



Other Viewpoints

Secretary knows paperwork is vital

Kris Kobach campaigned for, and won, the right to be the state's top record keeper – and he's long been a supporter of laws requiring people to keep accurate and current "papers" in order and on hand for on-demand inspections.

That is why it's a little puzzling that Kobach's own record-keeping isn't as tidy and up-to-date as it should be.

In 2004, Kris Kobach ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Congress. After the election, he failed to file the paperwork to show that he had terminated his campaign account, which retained a balance of nearly \$77,148.

Since 2008, the Federal Elections Commission has notified Kobach's campaign eight times about his failure to reconcile his congressional campaign account, with another notice set to be mailed out this week.

But that is another record-keeping snafu from the state's top record keeper and elections officer: The address of record with the elections commission is a post office box Kobach said is no longer "live."

Additionally, Kobach failed to formally notify the elections commission that he had changed his campaign treasurer – a role he's been filling himself since 2006.

Kobach said that the money left from his losing congressional campaign has been donated to other candidates or returned to donors. As it is now, however, there is no record on file with the federal commission to validate Kobach's statements.

Some would argue that Kobach's failure to keep his required campaign documents current is a nonissue – that it's simply a matter of turning in a form and closing the chapter on his congressional bid.

That might be the case if Kobach was a man who had dipped his toe into politics and decided to leave his aspirations behind him. That might be the case if Kobach hadn't landed the job as the top election officer, and had made such a hyperbolic issue of the integrity of elections – an integrity that can only be maintained with more documentation.

That is not the case, however.

Kobach is the secretary of state and serves as the top overseer of the state's elections. His failure to keep his own records in order undermines voters' confidence that he can effectively manage the state's elections.

– *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

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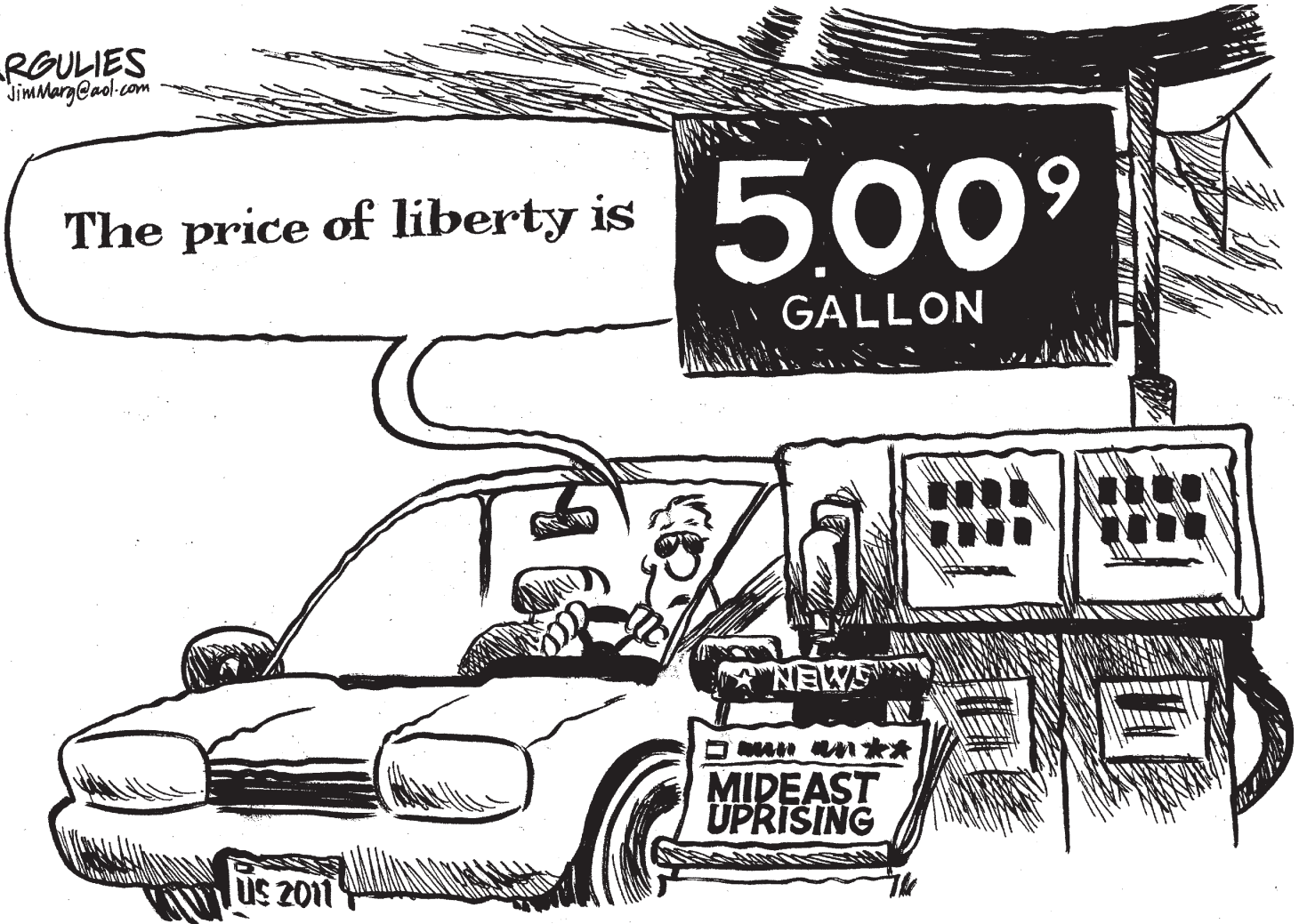
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Fickle Nature takes back spring fling

Nature can be so cruel, teasing us like she did last week.

Still, when the end of February rolls around, spring can't be far away.

You had to know that she was kidding when she sent us 70-degree weather at the middle of the month. My guess is even the wheat plants knew it was a trick, and wheat plants are notoriously short on intellect.

I admit, one batch of jonquils out back did start to poke their heads up above the ground. So far, they haven't been nipped even though it got down to 10 degrees by Monday morning.

Other flowers, including the crocuses, wisely stayed hidden. And I don't blame them.

We stayed inside, too, with a north wind blowing. Looking at the forecast, I'm thinking we will be woefully short of our goal of walking 25 miles this week.

Cynthia says her ears are sensitive, and she can't be out in the cold wind. Sounds like an excuse to me, but when it gets below 20 and there's a wind, I don't argue.

The dog is always willing to go for a walk, no matter how cold it is, rain or shine. Only heat would keep her in the house. But then, she's a dog. Wheat plants are smarter.

Cats are a different story. They hate cold. You'd think a creature wearing a fur coat would take to cold, but cats are most happy beside a warm stove – or on the porch on a



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

90-degree day. On a cold night, they set foot outside, then turn around and go back in. No wonder people say they're so smart.

Still, winter is about over. According to the climate people, spring weather here starts about March 1, and that usually is the case. Sure, there'll be snow and cold days. But the temperatures start to creep up and snow stays around only a day or two.

You only have to remember that March is to spring as November is to fall. April and October are mates. It won't be really nice until May, and all too soon, it'll be summer.

But spring training is in full swing, and Saturday the first games in the Cactus League begin the season. Barely a month later, it'll be opening day.

Soon enough, we'll be raking, trimming, cleaning, watering and mowing, getting flower beds, gardens and lawns ready to grow. We'll have to clean and tune the mower, find someone to till the garden and fertilize the lawn.

I don't know about you, but right now the

idea of yard work sounds pretty good. I know by August, it'll be drudgery, but compared to shoveling snow, I'll take it.

Snow. In March and April, you hardly have to shovel the stuff. You just clear doors, maybe a path to the car, and let it melt. Because warmer days are the one thing that's certain.

Daylight Saving Time starts March 13 this year, the second Sunday of the month. By March 20, when the spring equinox rolls around, and some people say it's the "official" start of spring, it'll already be time to mow the lawn. Days will start to be longer than night, especially noticeable with the earlier start to summer time.

In March, you may begin the month worried about blizzards, but you're sure to end it worried about tornadoes. April and May are prime time for "summer" storms, and the nasty stuff usually trails off after June.

By April, bushes will sprout leaves, the lawn will be in flower and grass will need to be cut. By April, we'll be waiting for the trees to leaf out and the irises to bloom. Won't happen 'til May, but that won't keep us from wanting.

Soon enough, it'll be summer. But let's not rush things. Just enjoy spring. After this week, we'll deserve it.

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 likes to ride and watch trains.

Turnaround Day keeps Topeka busy

It is hard to believe we will soon be at the halfway point of the 2011 Legislative session. Friday is the "Turnaround Day," when bills must be passed out of their house of origin. Following turnaround, the House and Senate will work on the bills passed out of the other chamber.

Because of the deadline, this week will be long and strenuous. We will be on the House Floor all day debating dozens of bills. Among the issues to be taken up are repeal of in-state tuition for illegal immigrants, proof of citizenship and photo identification requirement to vote, redefining misclassification of contract workers, increasing the speed limit on four-lane Interstate highways to 75 mph, a late-term abortion ban, tax bills, paycheck protection for workers, and a number of others.

The House will debate and vote on most of the legislation drafted in committees. We are addressing each with an eye towards reducing the size of state government and achieving responsible solutions rather than a band-aid fix.

This week, one of the committees that I am on, Commerce and Economic, passed House Bill 2134, which reformed workers' compensation. The vote on the House floor was 90-29.

This bill is the result of extensive negotiation between labor and business representatives. It is the most comprehensive workers' compensation package considered in 17 years, and the first to pass with support from both sides. The reform will improve business climate in Kansas and increase our competitiveness with surrounding states while ensuring that injured workers receive the care and benefits they need.

The compromise protects and reinforces the intent of the Kansas workers' compensation system by making four changes:

- Employers must pay for workplace injuries.



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

ries.

- Employees are compensated without regard to fault.
- Employers do not have to pay unwarranted claims.
- Benefit caps for injured workers are increased.

The cap for permanent injuries is raised by \$30,000 while the death benefit will increase from \$250,000 to \$300,000.

The House has made economic growth a top priority. This reform will have a positive impact on economic growth in Kansas.

When the Senate passed the Governor's freeze bill this week, it included \$10 million in additional spending, resulting in a potential ending balance of \$2 million when the fiscal year ends June 30.

The largest chunk of this spending added by the Senate was \$25 million for special education to meet an unknown amount required to keep federal money flowing. In a meeting that I and several other freshman legislators had with Gov. Sam Brownback last Friday, he assured us that the money for special education would be covered before the end of the fiscal year.

Although there have been several estimates on the required amount, it will not be available from the U.S. Department of Education until late April or mid May. School districts did not plan for the \$25 million when drafting their 2011 budgets so not appropriating the funds

now will not affect their current budgets. With a \$56 million short fall at the end of FY 2011, the Governor and House have made it clear that the goal is a rescission bill that establishes a responsible ending balance.

Congratulations two students from Colby Community College. Phi Theta Kappa is the International honor society for two-year colleges, symbolizing excellence in higher education and a commitment to students. Phi Theta Kappa has recognized and encouraged scholarship among two-year college students for 75 years by providing stimulation and enrichment while promoting the academic integrity of the associate degree program. Students with a grade point average of 3.5 or higher are invited to join Phi Theta Kappa. I would like to recognize Garrett Jones and Garrett Zwegardt who have achieved this honor and were in Topeka last week to receive this award.

I would like to thank the different groups and organizations who have traveled to Topeka to visit with me throughout this session. It is nice to have local people from Western Kansas share their concerns about the different issues that affect our region and the State of Kansas.

Thank you to those that came out Saturday to visit with Senator Ralph Ostmeyer and myself when we toured the 121st district.

Again, thank you for the honor of allowing me to represent the 121st District. If you have any input on any issues which will come before the Legislature this year, please contact me at rick.billinger@house.ks.gov or call me at (785) 899-4700.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

