyrics from the 1963 musical "Bye, Bye Birdie" reflect the attitude of many older folks that the young generation just isn't as stalwart as we were when we walked five miles to school each day, through the snow, and uphill both ways.

Each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention release their survey of Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance (June 4 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* Vol. 59, SS-5 available at the website as Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance — United States, 2009.) It should be no surprise that today's kids face a different set of hazards and fears than we did. Nationwide data show:

- During the 12 months before the survey, 31.5 percent of high school students had been in a physical fight and 6.3 percent had attempted suicide.
- 9.7 percent rarely or never wore a seat belt when riding in a car driven by someone else.
- During the 30 days before the survey, 28.3 percent rode in a car or other vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking, 17.5 percent had carried a weapon, 41.8 percent had drunk alcohol and 20.8 percent had used marijuana.
- 34.2 percent were sexually active.
- 38.9 percent of sexually active students had not used a condom during their last intercourse.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

- 2.1 percent of students had injected an illegal drug at some time in their life.
- 19.5 percent of high school students smoked cigarettes during the 30 days before the survey.
- 81.6 percent were not physically active for at least 60 minutes per day. Only one-third attended physical education classes daily.
- 7.4 percent had been physically forced to have sex when they did not want to. (higher among girls at 10.5 percent than boys 4.5 percent)
- 5.6 percent had carried a weapon (gun, knife, or club) on school property on at least one day during the 30 days before the survey. Overall, the prevalence of having carried a weapon on school property was higher among boys (8.0 percent) than girls (2.9 percent).
- 7.7 percent nationwide had been threatened or injured with a weapon on school property one or more times.
- Nationwide, 5 percent had not gone to school at least one day during the month be-

fore the survey because they felt they would be unsafe.

- Nationwide, 12.0 percent were obese. Overall, the prevalence of obesity was higher among boys (15.3 percent) than girls (8.3 percent).
- 15.8 percent were overweight.
- 44.4 percent were trying to lose weight.
- Nationwide, 10.6 percent did not eat for 24 or more hours to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight during the month before the survey.
- During 2003 to 2009, a significant linear increase occurred in the percentage of students who used computers three or more hours per day (22.1 percent to 24.9 percent).
- The percentage of students who vomited or took laxatives to lose weight or to keep from gaining weight did not change significantly from 1995 to 2003 (4.8 percent to 6.0 percent) and then decreased during 2003 to 2009 (6.0 percent to 4.0 percent).

This may partly answer What's the matter with kids today? But a similar survey from our youth would find we were not perfect in every way, either.

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.

Check the numbers for Kansas farmers

Without question, producing food has been the single most important vocation in human history. Farming and ranching helped pave the way for modern civilization.

Today, as in the past, feeding the world is vital to our growth as a community, region, state and nation. Our ability to produce the safest, most wholesome food in the world has allowed us to progress as a civilization.

When we think of food production, our state and the farmers and ranchers who work our fertile soil rank with the best in production agriculture. The Sunflower State ranks at the top when it comes to crop and livestock production.

In 2009, Kansas farmers produced crops worth \$6.9 billion, says Bob White of Kansas Agricultural Statistics. Livestock production amounted to \$6.1 billion, for a total of \$13 billion.

Kansas farmers and ranchers produced this bountiful harvest on 65,500 farms last year. The average size was 705 acres, a little over one square mile.

Kansas led the country in milo production last year when our state produced 224.4 million bushels. We also produced the third most



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

sorghum silage with a total of 440,000 tons. Our state ranked second in wheat production with 369.6 million bushels. We led the country in wheat flour milled with a total of 125,833,000 hundredweight. The Sunflower State ranks third in production of sunflowers. Kansas farmers produced 245 million pounds in last year. We placed fifth in all hay produced with 7.2 million tons and sixth in alfalfa hay with 3.7 million tons. Kansas corn producers ranked seventh in 2009, harvesting 598 million bushels. In soybean production, Kansas now ranks ninth with 160.6 million bushels. Our state's agriculture remains one of the most diversified in the nation. Our farmers and ranchers also grow dry edible beans, oats, corn silage, rye, barley and summer potatoes. Spe-

cialty crops like pecans, fruits, vegetables and popcorn grow in our rich Kansas soil.

Kansas ranked third in the number of all cattle and calves with 6 million head at the beginning of the year. Our state also ranked third in cattle on feed for processing with a total of 2.4 million head. Kansas ranked third in red meat processing with 5.28 billion pounds. Hog inventories ranked 10th with 1.8 million head.

The Sunflower State tied for 11th in market sheep with 30,000 head and 19th in all sheep and lambs with 80,000 head at the beginning of the year. Kansas farmers and ranchers also raise goats, turkeys, chickens, buffalo, ostriches and a few other exotic creatures.

Yes, Kansas is blessed with some of the finest farmland and farmers and ranchers in the world. By using this land wisely, with the help of the latest technology and research, we will continue to feed the hungry mouths of the world.

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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