



Free Press Viewpoint

Higher speed could cost communities

One of the worst bills to come up in the current session of the Kansas Legislature is one to raise the speed limit on four-lane divided highways to 75 mph.

This may sound like a feel-good exercise in freedom, allowing people to drive just a little faster, but it is a dagger aimed at the heart of our rural towns.

While it may be appealing to be able to get to Hays a few minutes faster, the net result will be to divert even more traffic off of two-lane highways, where the state has excess capacity out here, and concentrate it on the freeways. And those can get pretty crowded in some areas.

Less traffic on the two-lane roads means less business in our towns. And the towns on the Interstate already have most of the business as is.

On a trip to Kansas City, driving 75 mph rather than 70 might save 15 to 20 minutes. The change could cost rural Kansas towns millions in lost sales over the next decade. We doubt the time saving is worth the pain, but unfortunately, little consideration has been given to rural needs in this debate.

The 70 mph speed limit on Kansas freeways and expressways was carefully thought out back in 1996, after the government finally allowed states to raise their limits. Sen. Stan Clark, who represented this area at the time, and other rural legislators crafted a 5 mph differential to keep some traffic on the two-lane roads.

Now that agreement is about to be undone by a bill that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. Most legislators voting today may never head heard of the agreement created back then, or the reasoning behind it.

Worse yet, the bill would effectively establish an 85 mph limit on our freeways. One provision would establish the "grace" allowance for speeders at 10 mph, rather than the 5 mph often used by officers today.

The combined result would be a 15 mph increasing in the allowable speed on our Interstates and four-lane state routes. That's way too much.

We'd all be better off – and safer – if we just leave things the way they are.

Rural towns have taken enough hits without this added insult. Leave the speed limit alone, please.

– Steve Haynes

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roberts.senate.gov/public/

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U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

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MARGULIES
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Internet ramble finds Cthulhu?

You never know quite where aimless Internet searching will take you.

On a bored Saturday afternoon recently I was surfing the net. A hobby project that I had been hoping to work on didn't pan out, so I was on my computer casting around aimlessly for something interesting to read.

Somehow I got to looking up trivia on one of my favorite authors, H.P. Lovecraft. For those of you not familiar with Lovecraft, he was an early 20th century fiction writer who pioneered a genre known as "Cosmic Horror." A recurring theme in his work was extra-terrestrial beings who were so old and so advanced that they would take as much notice of humans as we do of ants. His works include "At the Mountains of Madness," "The Colour out of Space," and "Herbert West: Reanimator."

Perhaps his most famous of these "Old Ones" is Cthulhu, a giant, tentacled being that a bunch of sailors stumbled across and awakened on an island in the Pacific Ocean in the short story "The Call of Cthulhu."

The web site I was browsing, tvtropes.org, listed all kinds of examples in other fiction of cosmic horror. It also had a tab for real life examples. Thinking, "What kind of cosmic horror could possibly occur in real life outside an insane asylum," I clicked on the link. There were a few entries describing giant squids or jellyfish (tentacles were a common attribute of Lovecraftian monsters) and an interesting one on the "Technological Singularity," the idea that as computers become more interconnected they may develop a collective consciousness, one utterly alien to our human minds.

But one entry really caught my eye. It was about something called The Bloop. What could that be? I clicked the link.

Apparently, in the summer of 1997 a low frequency sound was heard several times in the Pacific Ocean about 1,700 miles from the southern end of Argentina. During the Cold



Kevin Bottrell

• Simple tricks and nonsense

War, the United States had sunk listening devices into the ocean all around the world to detect Soviet submarines. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration began using them for scientific purposes.

Several of the devices – more than 3,100 miles apart – picked up the strange sound. The official Acoustics Monitoring Program entry describes the sound as rising rapidly in frequency for about one minute and the origin is unknown. It was dubbed The Bloop.

There's been a lot of speculation as to what caused this mysterious sound. Scientists have ruled out man-made causes, suggesting instead that the sound had characteristics of animal sounds, such as whale noises. The problem is, the loudest animal on earth, the blue whale, can send its songs hundreds and even thousands of miles, but not this far. The animal that sent out this sound would have to be larger than anything known to science.

That's what grabbed my attention. A great beast swimming in the depths of ocean, unseen by mankind. The blue whale can grow up to 110 feet. That's longer than eight cars lined up hood to trunk. And if it's too small to make this noise, how massive must this unknown sea creature be?

Scientists don't think it's a squid. Apparently squid don't have the kind of gas-filled sac that could make a sound like this. Could there be whales larger than anything we've seen living in the empty parts of the ocean where hu-

mans seldom go? Could there be large reptiles, holdovers from ancient times? Or something else entirely? It's certainly possible. The area is virtually empty, with no islands to speak of, and up to 2 1/2 miles deep in places. With how little we've explored the deep sea, unknown sea creatures could easily exist.

A few jesters and devoted Lovecraft fans have suggested it might be Cthulhu himself being awakened. From what I remember of the story (it's quite a strange one), when Cthulhu is awakened he produces an extremely loud sound that makes people go mad. The pinpointed origin of the Bloop is about 950 miles from the fictional sight of Cthulhu's island. The idea prompted some great headlines like "Cthulhu goes Bloop!"

It's also possible that the sound could be from volcanic activity or plate tectonics on the sea floor or a process called "ice calving" when an iceberg breaks away from a glacier, all of which produce a lot of noise. But these possibilities don't inflame the imagination the way a giant sea creature does.

The Bloop isn't the only unexplained noise recorded in the oceans. There's the Hum, the Upsweep and the Slowdown, all named for what they sound like.

For my money this is the real virtue of the Internet. It isn't social media or gossip, but rather it is linking together all of this information. There is so much knowledge available now on the Internet that it staggers the mind, and the great thing is how it's interconnected. Read one article and click five links and you may end up someplace fascinating that you did not expect within seconds. We now literally have the world at our fingertips.

Kevin Bottrell, news editor of the Colby Free Press, is a Colorado State University graduate who believes that the middle road is often the high one. Contact him at kbottrell@nwkanssas.com

Demolition waste bill passes committee

A Senate committee passed SB188, which would expand the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's authority to approve the disposal of the demolition waste from buildings or structures at, adjacent to or near the site without a solid waste permit.

The bill also would add additional evaluation criteria that the secretary must consider when determining whether to approve a request for off-site disposal. These would include public safety, proposed plans to redevelop the demolition site and the capacity of nearby landfills. I appreciate the good-faith efforts of the department to relax demolition policies that will ultimately help small rural towns.

The House passed HB2088, which would permanently restrict cities and counties from requiring installation of a fire protection sprinkler system in a single-family structure. The bill also would prohibit requiring such a system as a condition for approval of a building



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

permit or plat.

The 2010 Legislature approved a one-year prohibition, which was at the time, and still is, a compromise. Originally, fire officials wanted to require sprinklers in all one- to four-family units. In the spirit of compromise, different groups agreed not oppose the requirements for three- and four-family units but opposed requirements for one- and two-family units. HB2088 eliminated a sunset provision inserted into the bill.

The bill doesn't prevent a homeowner from

installing a sprinkler system. We just need to make sure cities and counties don't require them. Smoke detectors have a survivability rate of 99.45 percent and sprinkler systems 99.80 percent. That's a very small gain, if any, at a tremendous cost to new-home buyers.

It basically boils down to allowing anyone who wants to have a fire sprinkler system in their home, and is willing to pay for it, to work with their builder to have this feature installed. However, this should remain an option and not a law.

If you have comments or questions regarding these or other issues, contact me at Ralph. Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is Ralph. Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov.

Write us

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about

topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

