



Other Viewpoints

Higher speeds OK for Kansas roads

Kansas has some of the best highways in the nation, but a lower top speed limit than three of its neighbors. So the Legislature's final action on a bill upping the state's speed limit from 70 to 75 mph made sense.

Too bad the measure includes a nonsensical \$10 cap on seat-belt fines that meddles with municipalities, including Wichita, that have set fines higher than state law and will deter compliance with the state's year-old primary seat-belt law.

Assuming that Gov. Sam Brownback signs the bill, the higher speed limit on some divided, multilane highways should help Kansas capture more of the long-distance truckers and other travelers currently attracted to the 75-mph limits of I-80 in Nebraska and the Oklahoma turnpikes.

Cars are better equipped to handle high speed now than they were in 1974, the last time Kansans could drive 75 mph legally. The higher speed limit also will be good for Kansans' time management, if not their greenhouse-gas emissions. And patching existing signs shouldn't cost more than \$24,700, according to the state.

The legislation gives the Department of Transportation discretion in deciding which four-lane highways are suited to a 75-mph limit. Officials should be wary of using it for roadways that aren't limited access, such as K-96 and K-254, and already prone to intersection collisions.

The impact of higher speeds on public safety statewide is a concern, and worth watching closely going forward, especially if it ends the recent declining trend in traffic fatalities.

An increased speed limit on Kansas highways will call for increased caution among drivers.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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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

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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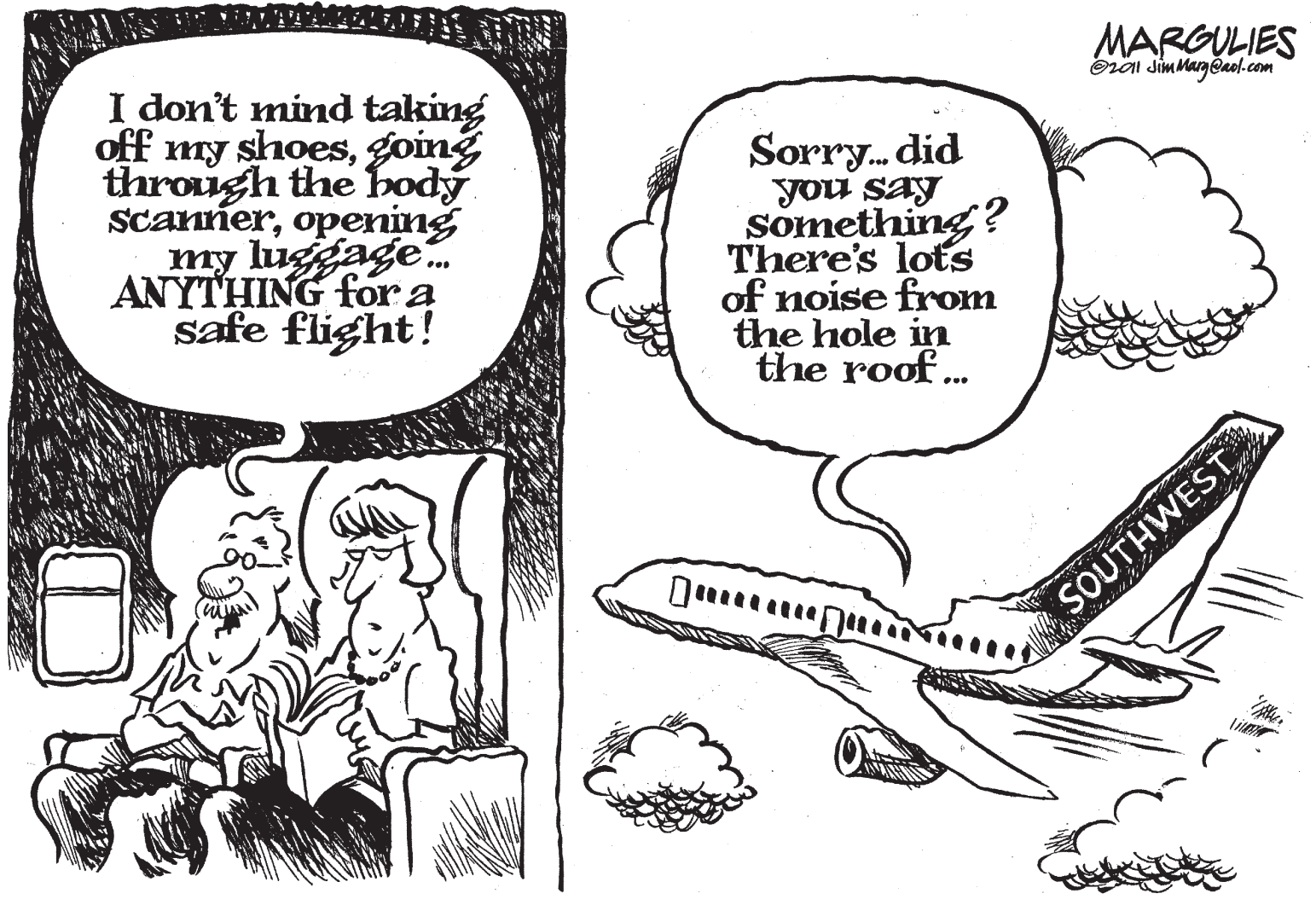
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Solo robin fails to share feast

The robin could have shared the bounty, I think. Maybe he didn't want to.

But I guess I'd better start at the beginning, Saturday when it was so nice out. We wanted to grill a steak and sit out on the back deck. We needed the cushions for the deck chairs and a couple of straight chairs to put our feet up on.

Cynthia went to get the cushions out of the basement. I went looking for the plastic patio chairs, stored in the garage for the winter.

I have to say, I'd been wondering what had happened to all the webworms that hatched in the bird seed Cynthia bought last fall. A lot of them went into the bird feeder along with the seed, but after a certain point in the winter, they just seemed to disappear.

When I got the patio chairs out, I understood. Of the eight chairs stored in a stack, the legs of seven were covered with worms webbed tight to the plastic, ready to pupate and graduate to adult form, I suppose.

There was no doubt these were the worms from the bird seed, white, squirming, with six legs at the front. I grabbed a couple of chairs and hosed them off for us, and forgot about the rest.

Next morning, Cynthia was up early. She'd unstacked all the chairs and set them out to clean. I looked out in the yard, and saw she had help.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

A lone robin was picking all the worms he could get off one chair. It was a feast, a banquet, and he was hard at it. I called Cynthia to the door and showed her.

"If he has any friends," she smiled brightly, "maybe we won't have too much cleaning to do."

We saw the robin a couple more times, but no friends. We surmised he was saving all the goodies for himself, though it was a big task for such a small bird. Still, he was working away at it. By mid-afternoon, he was having to jump up and peck off worms much above his height.

Later, Cynthia went out with the hose and sprayed off the rest of the bugs. We stacked the chairs for storage until summer, when we'd need more than a couple on the deck.

Late that afternoon, Cynthia called me to the back door.

"Look," she said, pointing to a robin in the

grass. "He's back. He was looking all around for the chairs. He can't figure out where they went."

And sure enough, that robin looked puzzled.

We tried to tell him he'd need help to finish the job on time. We tried to warn him.

I felt a little guilty that we'd flushed the rest of his bounty, but he had his chance. We couldn't just leave those chairs out there all spring, could we?

That evening, Cynthia emptied one of the sacks of bug-infested bird seed she'd bought this winter. No bugs. Apparently they all hatched at the store.

And she'd bought two bags on sale, too. An Extension article said bugs in the seed were a good source of protein for wintering birds.

Apparently, though, you have to feed them before the big hatch. We could have harvested a bunch off the chairs, had washing them not been so much quicker.

Better luck next time, Mr. Robin. Bring your friends.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Governor's plans include west end of state

It is nice to have a governor who knows the value of western Kansas.

Gov. Sam Brownback will be at the Colby Airport at about 10:30 a.m. Monday to sign the Rural Opportunity Zone Bill into law. This will allow those from outside Kansas who move into one of the 50 counties in the zone, including all of northwest Kansas, to avoid state income taxes for five years.

Gov. Brownback also announced he will sponsor a Governor's Pheasant Hunt, called the Kansas Governor's Ringneck Classic, Nov. 18 to 20 near Oakley. The weekend will include a community dinner Friday night, a hunt Saturday with awards and a dinner that night, and a "bonus" hunt on Sunday.

This was the final week of the regular session for the Legislature. On Friday, the House of Representatives adjourned until Wednesday, April 27. During the break, the staff will compile information on the state's economy and revenue numbers and update our fiscal outlook so we can take additional action on the budget when we return, if necessary. Also, the break provides a chance to spend time with our friends and neighbors, discussing the issues directly affecting them.

Last week, the Legislature's primary focus was passing a budget for the 2012 fiscal year beginning July 1. Tuesday, the Senate passed its version with an \$8.1 million ending balance. Thursday, the House worked all day on the budget, passing it at 11:05 p.m.

There was a wide range of feeling, but almost 70 legislators, regardless of concerns, understood that passing the House budget was the first step in reforming state government and trusting Gov. Brownback to lead us to small, responsive and responsible government.

The House budget has an ending balance of about \$80 million, controls spending and is the first balanced budget produced by the House in three years. For the first time since 1972, to-



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

tal state spending would decrease – by nearly \$900 million.

I look forward to visiting with constituents over the next three weeks. The Legislature still has work for the "veto" session, and it's vital that I know your thoughts and opinions. I have some surveys printed to distribute throughout the 121st District. If you would fill one out and return it, I would appreciate it. There is space on the bottom for your e-mail address, and I will e-mail information from time to time.

Workers Compensation (Sub HB 2134)

Workers compensation was another major issue requiring action this year. These laws have remained unchanged for over a decade, and this year the Legislature made improvements to the overall structure. The vote on this measure represented years of work and compromise, and I'm happy to see it resolved.

Sub for HB 2134 revises several parts of the Workers Compensation Act. Current law prohibits compensation for injuries caused by employee actions or by failure to use adequate protection. The bill also disallows compensation if an injury that is the result of violating workplace safety rules or caused by fighting or horseplay with a co-worker.

It deletes the requirement for probable cause to require drug or alcohol testing if an employee is believed impaired. Instead, employers must have sufficient cause. Positive results may be overcome if clear and convincing evidence is provided proving otherwise.

The bill extends from 10 to 30 days the period for an employee to give notice of an injury

accident or repetitive trauma. Once an employee has reached their maximum prescribed medical treatment, the employer's obligation to provide health care would end.

It also replaces current provisions for permanent total disability, requiring expert evidence and preventing a worker from getting more than one award for permanent total disability in their lifetime. An employee unable to accommodate temporary work restrictions imposed by a physician may be entitled to temporary total disability. Employees who refuse to accept work to accommodate the temporary disability would be ineligible for temporary benefits. They would also be ineligible if already receiving unemployment benefits.

Caps on maximum compensation for benefits are increased in the bill. In addition, employers would be responsible for paying up to \$1,000 for court appointed conservators when an employee's death is caused by an injury.

If an employee refuses to submit to a medical exam requested by the employer, benefits are terminated under current law. The bill broadens the appeals process so employees, employers and the insurance carrier can request a post-award hearing for medical treatment.

The House approved the final version 120-0 and the Senate 37-0 on Friday.

I would like to thank my recent pages, Whitney Schultz from Brewster High School and Andrea Roeder from Goodland High School. I was happy to have Hayden Ribordy stop by for a couple of photos when he was paging for Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer.

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

