



Free Press Viewpoint

Elitist process dominates courts

The decision to open up interviews conducted with candidates for Court of Appeals and Supreme Court vacancies in Kansas is a step in the right direction, a good move, a fine idea.

It doesn't, however, change the fact that in Kansas, appellate judges are chosen in a process that is by nature elitist, inbred and undemocratic.

Appeals judges, and district judges in most large counties, are chosen by committees dominated by and chosen by, mostly, lawyers. While they supposedly represent the voters in this process, the members of these panels are anything but representative.

Kansas used to elect its judges. We still elect district judges in most areas, outside the metro areas, and the process works pretty well out here. Judges seldom if ever come under attack for their decisions, though they surely must weigh public attitudes when deciding cases.

The electoral system, with judges running by party and seats open for contest every four years, allows for change when a judge is not responsive to the public. Usually, this means poor public service or erratic decisions. A decision to oust a judge is rare, but voters have done it.

Appeals judges are another matter. Once appointed by the governor, they answer to no man, short of committing some impeachable offense. As we've seen with presidents, impeachment is reserved for truly bad officials, not for those with whom we disagree.

While district judges may have to keep an eye on the voters, appeals judges simply do not. While they are supposed to stand for "retention" every four or six years, the fact is, no Kansas judge or justice has been voted out of office since the state adopted the so-called "Missouri" plan of choosing its judges.

This has led to some poor law, where judges have substituted their own infinite wisdom for that of the Legislature and governor, making budget decisions and more or less taking over the state's education finance system.

Well, voters could throw the rascals out, you say?

We ask why they have to put up with rascals when they could be choosing their own judges, as once was the case.

In fact, today, it's hard to see the reason we switched at all. But a return to some sort of sanity in judicial selection would be a good thing. If we're not going to trust the voters to select judges, at the least, the state Senate ought to have veto power over the governor's choices, as it does with most appointments.

Open interviews are a start. But in the end, why not just let the voters decide? — *Steve Haynes*

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New catalog overlaps old garden season

My first seed catalog of the year arrived the day before Christmas.

Now that's getting a jump on the season. I don't even remember buying anything from these people, but obviously some time or another, I must have.

Frankly, I haven't gotten over this year's garden yet. In fact, I was out on Sunday, digging carrots.

I planted a zillion things this year — lettuce, spinach, cucumbers, green peppers, tomatoes, radishes, zucchini, corn, broccoli, carrots, cabbage, snow peas, green beans and spaghetti squash. We also have onions and garlic.

I planted, weeded, fought bugs, mulched and picked from May through November.

As soon as the lettuce, spinach and peas were done in the spring, I planted squash and corn. As the corn stalks were pulled, lettuce and spinach went back in. The radishes gave way to tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers.

I picked green beans every day or two for months. The tomatoes lasted until almost Halloween and the broccoli was still producing into November. Finally, about mid-November, I picked the cabbage and pulled the last of the broccoli plants.

The garden was done except for the car-



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

rots. Steve said that I should leave those in the ground until I wanted them.

That sounded like real good advice. Let's face it, I was tired of the garden. Tired of weeding, watering, picking and produce.

I still had boxes of green tomatoes ripening in the basement, a couple of zucchini, three smallish spaghetti squash and a half dozen little heads of cabbage in the fridge.

I was tired of gardening. Tired of produce littering every flat surface in my kitchen. Tired of leaving baskets of tomatoes on the neighbors' doorstep in the middle of the night. (Most of my zucchini died, so it had to be tomatoes this year.)

Let the carrots wait, I figured.

Well, they waited and waited and waited.

With a break for Christmas and temperatures falling into the single digits, I figured I'd better

harvest my last crop.

Easier said than done.

The ground is frozen solid. I couldn't dig them with a potato fork. I couldn't budge them with a hand digger and trowel.

I finally grabbed a hammer and screwdriver and pounded the screwdriver into the ground around each carrot to loosen the earth. This was moderately successful and I now have a dozen or so carrots of moderate length in my larder. However, that's only about a third of the crop.

Why did I plant so many this year? And why didn't I pull them when I could have just pulled their foliage? And why am I out here when the temperature is 25 degrees and the wind is blowing, trying to get carrots out of the ground?

Does anyone have a jackhammer or dynamite? One of those might be a faster way to harvest this entirely-too-cold-weather crop.

But the carrots are pretty tasty, I have to report. So it must be worth it, I think.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor'West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

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Spending on college unsustainable

If you think that the cost of college has gotten out of control, you're not alone.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni recently released a report on Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and the rest of the Big 12 conference, and their findings are nothing short of troubling.

Between 2004 and 2010, tuition at KU rose by 52 percent after inflation. Tuition at K-State is, comparatively speaking, a bargain; it rose by "only" 30 percent. As a result, the average Kansas family has to spend 15 percent of its annual income simply to pay for one child's tuition at K-State or 18 percent at KU.

Add the soaring debt of college students, and you have hardship for years to come.

Administrative bloat is one reason for the soaring costs. Both institutions have increased administrative spending faster than instructional expenses. They've spent \$1.50 on administration for every extra dollar dedicated to

Other Opinions

• **John R. LaPlante**
Kansas Policy Institute

instruction.

Cutting administrative expenses isn't just a nice thing to do; it is possible: Iowa State, Texas A&M and the University of Missouri actually reduced administrative expenses. It should be no surprise that they had smaller tuition increases than every other university in the conference, save Texas Tech.

Rising tuition rates impose a hidden cost: college dropouts. For every five students who start a bachelor's program at KU or K-State, two fail to finish it. Many students, then, come

away with little to show for their debt, and taxpayers subsidize an incomplete education.

The association warns that even students who do finish their degrees may not be adequately prepared for the future, either as workers or as citizens.

The first law of economics is that we have limitless wants but limited means to pay for them — even for something as valuable and cherished as college education.

Everyone from lawmakers to university presidents to incoming college students has acted as if money for college is unlimited. It isn't, which means that we all need to be more creative about solving the state's budget problems — and financing higher education.

John R. LaPlante is an education policy fellow with the Kansas Policy Institute. He has worked in public policy since 1998, focusing on education.

Will your future holidays be lonely?

To the Editor:

A few years back, while working in a grocery store, I was helping a woman put the groceries in her van. I knew her only daughter, who she spent every waking hour with, was going off to college. I commented to the woman that I thought she was going to miss her daughter.

The woman turned to me and with a most serious look said, "The worst decision I made in my life was to have only one child."

I think about that every Thanksgiving. We see pictures of families gathered around a big table with a turkey, dressing and all the goodies. They are having fun, visiting, sharing and praying in thanksgiving for the blessing of family, children, love, etc.

But there are many couples who have no one to share holidays with because they made the decision to have one child, or no children. A



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

friend of mine told me, "When I'd go places with a bunch of little ones, no one ever criticized me, but lots of older people would come up and lament that they didn't have more kids."

Birth control is not all that it is cracked up to be. We don't know the future. Sometimes we think we have it all figured out, and then.... Maybe a couple cannot have children, or may-

be a child dies from some tragedy. One certainty is that things can change in an instant.

This holiday season, talk to your spouse about the future. Do you want to be sharing bologna sandwiches on holidays or sharing love with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren? Communication is at the heart and soul of a marriage. Birth control stifles communication, stifles natural processes with chemicals and stifles an unknown future that may be filled with love and affection.

Don't be someone who says, "The worst decision I made in my life was to have only one child." Allow God to send you blessings and love in the form of children. Then you will be filled with gratitude.

David Gittrich, Wichita

Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

