

Other Viewpoints

Safer teens make safer Kansas roads

Statistics released last week bore witness to what proponents of tougher teen driving laws long have preached: Fatal car crashes decline when experienced teen drivers are behind the wheel.

A report from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention partially tied the decline in fatality accidents to nationwide efforts that restrict teen drivers from obtaining a license until they've met tougher driving standards. The centers also credited safer cars – specifically those equipped with airbags – and better highways for the five-year decline in fatality accidents involving teens.

The report showed that the number of deaths in these accidents fell from about 2,200 in 2004 to 1,400 in 2008. That is dramatic, and it is good news for all motorists, no matter the age group.

Over the last decade, lawmakers in a number of states who were alarmed by the growing number of fatality accidents involving teen drivers enacted graduated driver's license laws. States that previously allowed teens to obtain unrestricted licenses at age 16 decided to move the markers. Additional driving experience was mandated, passenger limits were enforced and devices such as iPods and cell phones were banned until teen drivers became older and clocked more driving time. Several states won't allow teens an unrestricted license until age 17 while others have settled on age 16 1/2.

Kansas was slow to get on the bandwagon – 48 other states already had stricter laws on the books – but proponents finally convinced lawmakers of the need for tougher teen driving laws, which went into effect in January.

With just 10 months of data, state officials will have to wait to see the effect Kansas' law has on fatality accidents involving teens. The Kansas Department of Transportation reported 15,500 crashes involving 15- to 19-year-old drivers in 2008. Those accidents ended the lives of 46 teens.

It's hoped the decline in such deaths will be as dramatic in Kansas as it has been nationwide.

– The Hutchinson News, via The Associated Press

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RISING TIDE



It's going to be a beautiful Halloween

Are you cold?

While fighting the urge to write about Halloween, I started noticing that the native Kansans around me were complaining about the cold.

This strikes me as a little weird, if you'll forgive the observation. After all, it's the end of October. We finally had an overnight frost this week. Daytime temperatures are in the 60s and 70s. Objectively speaking, we've had a gloriously warm October.

There are some people, of course, who are happiest when the temperatures are above 90. I think they're a little strange, but then they think I'm strange when I say 20 below makes a nice break, as long as you don't have to travel long distances. (Twenty below on the highway in a drafty car with a bad heater, I admit, is absolutely no picnic at all.)

But for people who live in a state where winter is actually a recognizable season, whining about the shift to fall seems a bit much. I was in Oklahoma one year just before Christmas, and was amused to see that the only snow in sight was to be found in the inflatable plastic snowmen that inhabited every other yard in some neighborhoods. If that's the way it is every year, I could believe they would be dis-



Marian Ballard

Collection Connections

turbed by cold weather.

Colby, on the other hand, is no stranger to cold. I'm not a native, but I can remember several memorable storms, including one in September the first year I was in northwest Kansas. That one broke tree branches, it was so heavy and wet.

Let's put our beautiful autumn in perspective. Adults who feel the need to worry, should probably be more concerned that the weather is beautiful. There have been too few cold, wet days. There has been too little rain.

But for kids, it's a different story. Finding a mud puddle is unlikely, so there are good chances to get yelled at. And the Halloween forecast is looking great. With a high of 61, a low of 38, and no precipitation in the offing, trick-or-treat night should be pulled off without a hitch.

Adults, of course, have to watch for pranksters on a clear Halloween. I have been known to hope for snow on Halloween, especially when it falls on a Friday night. That's less likely here than in northwest Nebraska where I lived for 30 years or more.

As a kid, Halloween costumes were almost a waste, because they were almost always covered up by winter coats. We still went, of course. I even remember going trick-or-treating for UNICEF, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund as it was then. That ended when there was some bad publicity about misuse of funds, though the program – and UNICEF – are still going strong. It's great that the kids here all get together and gather food for the food bank, even if it's not on Halloween.

But for this weekend, the kids will be out in force, the costumes will not be hidden under layers of coats and hats, and the weather will be glorious.

Drive safely, and watch out for those little goblins. Keep it a happy Halloween.

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.

Holcomb expansion will benefit state

The Holcomb expansion project. If it seems like you've been hearing about it for a long time, it's because you have. Sunflower's application for an air quality construction permit was initially filed with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment in September 2006. That's 48 months ago and, coincidentally, the same amount of time projected to build the unit. Though in some ways it seems like we have been pursuing this project forever, in other ways time has flown and underscores the need to move forward so that half a million Kansans have access to reliable, low-cost and environmentally-responsible power.

In 2009, Gov. Parkinson signed into a law a comprehensive energy policy that would be good for the environment, good for Kansas' business and good for Kansas' consumers. This plan was the result of a bi-partisan compromise that drew consensus on important issues, such as job creation, energy development, regulatory certainty and economic development.

Across the board – Republicans and Democrats, labor and business, public and private stakeholders – worked together to create a sensible energy policy to strengthen our economy while protecting the environment. Specifically, this legislation promotes renewable energy development; establishes regulatory certainty so businesses can invest with confidence; and supports the development of safe, responsible power generation facilities to meet the growing energy demand. Core to this agreement is a compromise that allowed Sunflower to resume the permitting process to expand Holcomb Station in southwest Kansas.

The Holcomb expansion project will help stimulate Kansas economy at a time we need it most by creating more than 1,900 well-paying jobs at peak construction earning approximately \$121 million in wages each year and more than 330 direct and indirect jobs with an annual payroll of more than \$14 million.

Sunflower, a not-for-profit, member-owned

Other Opinions

Earl Watkins Sunflower Electric

cooperative, has served Kansas responsibly for more than 50 years by investing in a diverse mix of energy resources to provide our customers a reliable, long-term supply of affordable power. We believe a diverse generation portfolio, one that includes Holcomb, makes this possible. Sunflower's power generation portfolio is 48 percent natural gas, 42 percent coal and 10 percent wind. We are proud to be one of the state's first utilities to meet the governor's wind energy challenge and are well on our way to achieving the renewable energy goals passed into law in 2009.

We will continue to meet all state and federal regulations designed to protect public health and the environment while fulfilling our mission to deliver Kansans a reliable supply of electricity at the lowest possible cost.

Since our air permit application began in 2006, there have been seven public hearings and a total of more than 200 days for public comments. Given Sunflower's demonstrated record of environmental compliance and the extensive review of the Holcomb expansion project, the time for delay is over.

The Holcomb expansion project will be among the cleanest power plants of its kind, using the best available technology to reduce the emission of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter. In addition, because we will use supercritical steam temperatures and pressures, the efficiency of the plant, and thus the carbon dioxide released from it, will be up to 8 percent less per unit of energy produced than comparable power plants existing today.

We appreciate the professionalism and expertise of the Department of Health and Environment technical staff members, who have worked long and hard to make certain the permit for our project protects the environment and follows strict state and federal requirements.

The road has been arduous, and some may wonder why we continue to be persistent. The answer is because it continues to be in the best interest of those that Sunflower serves. Time will not stand still, and the demand for energy will continue to increase. Advancement of the Holcomb expansion project will ensure that Kansans, now and in the future, have access to the benefits of this project that they justly deserve.

Earl Watkins is president and CEO of Sunflower Electric Power Corporation, a regional wholesale power supplier for member cooperatives in Dighton, Ulysses, Norton, WaKeeney and Scott City. His e-mail address is chertel@sunflower.net.

Write us

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

