

Other Viewpoints

State should pay to house felons

It's an old gripe but a good one, especially in fiscally difficult times: When the Legislature passes a bill, it should cover the costs associated with that law. It should not foist the resulting financial responsibility – and, if necessary, tax increases – onto local governments and look the other way.

Such a problem has arisen in Kansas over housing convicted felons, who once served their terms in state prisons while county jails held people convicted of misdemeanors. Increasingly, counties are expected to jail people convicted of crimes such as felony driving while suspended, felony drunk driving and some forgeries.

To his credit, Sedgwick County Commission Chairman Karl Peterjohn persuaded the Kansas Association of Counties to include the issue in its 2011 legislative agenda, which seeks "state funding to reimburse counties for the entire cost of housing convicted felons. It calls on the state to count and make public the number of felons in county jails, but shouldn't it already do so?"

County residents should cheer Peterjohn, because his crusade against the Kansas Department of Corrections' treatment of county jails as "subsidiaries of the state prison system" could help spare taxpayers the cost of another jail expansion.

Just as cities within Sedgwick County are now responsible for the cost of housing those arrested on municipal charges, the state should be accountable for the expense of housing felons at the jail – \$11,585 a day total for the 175 felons among the 1,556 inmates at the jail this week.

True, unfunded mandates are an old and well-used tool in Topeka as well as Washington. Over the past decade in Kansas, a bipartisan cast of state leaders has cut spending, withheld promised aid to local government and passed the buck – wreaking budgetary havoc on cities and counties. The House GOP budget proposal for fiscal 2011 crafted last spring by state Rep. Kevin Yoder, now the congressman-elect for the 3rd District, would have forced school boards to choose between deep spending cuts and higher property taxes.

When it comes to corrections, the state-local relationship is further strained because state budget cuts over the past two years have eliminated so many of the education, drug-treatment and supportive-housing programs that had made Kansas a national model not only in controlling its prison population numbers but also in reintegrating parolees into society.

And if counties tolerate the state's off-loading, they will invite the Legislature to do more of it.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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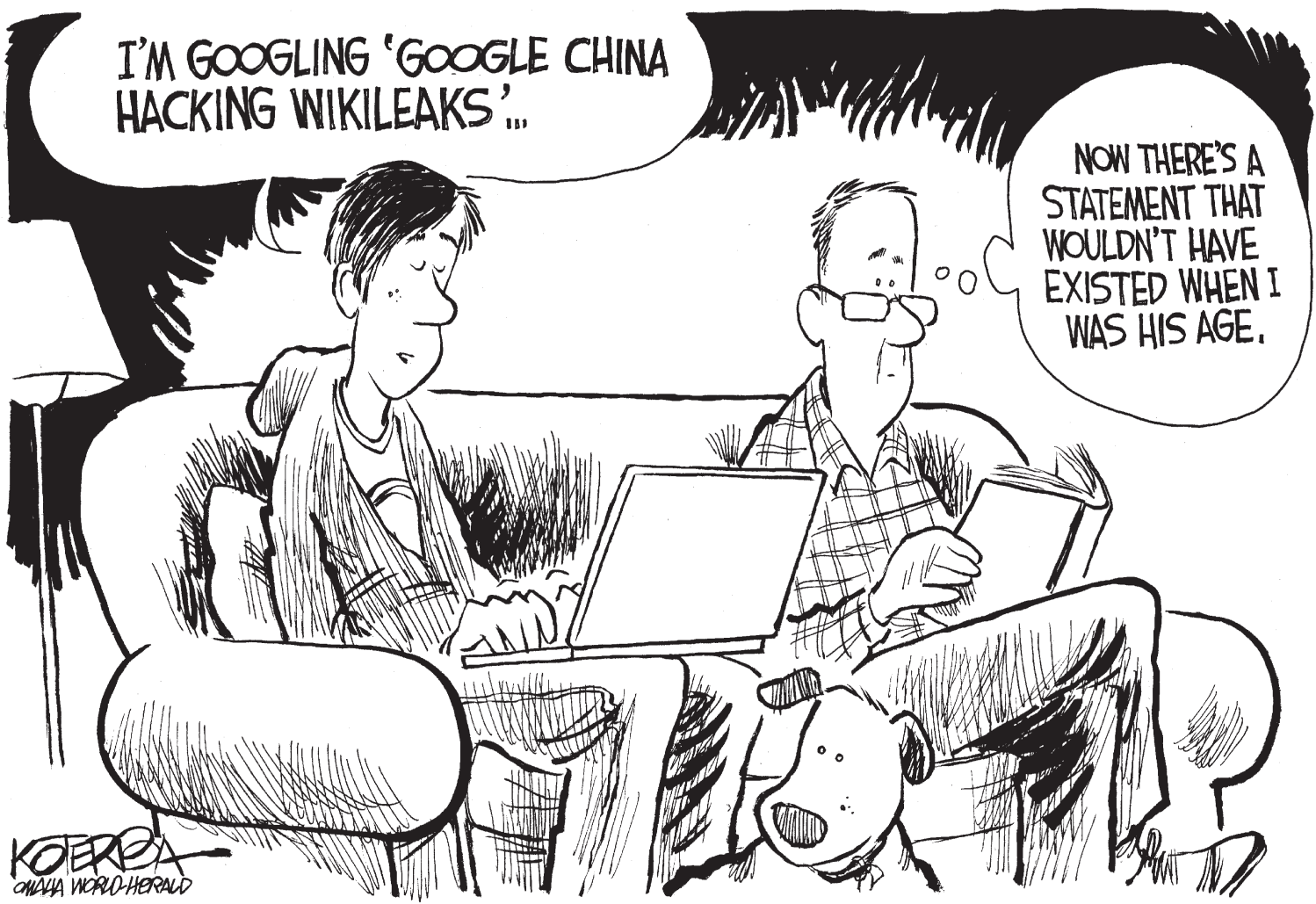
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Photographer tells visual story of oil spill

There's always a story at the Associated Press's annual meeting for Missouri and Kansas publishers and editors in Kansas City each December.

This year, it came from Charlie Riedel, a veteran photographer who started his career at the *Hays Daily News*, moved on to the *Salina Journal* (both papers owned by the Harris group out of Hutchinson) and then on to the AP at Kansas City.

Mr. Riedel, a native Kansan, caught readers' eyes with beautiful, dramatic shots, whether it was the weather or a big fire, a Christmas party or a tragedy. He had the great good fortune to work for papers that appreciate fine photography and know how to use it.

And at the Associated Press, he joined an organization which owns more photo prizes than any other, a team where taking the iconic picture of any event is just standard procedure.

And it was Charlie Riedel's photos of oil-covered pelicans that became the image in our minds of costal damage from the gulf oil spill earlier this year. While he says he and his family like living in Kansas City, he loves to go out on assignments outside the area. The oil spill was a big job, being covered by dozens of newsmen, but he said, a tough case to crack.

When he got there, about three weeks after the fire and explosion which destroyed the Deepwater Horizon drilling platform, there was not much to shoot. The fire was out, the platform cold and there was no oil on the



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

beaches. Not yet.

It was early June, in fact, before he could make the pictures that would resound with readers and viewers around the world. Until then, the oil had not really piled up on the shore.

Because it was so expensive to hire a boat or helicopter to get out to costal islands, he said, he and other newsmen were hitching rides with the governor's office, county officials, environmental groups, anyone who was going. He was with a party including Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal when he wandered away from the routine photo op and walked down the beach. There he found three birds, two brown pelicans and a gull, foundering in thick oil.

Riedel said he shot dozens of frames and moved about 50 photos on the wire that night. By the next day, his phone was ringing constantly. Though he was out on a boat again, taking more pictures, he had calls from newspapers, television producers and others all over the country.

Within a few days, his wife and daughter

had created a Facebook fan page to take all the "friend" requests he was getting from strangers. All that was a little surreal, he added.

One result of the photos, he said, was more teams hit the beaches to find and rescue birds and other wildlife. Another was that restrictions on photography suddenly got a lot tighter. Security people hired by or influenced by BP (or British Petroleum, as it used to be known) tried to keep news people off the beaches and away from the action.

One day when he got tired of being harassed, he said, he started asking why the area was off limits and what would happen if he didn't leave. No one had a good reason, he said, and he stayed. Eventually, a couple of BP safety officers told him they'd have to decontaminate his shoes before he could leave.

"From that point on..." Mr. Riedel said, "it sort of became my mission to tell the wildlife story on the beaches."

We're lucky to have people out there like Charlie Riedel, the AP Missouri-Kansas Staffer of the Year, to represent us in places where the bad guys, the self-important corporations and public officials, don't want us to look.

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.

Kids can skip holiday weight gain, too

We all know how easy it is for most of us to gain weight during the holiday season.

Unless we work hard to avoid it, we adults can expect to tack on a pound or two between Halloween and New Year's Day. That's extra bulk that most of us will be fighting until the next holiday season rolls around.

Now there is evidence that the same risks of holiday weight gain are true for children, especially those who are overweight already.

Mix large amounts of tempting holiday foods with more time off from school to indulge in sedentary pursuits like watching television and playing computer games, and you have a "perfect storm" for kids to put on unwanted pounds, just as adults tend to do at this time of year.

Food is an important part of holiday celebrations, and no one wants children to be deprived of the special tastes that are part of family traditions. Visions of sugar plums and other seasonal treats have a rightful place for kids in this magical season – but conscientious parents know that calorie-rich foods must be approached in moderation.

So what can a parent or caregiver do to see that their kids enjoy this year's festive season without gaining unnecessary weight? Here are some tips:

- Maintain your child's regular eating schedule, including a hearty breakfast, as best you can. This will make it less likely that later in the day she will devour excessive amounts of holiday candies, cookies and other treats – items that are almost impossible to avoid during the holiday months.

- If you know you are going to a party or gathering where food will be available, fill your child up a bit beforehand with healthy foods like cut fruit or baby carrots. Again, he will be less tempted to overdo it on the party



Jason Eberhart-Phillips

• Kansas Health Officer

foods.

- Set a rule with your child that limits her to just one dessert.

- Don't keep nonnutritious holiday snacks and sugary drinks around your house. Make healthy snacks of fruits and vegetables available instead. If you bake your own cookies, use a smaller cookie cutter to reduce the mass of cookies your child will eat.

- Encourage your child to eat slowly at family feasts and other meals. By savoring each bite, he will feel full sooner and be less likely to demand seconds.

- Politely ask friends and relatives not to furnish your kids with large amounts of unhealthy foods, or to buy them as gifts for your child.

Reducing the risk of overeating is just half of the battle. Winning the holiday weight game also requires a stepped-up commitment to helping your children burn their excess calories through physical activity. Here are some tips for parents on that score:

- Set aside at least an hour for the family to engage in moderately vigorous physical activity each day – starting now. Such activity includes games that involve running or jumping, or activities such as biking, swimming or skateboarding.

- Limit screen time to less than two hours per day, and discourage it altogether for children under 2.

- Organize backyard football games, neigh-

borhood walks and other outdoor activities before and after holiday feasts.

- Get your children to join into active party games and dances that you include in the holiday gatherings at your home.

- Consider buy gifts for your child that will encourage physical activity, such as bikes, skateboards, balls and jumping ropes.

The holiday season is fraught with weighty risks for children growing up in today's world. But if you plan ahead, anticipating the risks, the chances are good that you can keep your child on a healthy path without missing any of the fun the season brings.

Dr. Jason Eberhart-Phillips is the state health officer and director of health in the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. He can be reached at jeberhart-phillips@kdheks.gov. Read his blog at www.kdheks.gov/blogs/dr_jasons_blogs.htm.

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