

Other Viewpoints

Drunk-driving law needs some teeth

The timing of a new initiative to reform the state's drunken-driving laws probably couldn't be worse. After all, lawmakers will need to stick to basics during the 2011 session as rarely before, and that means working to eliminate a crippling budget deficit and taking action to spur the state's economy.

But while most of the focus needs to be on financial matters, lawmakers should make it a priority to consider a bundle of proposals unveiled Monday by the Kansas DUI Commission.

After two years of study, the commission has proposed a number of well-reasoned measures aimed at putting more teeth in drunk-driving laws and reducing a chronic problem with repeat offenders.

Among the proposals:

- Increasing penalties for first-time drunk drivers offenders.
- Requiring installation of vehicle interlock devices for all violators.
- Mandating prison time for fourth-time offenders with a regular driver's license and third-time offenders with a commercial license.
- Requiring state and municipal courts to report drunk-driving arrests, prosecutions and convictions to a central repository operated by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation.

It's a report well worth considering, even in a year when the Legislature's most pressing priorities will involve digging the state out of the recession.

Current laws have resulted in a revolving door for repeat offenders, with stories emerging all too often of motorists being convicted 10 or more times of drunken driving.

Under existing state laws, third and successive convictions all carry a sentence of 90 days to a year behind bars, and it's not unusual for violators to receive the minimum term. What's more, offenders often are presented with the same treatment options over and over, even when those programs have already proven ineffective.

For some offenders, the result is that jail terms end up being little more than time outs between bouts of drinking and driving.

The commission's reforms would not only address penalties for multiple offenses, it would attack the problem from the other side by focusing on early intervention and allowing second-time offenders to more quickly regain restricted driving privileges in order to maintain employment and participate in treatment.

It's a promising solution, and the commission deserves commendation for its work over the last two years in crafting it. The panel consists of 27 legislators, judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers.

No question, the effort was worthwhile. Alcohol was involved in 3,145 crashes in Kansas during 2009, resulting in 1,345 injuries and 113 deaths.

Granted, the commission's reforms won't do much to reduce unemployment or solve the budget shortfall, but legislators would be doing a service to Kansans to consider the package.

- The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press

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Catching up a reminder of connections

There were these five "older" guys sitting around a table in a place called Mickey's, talking up a storm and laughing up an even bigger storm. They had stories to tell and each was anxious for his turn.

There was a rather short-built guy who needed a small ladder to get into his pickup and who had glasses perched on the end of his nose; another had gray hair sort of combed like the comb missed its target; another had neatly groomed gray hair and smacked of perfection; one was nearly bald; and one had hair that was just ... well, hair.

They spent more than an hour talking and eating. Mickey's is a well-known and much preferred place to eat, with helpings that would draw applause from even the dieting bunch. Hamburgers were the size of small pancakes.

They all must have been from Kansas at one time or another, judging from their windy conversations. And isn't Kansas among the top 10 windiest states? They mentioned the name "Hays" time and again. Five old guys having the time of their lives, sharing the past. Wow!

OK, I was one of those five "old" guys. We were all graduates of St. Joseph's Military Academy, Class of 1953, and LeRoy Rome, Richard Deen, Ernie Leiker and Tom Olson held this little luncheon to officially welcome me to Colorado. They have lived in the Denver area for many, many years. Coming from a graduating class of only 47, we had an advantage those graduating from much larger classes never enjoy - oneness - and it showed again at this luncheon.

I wondered, prior to the affair, just what to expect considering the fact it's been many years since I've seen a couple of these guys. But that was no problem, and just seconds into the initial handshakes and brotherly hugs, my brain took me back 57 years to our graduation and it was as though we were never separated.

When we were talking about our education and the various directions we took individually, LeRoy mentioned that I was probably the only one who stayed with his chosen field - journalism. I was on the staff of the school newspaper, *The Cadet Journal*, and was editor-



Tom Dreiling

• A View From the West

in-chief of the school's yearbook, *On Parade*. That's where I got my taste and love for journalism, thanks to our teacher, Father Ludger.

During the time we were lunching together, never once was the word "politics" mentioned. There was just too many other things to talk about. I don't know what party LeRoy or Rich or Ernie or Tom belong to. This wasn't the time, nor was it the place. I was thankful for that, and I'm sure the others had similar feelings.

Then it was time to depart. That quick hour or so seemed like just minutes. But I think each of us was thankful for the opportunity to sit down and re-connect. I can't tell you where Mickey's lives, but I do know that it's around 32 miles from my place and Ernie mentioned a time or two that we were still within the Denver city limits. Now that's big! (Ernie, incidentally, picked me up inasmuch as I no longer drive).

A great time with some great classmates from a great school now carrying a different name: Thomas More Prep-Marian High School.

As a military institution, the academy - when we attend - had six military instructors, 15 priests and six lay faculty members. The Class of 1953 dedicated its yearbook to the six lay faculty members: Alvin Billinger, Frank Windholz, George Gatschet, Thomas Gatschet, Sylvester Palmer and Clarence Cunningham.

We were known proudly back then as the Hays Cadets.

And now it's 35 years.

Yes, the passing of my wife Jeanie occurred on Dec. 15, 1975, in St. Joseph Hospital, Den-

ver. The culprit was leukemia. From the date of diagnosis, April 15, to the date of passing, she was in and out of the hospitals in either Goodland or Denver. It was a struggle, a painful struggle.

There were times, thanks to the pain, that her grasp of my hand nearly caused me to also vocally react, but she never complained. She would bite her upper lip, squeeze my hand, open and close her eyes when the pain hit. Nine months of this. Nine long months.

During the early morning hours of Dec. 15, her pain left. For good. Her hand in mine, just as it always was. I cried over the loss, but also cried for the peace she so dearly sought and finally realized.

My challenge then was to tell two little boys, ages 3 and 5, back home in Goodland, that Mom wouldn't be home for Christmas. Then try to explain it in words they would understand. They are now 38 and 40 with children of their own.

Daughter Denise, 16 at the time, knew the seriousness of her mother's condition, but when the end came, it was still a tough pill to swallow. But I am certain Dec. 15 still has special meaning to all three. And the brightest star in the sky is still there, looking down on them and on their children - her grandchildren. How proud she would be!

Jeanie was only 37.

My thanks once again to those who respond to the columns I provide. Not every reader is a supporter, but it is the dialogue that matters. It's an ongoing learning experience for me. Keep it going. My e-mail address is milehitom@hotmail.com.

Take care, and a Merry Christmas to you all!

Tom Dreiling of Aurora, Colo., is a former publisher of the Colby Free Press and The Norton Telegram, and a former long-time editor of the old Goodland Daily News. He is a life-long Democrat, a curmudgeon come lately and a newly minted Coloradan.

Biofuels get boost from NASCAR

To the Editor:

It's great to see NASCAR promoting U.S. corn ethanol and using ethanol blends starting with its 2011 racing season. America needs to use more biofuels to help promote not just energy security and independence, but to help grow rural economies also.

At a time of high unemployment and with foreign oil making up such a large part of our fuel consumption, expanding ethanol only makes sense, and we thank NASCAR for



Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

taking the lead and helping out nation's corn

growers, who this year harvested another large crop, the third-highest on record.

We're pleased to see them partner with the National Corn Growers Association and growth energy. Our nation's corn crop is large enough to meet all needs for food and fuel, and we're excited by this good news about American ethanol.

Irwin Porter, Quinter member, National Corn Growers

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

