

Other Viewpoints

State Fair wins safety blue ribbon

As families make plans to attend the Kansas State Fair, it's good to know that fair officials have taken action to help ensure their visit goes safely.

The tragic stage collapse at the Indiana State Fair prompted a recent meeting between Kansas State Fair administrators and officials from the Kansas Highway Patrol and Reno County Emergency Management to discuss how to better protect fairgoers in the event of dangerous weather.

Officials examined the fair's protocols for obtaining information on weather warnings and evacuating crowds, among other matters. Steps taken as a result of the meeting include an arrangement with a Wichita TV news station to provide a detailed daily weather forecast for the region.

There's never a bad time to revisit safety issues at the fair, and that's certainly the case in the aftermath of the Indiana tragedy. Seven people died there and dozens were injured after a thunderstorm packing high winds hit the area and toppled the grandstand stage. Although fair officials had received word about the storm 30 minutes before it arrived, they did not issue a mandatory evacuation order.

Undoubtedly, many Kansans have seen video footage of the Indiana stage collapse and have wondered whether adequate protections are in place at the Sunflower State's fair. That being the case, it was appropriate for officials to hold their discussion.

Denny Stoecklein, general manager of the fair, said there had already been protocols in place for his staff to maintain regular contact with emergency management officials in the event of a severe-weather threat. He also said the grandstand stage in Hutchinson isn't as tall as the one in Indiana and also differs in that it doesn't feature speakers mounted above it, meaning it's less top-heavy and therefore would be less apt to collapse in high winds.

There also has been a plan in place for some time to evacuate fairgoers to the grandstand's concourse areas, which offer protection from the elements.

The precautions in place before the recent meeting had proven adequate, but keeping the public safe is an area that's always worth more attention.

— *The Topeka Capital-Journal, 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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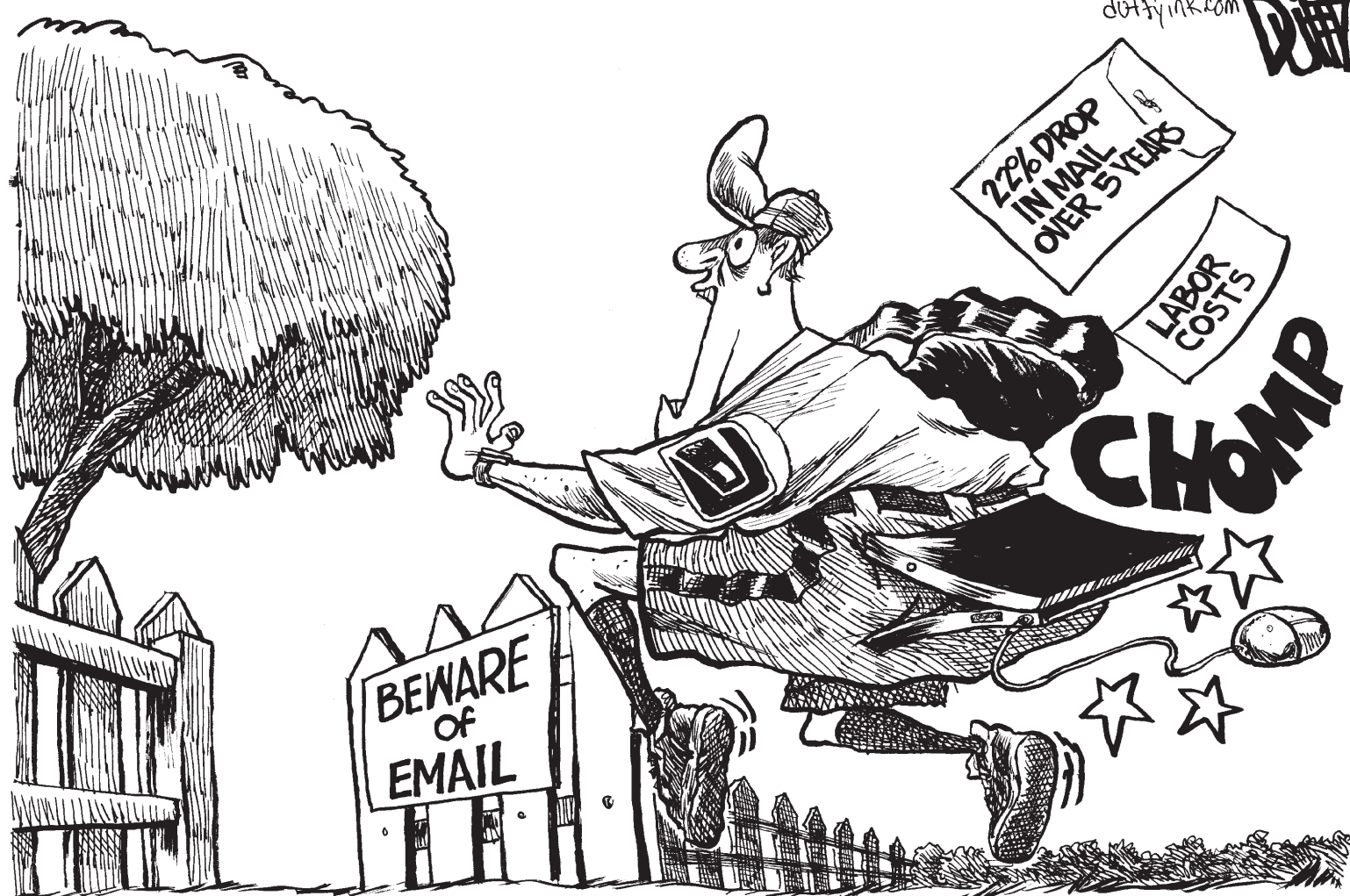
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Big events create big memories

They say everyone can remember where they were when President Kennedy was shot, just as everyone who lived through it can remember where they were when they learned about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, or the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Big events create big memories. I was born well after Pearl Harbor, after my daddy came home from the Navy. But I do remember Nov. 22, 1963.

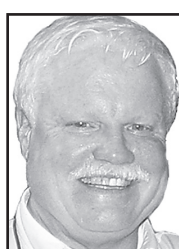
I was in sophomore geometry class. Wood Bloxson, a much beloved, crusty old teacher was lecturing us when the word came to the third floor of Emporia High School.

Television was coming of age in those days, and the nation remained glued to the sets as never before. School was called off and many stayed home from work. We were in shock as we watched the motorcade approach Dealey Plaza in Dallas over and over again.

Presidents have been shot both before and since, but never so publicly, so instantly, so well and thoroughly recorded. Never shared with the nation from start to finish, from the shooting itself to the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald days later.

Sept. 11, 2001, dawned in a cornfield somewhere in Iowa. We were on Amtrak's California Zephyr, headed to Milwaukee for a newspaper convention. It would take us all day and the better part of the next day to get home.

The railroads, unsure of what might happen next, stopped everything. Eventually, passen-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

ger trains were allowed to proceed to the next stop, which for us was Ottumwa, Iowa, where many went into the depot to watch the television. There we saw the horrors of the second plane, witnessed the collapse of the twin tower.

Unsure of what would happen next, people started looking for a way out of town. Rumor had it that the train could not go to Chicago because the depot tracks stood in the shadow of the Sears Tower, and who knew if it might not be next?

(As it turned out, we could have gotten to Chicago that night and perhaps to Milwaukee in the morning, but hardly anyone was there. The trains did finish their runs, but airlines were grounded for three days. The association faced huge problems trying to refund people's money, and the few delegates who arrived early were trapped in Milwaukee.)

We rented a car that we had to return in Lincoln, Neb. From there, eventually, we caught the westbound Zephyr, which got us back to McCook only a little more than a day after we

left. It was an expensive round trip, but compared to the attacks' impact on the rest of the country, only a minor inconvenience.

The next day, we went back to work, one eye on the news as the situation developed, the other on how the disaster was affecting our town and our neighbors.

Time has dimmed the details of when we learned when, but as in 1963, the memory remains strong: Images of Mayor Rudy Giuliani, firemen and police officers, the planes striking, the towers crumbling, anti-aircraft crews at the Pentagon, survivors and weeping relatives.

It's easy to see President Bush as he spoke to the nation. He put the blame on Osama bin Laden and al Qaida, declaring war on the terrorist. And he warned us that night, the fight would not be quick or easy.

When you think some of the troops he sent that day are still in Afghanistan, those sent later still in Iraq, security ever tighter on airline flights and in major cities and ports, you begin to understand what he was talking about.

In the days and years since, it seems like we have gotten the upper hand, but terrorist is hard to deter and impossible to completely prevent. The war started that day continues, and it's likely to be going 10 years from now.

Let's hope there are no more memorable days to recall by then.

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.

Time for 'Academic Spring' revolution

As Americans watch the "Arab Spring" revolutions that are redefining governments in the Middle East, is it not time to call for resistance to the tyranny in education right here in America?

If a people can stand up against those who kill by bullets, then certainly we can stand up against those who are killing our students' spirits in the public classroom.

The list of violations to student and teacher dignity is long and growing.

High-stakes testing and test-prep has replaced professional teaching.

Lessons not leading to higher test scores are often prohibited.

A teacher who dares address an off-standards topic risks being charged with insubordination.

The curriculum has narrowed, reducing or eliminating student time in subjects not tested. This last generation of students was anemic in science, social studies, art, music and physical education. The next generation will suffer even more academic starvation.

Teacher professional decision-making in kindergarten through 12th grades has been decimated.

Some of the best teachers who most valued their professional discretion have fled.

Our best college candidates have seen the assembly line test prep that teaching has become, and many are electing to not join the test-prep factory.

Student teachers are no longer trained to develop curriculum; test-makers now determine curriculum.

Big testing companies drain our educational budgets.

Our students get physically sick under the pressure to perform.

Two out of three dropouts quit because of



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

boredom; there is nothing more boring than material taught to the test.

Defenders point to math and reading test scores that appear to gradually increase. But National Assessment of Educational Progress scores for these same fields remain flat, putting the lie to that claim. The increase in scores—the purported “closing of the achievement gap” — is nothing but what is expected when teachers hone in on preparing students for a specific test while the students' overall academic ability declines — as most college professors can attest.

Our gridlocked government fails to take action as the No Child Left Behind “100 percent-by-2014” requirement approaches, each year ensuring that more solid schools are declared failures. More solid teachers are proclaimed incompetent. More administrators are fired. More schools are sanctioned.

Enough is enough. It is time to take action and that action is surfacing across the United States.

If fewer than 95 percent of a student population takes the mandated assessment, the data are considered incomplete under No Child. Regardless of the students' genuine performance, the school will not make Adequate Yearly Progress. A “6 percent movement” is now underway. Dr. Yong Zhao, currently presidential chair and associate dean for global education in the College of Education at the University

of Oregon (and a distinguished speaker this spring at Emporia State University) notes that if 6 percent of parents opt their child out of the assessments, they can shut this system down.

Another effort, “The Bartleby Project” begins its website by inviting 60,000,000 American students to peacefully refuse to take standardized tests.

In many states including Kansas, parents have the right to opt their child out of the spring assessments. In Kansas, this is not civil disobedience but merely exercising a right.

But some states do not allow opt-out. Some even base course grades on high-stakes tests. In those cases, it will be up to the students themselves to lay their pencils (or mouse) down.

The pressures to conform are tremendous. But if the Arab Spring was propelled by Facebook and Twitter, we can use social media here as well. For the sake of our students, the future of our schools and the teaching profession, it is time for an “Academic Spring.”

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

