

## Other Viewpoints

### Risks of binges don't faze our kids

There are troubling signs that, despite years of effort, there's been little progress in curbing binge drinking among teens and young adults.

Perhaps the most visible of those was the rise in popularity of beverages containing high levels of both alcohol and caffeine drinks with names like Four Loko, Dragon Joose and Moonshot.

The products, essentially energy drinks infused with alcohol, contain the equivalent of as many as three beers and three cups of coffee in each 23.5-ounce can.

Four Loko, the most popular of the type, has been linked to several deaths and illnesses among young people. Although area colleges haven't reported problems involving the beverages, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has taken action aimed at protecting consumers. The agency issued a warning to four manufacturers, saying their products could be seized or banned unless something is done to remedy the unsafe mixture of alcohol and caffeine.

The action was well justified.

The drinks contain 9.9 percent to 12 percent alcohol by volume, and experts say the caffeine in them can impair drinkers' ability to know when they're getting inebriated. Sometimes, the realization comes after they have greatly exceeded their tolerance for alcohol - which helps explain why Four Loko and the like have been called "blackout in a can."

At least one manufacturer has already pledged to stop putting caffeine in its drinks, which is good to hear.

However, that's not going to stop young people from mixing alcohol and energy drinks.

The bigger issue is, why are binge drinking and other dangerous behavior involving alcohol such stubborn problems?

So the problem of binge drinking goes on, often with fatal consequences.

That was the case last year at the University of Kansas, where two freshmen died in a two-month span in incidents that involved alcohol. One was a fraternity member who died with a 0.362 percent blood-alcohol level - more than four times the limit for driving under Kansas law. The other fell off of a roof after he had been drinking.

It's especially sad to note that a lawyer representing the family of the fraternity member revealed in a recent filing that the frat incurred an alcohol violation in April of this year. The fraternity was found to have purchased alcohol and provided it to underage pledges.

That's not to suggest KU has been lax in dealing with underage and binge drinking. To the contrary, the university has taken several steps to battle the problem, including adopting mandatory online alcohol education courses for all students 21 and younger.

But KU and other universities can only do so much, as is the case with parents and law enforcement.

Beverage makers should play a role, too. Here's hoping the federal action serves as a reminder to the entire industry of that responsibility.

- The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press



### Really, there's a lot to be thankful for

I had Thanksgiving dinner with my neighbors from across the street - Orvella and W.G. Romine - and their adult children on Thursday.

They invited me after learning I wouldn't be going home to celebrate the holiday with my family.

Not going home for Thanksgiving was a little hard to cope with. I have been going to my Grandma Jo's house for Thanksgiving as long as I can remember. My grandma, bless her heart, fills her house with enough appetizers to feed an entire country on this holiday. She always included cheese puffs, SpaghettiO's and Jell-O (real men are not afraid to admit they like Jell-O) in the meal just for me.

Grandma always worked her tail off getting the food ready for everybody, and she always seemed unable to sit down after the cooking was done. Even when we had reassured her we were all full, she would be busily moving through the television room, which was occupied by lethargic adults watching football and feeling a little ashamed of how much they had eaten, offering appetizers and asking if anyone needed another drink.

I think she always wanted Thanksgiving to be perfect. It always was, and she was the main reason.

Yes, not going home was a little tough. I missed my Dad's stories, my Mom's joy at seeing her kid come home, my dog Max's funny quirks, my brother Erik's sense of humor and his assertive, take-no-prisoners way of arguing.



**Andy Heintz**

• Wildcat Ramblings

While I really missed my family, having dinner with the Romines was a wonderful substitute. During the dinner, W.G. asked everyone at the table to say what they were thankful for. I wracked my brain trying to think of something to say. I wanted to get my little speech done as soon as possible so I wouldn't have to worry about it. For some reason, I have no problem talking in front of big groups, but I get nervous talking to smaller crowds.

I eventually got up the nerve to speak. I said I was thankful for being able to celebrate Thanksgiving with good company and for my parents and my grandparents.

A couple days later, I began to think about everything I had a reason to be thankful for. This revealed that I have a lot of things to be thankful for, and I should remember this when I start to feel sorry for myself.

Here is a list of things, in no particular order, that I'm thankful for: My parents' love and support, my Grandma's big heart and my Grandpa Roy's tears when he's really happy or proud of something, my publisher Steve Hayne's patience with me when I first started working here, mountain lakes, my editor Kevin

in Bottrell's calm demeanor, Jimmy Buffet, ripples, water falls, Bob Dylan, small streams, children's imaginations, the Everglades, top-water fishing for largemouth bass, the big fish that got away, the big fish that didn't get away, dirt roads, open spaces, forests, getting a chance to watch Michael Jordan play basketball in his prime, "Seinfeld," untouched rivers, northern pike, brook trout, Alaska, unspoiled wilderness, unspoiled people, mountains, oceans, nuance, optimism, forgiveness, sunrises, sunsets, redemption, the Grateful Dead, friendly smiles, hip-hop artist Talib Kweli, loyal friends, honesty, John Mellencamp, Jeff Bridges, Alicia Keys, the movies "Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy," "Finding Forrester," "Meet the Parents," "The Two Towers" and "The Big Lebowski," James Taylor, Bob Marley, city manager Carolyn Armstrong's patience (The number of times I've called her with questions would have driven the average person nuts), journalist Bill Moyers, George Orwell's enduring legacy, Dr. Paul Farmer's passion, organizations like Doctors Without Borders and Disabled American Veterans, tolerance, random acts of kindness and being a able to live in a country where its OK to speak my mind.

Hope everyone had a happy Thanksgiving.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

### Show 'em high bills have to go

A few years back, they told me the country was short on electric power, so I used to read in the dark, by candlelight or the light of the silvery moon.

It wasn't long after that they raised my electricity rates because consumption decreased. Seems I wasn't the only one conserving - people all across the country were also reading in the dark.

A couple years later, they told me there was a water shortage. I could no longer water my grass or shrubs or wash my car. I flushed the toilet only when I was absolutely sincere. Then they raised my water rates because consumption was down.

Next, they told me there was an oil shortage so I stopped using my car and bought a French racing bike. Unfortunately, the price of gasoline continued to go up and stayed up.

I'm still riding my bike, but now I do it for fitness. I'm considering selling my car or buying a horse.

Every U.S. president I can remember has told us we could receive a tax break if we insulated our homes and outfitted them with the latest energy-saving windows. I'd already built my home that way nearly 20 years ago, so



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

I lost out on that tax break too.

How come every time I try to do the patriotic thing, wrap myself in the red, white and blue and save the good old United States of America some green, I wind up with egg on my face?

Where is it written in our constitution or tablets of stone that each time there is a shortage or surplus, I must pay more for less?

I've decided to fight back. I'm going to stand my ground. After all, I'm a veteran. I served my country. I've paid into Social Security and income taxes for more than 40 years. I'm going to take my country back. If the tea baggers can do it, so can I.

The next time my electricity or heating bill goes up, I'm going to send a letter along with my next payment. My letter will read:

Dear Madam/Sirs & Bandits,

Due to the worldwide shortages of money, except in the hands of the big banks that primarily benefited from the last government big-buck giveaways, I am unable and willing to meet all my expenses at this time.

Fortunately for you I have increased my consumption of electricity as you can plainly see by this horrendous bill you sent me. Because you are selling so much more electricity and there are millions of additional users at this time, I am certain you will see your way clear to lower the rates you charge me.

Accordingly, I am sending you exactly half of the amount you asked for. If you do not accept this payment within the next 10 days, I will be forced to turn off all my lights.

Sincerely, John L. Schlageck.

That should work, shouldn't it?

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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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

