



Other Viewpoints

Schools help fight growing obesity

The recent news about obesity in Kansas came in two flavors.

Some was definitely bad. Some was potentially good.

The bad news was that Kansans are near the head of the pack when it comes to packing on pounds. A study showed the Sunflower State recorded the fourth-fastest growth rate in obesity in the nation since 1995.

Back then, the state's obesity rate of 13.5 percent ranked us at No. 36. Today, we've zoomed up to No. 16, with a 29 percent rate, as reported by the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Yikes. That's more than a 100 percent increase in 16 years. At this rate, more than 50 percent of Kansans will be obese in 2027.

Why would the rate be going up so quickly in Kansas? There's no single answer. It's no secret our population is aging, for example, and obesity tends to be more prevalent among middle-aged and older people than among children and young adults.

But there are many other factors involved in the problem, too, ranging from lifestyle choices to the availability of recreation and exercise opportunities to public policies to socioeconomic conditions.

Whatever the mix of causes, the result has serious implications for the state. Problems related to obesity not only threaten the health of those who are overweight but also put stress on medical facilities and social programs.

So what was the potentially good news?

Nine schools in Topeka have been invited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to participate in a White House reception hosted by first lady Michelle Obama and focusing on efforts to improve the health of American children.

The reception, scheduled for July 29, recognizes schools that received a HealthierUS School Challenge award during this past school year. The initiative, part of Mrs. Obama's Let's Move! program, awards schools that have improved the quality of foods they serve, offered nutrition education, provided physical education and recreational opportunities to students.

Local schools that have been invited to the event include Logan Elementary in Seaman Unified School District, all Auburn-Washburn elementaries and Washburn Rural Middle School.

The schools deserve credit for trying to get students off to the right start in eating wisely and managing their weight.

The more students who get such a foundation, the fewer may suffer from obesity when they get older. And if that happens, perhaps Kansas can reverse the trend toward becoming one of the most overweight states in the nation.

— The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press

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Don't forget to grab your keys

A story out of Colby reminds me of one piece of solid advice that most people tend to ignore: Never leave your keys in the ignition. Never, not for a second.

The story: here in Colby, a business had a company car it kept for running errands and the like. It was parked in the lot by the office, keys in the ignition, when a thief on the road from California spotted it.

The thief jumped in the car, leaving a pickup with California tags (later found to be stolen) in its place. Colby police noted that the swap was pretty easy to spot when they got there.

Which goes to show, even in a small town, it's not safe to leave the keys in the car.

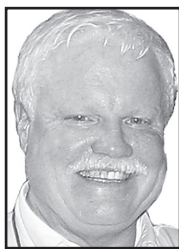
That's not the end of the tale, though. In Salina later the same night, a visitor from Johnson County was pumping gas into a company car he was driving. When he turned to replace the nozzle, the car took off.

You guessed it: he'd left the keys in the ignition. After all, he was *right there*.

You may also have guessed by now that Salina police found that car stolen in Colby nearby in the truck stop's parking lot.

Guess the thief decided he wanted one with a full tank this time.

Even in Oberlin, cars sometimes disappear



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

when they have keys in them. It was worse when the youth ranch was going strong, but cars still take off now and then.

In Kansas City one winter, a woman left her baby in the car while she ran into a convenience store "for just a second." She looked out to see the car leaving, and wound up with a lot of explaining to do, once the police found her baby.

An all-time classic case happened around Goodland a few years ago. A young man who apparently had gotten more into drugs than his classes at a Colorado college wrecked his car just over the state line, flipping into a nearby field.

A farmer happened along, stopping to see if the driver was all right. The sheriff arrived. Both were startled when the farmer's truck roared to life and took off for the freeway.

He'd left the keys in the truck, of course.

Out on I-70, the kid wrecked the pickup over on the Kansas side. People stopped to help. One of them, a guy hauling a boat home from the lake, looked up to see his rig, pickup, boat and all, taking off.

He'd left the keys in the ignition.

The boat flipped into a field on the first hard turn off I-70 and onto old U.S. 24, but the kid kept going, trailer and all, until he wrecked that truck, too, going the wrong way on the freeway. Only this time the highway patrol had him surrounded.

His last mistake, allegedly, was trying to reach into a trooper's car to take the keys. The trooper, it seemed, was still in the driver's seat.

The moral of the story is simple. There's no good time to leave the keys in the ignition. None.

If you want to keep your car, keep the keys with you, even if you are right there.

Period.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Rich or poor state: a matter of choice

The fourth edition of "Rich States, Poor States," recently published by the American Legislative Exchange Council, is an excellent review of economic competitiveness among the states. Co-authors Arthur Laffer, Stephen Moore and Jonathan Williams use statistical analysis and anecdotal information to show that states with low tax burdens and regulatory hurdles have the best record of job creation and personal income growth.

State rankings are based on 15 criteria, including marginal income-tax rates, personal income-tax progressivity, the burden imposed by other taxes, the existence of a tax or expenditure limitation and a variety of legal and other economic policies. The complete list is available with a free download of the book at www.alec.org.

Williams says that capital goes where it's wanted, and the evidence certainly bears that out. But not everyone agrees.

Some critics say taxes and regulation have nothing to do with jobs and people migrating to low-burden states, saying it is simply weather-related. Certainly some of the best-performing states, such as Florida, have good weather, but other top-ranked states such as Utah and North Dakota aren't known for great weather.

Other critics believe that investment in infrastructure and equipment, labor efficiency, education and innovation are drivers of job

Other Opinions

• Dave Trabert
Kansas Policy Institute

creation and economic prosperity. Of course, by "investment" they mean government spending.

Having a good highway system and an educated workforce is important, but the measurement is not based on how much is spent. The test is whether a good highway system exists or whether the workers have the technical skills to be productive employees.

Fortunately, Kansas has a great highway system and a skilled workforce. But so do many other states. What those states don't have is an uncompetitive tax structure.

That's the point of "Rich States, Poor States." It's not about being competitive on a few items; you have to be competitive on everything.

There are a lot of states with great weather and good highways, and that invest a lot of money in education and innovation. But they also have lost jobs and have substandard

growth in population and personal income.

"Rich States, Poor States" is loaded with good policy advice, but perhaps the greatest takeaway is that economic prosperity is a matter of choice. Some states choose to create an environment that encourages economic activity; others choose to put a higher value on government growth, which discourages job creation.

Kansas can't be complacent with its middling rank. "We're No. 27" isn't much of a slogan. In fact, Kansas is the only state whose average 2011 private-sector employment level is lower than its 2010 average.

We can either choose to continue the tax-and-spend mentality that continues to drive jobs away or we can choose to become prosperous.

Dave Trabert, president of Kansas Policy Institute, researches and writes on fiscal policy and education issues. He most recently authored "Kansas County Budget Analysis — In Search of Efficient Government" and "Volume III: Analysis of K-12 Spending in Kansas" in A Kansas Primer on Education Funding. He graduated from West Liberty State College with a degree in business administration.



Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

