

## Other Viewpoints

# Look again at law requiring primary

When Secretary of Administration Dennis Taylor has finished rooting out state laws that unduly hinder business growth and job development in his role as chief repealer, we'd suggest he and other officials take a look at the law that requires Kansas to conduct a presidential primary election every four years.

The law has been on the books since 1990, but Kansans haven't voted in a presidential primary since 1992. The only other time the state's voters participated in a presidential primary was 1980, when one was conducted as an experiment.

In other years, Kansas' Democratic and Republican parties have relied on caucuses that they fund to determine how their delegates are allocated at the parties' national conventions.

Since 1992, legislators have, in the odd-numbered years before a presidential election, declined to fund the primary state statute says must be conducted the following year. No funding, no primary.

We don't have a problem with the caucus system, nor are we opposed to a presidential primary. We think the voters can live with either, or perhaps even some combination of the two. But we are more than a little curious as to why legislators leave a law on the books that they so routinely and easily dismiss.

Gov. Sam Brownback has said presidential primaries involve more voters in the process and provide a better cross-section of the public's views. He also has said funding a primary isn't the easiest thing to do in tough economic times.

He's right on both counts, but by the time next year's presidential primaries are contested across the country it will have been 20 years since one was conducted in Kansas.

Certainly there were opportunities in that period to fund a primary.

In addition to the cost factor - Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach estimates it would cost the state \$1.5 million to conduct a presidential primary in 2012 - there is the question of significance.

The relatively small number of delegates Kansas sends to the national conventions, coupled with the timing of a primary, really wouldn't give the state much weight in determining the presidential nominees.

"You don't want the \$1.5 million to be spent on an election when it's too late to affect the outcome," said Kobach, a Republican.

"It isn't as if Kansas is going to be deciding who's going to be the presidential nominees," said state Democratic Party Chairwoman Joan Wagnon. "We're not, so why spend the money?"

That might be the only thing on which Kobach and Wagnon ever agree. But there is the participation factor.

Kansas' 1980 presidential primary drew 479,000 voters to the polls. In 1992, 373,000 voters participated. In 2008, about 20,000 Kansas Republicans participated in their party's caucus. The Democratic Party caucus was attended by about 37,000 of its members.

Clearly, voters like the primaries.

Obviously, legislators and other officials don't think primaries are worth the expense.

We think it's time legislators revisit the law and decide whether it should be repealed, amended - perhaps to give the voters a presidential primary once every eight years or once a decade - or left as it is.

After 20 years of avoiding the law, it's a discussion worth having.

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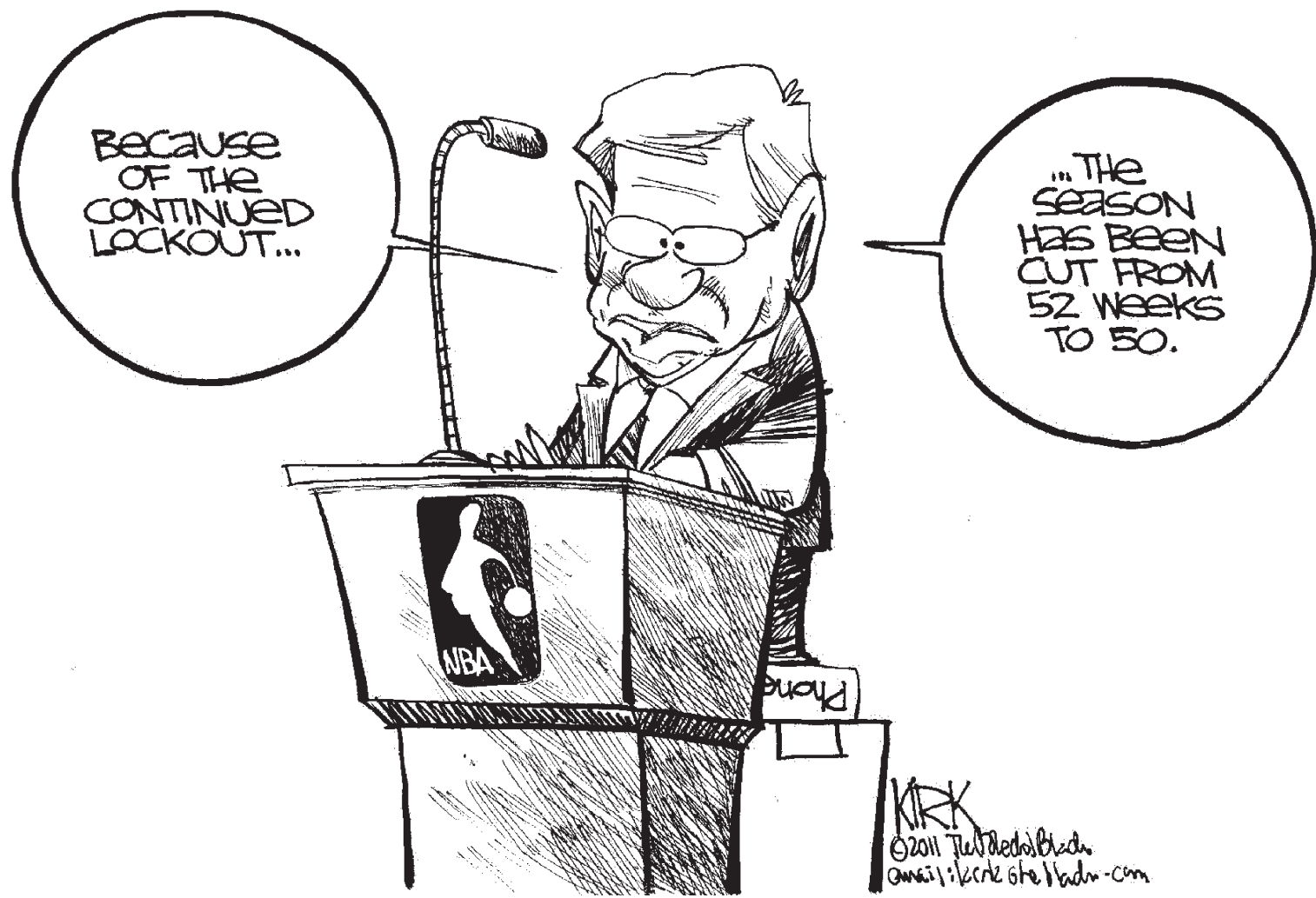
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# It's busy at the crossroads of 'crossers'

Caution: hippie crossing.

All kidding aside, it seems Colby has become a popular place to pass through for groups or individuals traveling across the country for one cause or another. And somehow, I almost always end up interviewing them.

Let's face it, Kansas is a flyover state, but if you're traveling coast to coast on the ground, Kansas has a lot of the most direct routes. Many of the walkers, runners, bikers and drivers are following U.S. 24 or U.S. 40, and that takes them right through our area.

Actually my first experience in the cross-country trek phenomenon was when I worked in Torrington, Wyo., with - believe it or not - the Pony Express. Every year Pony Express enthusiasts (all four of them) perform a reenactment ride from Sacramento, Calif., to St. Joseph, Mo., and their route takes them right through Torrington. The riders were passing through on U.S. 25, which goes right through town and then heads southeast to Scottsbluff, Neb.

The catch was that they were passing through at 3 a.m. To get pictures I would have to be up and waiting for them. Fortunately, they have a web site that allows you to follow them in real time, so I didn't have to stake out the route for hours just to catch them. So I was able to get the pictures I needed - and then go back to bed.

Fortunately, the groups I've interviewed here have either come through town during the day, or stayed here the night before.

One of the first ones I talked to in Colby was in 2009. A young woman who - with a few companions - was walking from California to Virginia to raise money for wounded and



**Kevin Bottrell**

• Simple tricks and nonsense

homeless veterans. What amused me was that this wasn't her first time. She was, in fact, on her second trip in four years. She told me it was nice to get on the flatlands after running up and down the Rocky Mountains.

Last summer we had a "rally" of three 100-mile-per-gallon cars pass through. These were homemade vehicles, and some looked rather wacky. One that caught my eye was half made of wood paneling and had only three wheels. I did a small story on them before they came through, but one of my reporters did the interview.

This year we saw a group of about 30 bicyclists come through Oakley. I made the trip down that afternoon to talk with them. They were riding to raise money for an organization that builds homes for low-income families. The riders, of course, were exhausted and mostly asleep that afternoon, but I got to sit and talk with the guy leading the ride.

Later in the summer we also had a group of runners trying to raise awareness of natural medicine. I thought walking or riding across country was hard, but running would have to be 10 times worse. By the end of it, you'd be thin as a rail, have a horrible farmer's tan and probably have an uncontrollable urge to lounge on the couch for a month.

One thing all these groups have in common when I interview them is they always tell me how nice people are in Kansas compared to other states. I hear stories from each one of drivers who slow down and ask if they need help or make an effort to give them space on the road. They all say you don't find that level of polite concern in Colorado.

They also have good stories to tell about the adversity out on the open road, something most of us can relate to. Sometimes you take a trip and nothing goes right.

Now I joked that these were hippies, but not all of them are. A lot of them do share the ideals like mental, spiritual and physical fitness, conservation, helping the poor, etc. Although, a few of them really are hippies, or were a long time ago.

I can understand the reason behind these cross-country events. People need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy. Here we are living our day to day lives blissfully ignorant, and along comes someone doing something extraordinary. That'll make you perk up your attention. It's not like they don't have good causes. Who could argue with raising money for homeless veterans, low-income housing or high gas mileage cars?

So the next time you see someone walking by, you might consider talking to them, it may take you somewhere you never expected. At the very least, you'll get a good story.

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@nwkansas.com.

# Standardization or academic freedom?

The push by the Kansas Board of Regents to require all general education courses be accepted across Kansas schools entails more than just making all course numbers and names uniform. A second committee has been charged to ensure that the "course outcomes" will also be the same.

Kansas kindergarten through 12th grade teachers have already heard these weasel words before. This outcomes-based "logic" was used to standardize courses, eventually culminating in math and reading teachers teaching-to-the-test. Kansas elementary and secondary teachers in assessed classes lost their academic freedom over a decade ago.

Now, this teach-to-the-test disaster called "No Child Left Behind" is coming to Kansas colleges and universities under the mandate that all general education courses transfer. Just as standardization was unavoidable in public schools, it will drive a common syllabus and most likely common exams at the college level as well.

"Academic freedom" encompasses a wide array of faculty responsibilities and protections that have contributed to our American university system being the world's best. It includes a freedom to assign grades free from political influence as well as other rights and responsibilities. But here we are looking at the teachers' responsibility to define their course curriculum within the boundaries of their subject. And the regents action will take away faculty control of both our syllabus and grade book.

Our current system of articulation of general education courses is not broken, but the Re-



**John Richard Schrock**

• Education Frontlines

gents are hell bent on fixing it. The first step is common numbers and names and they appear to want this finished by December. The second step is uniformity in outcomes. That has already played out in several other states that have gone down this disastrous route.

It has occurred at some community colleges already. Embarrassed at the quality of coursework being offered at their outreach centers, faculty at one community college stipulated a common final exam that must be taken. But quality free-lance teachers often turn down such job offers that involve teaching-to-the-test. Teaching-to-the-test kills the creativity and function of the American college classroom.

The Board of Regents committee for common course outcomes has not yet mandated common syllabi and final exams. But once the common course mandate is delivered, it is about the only possible consequence. Such a teach-to-the-test general education system brings all the madness of No Child Left Behind to the university classroom.

In China, I will be helping with bilingual entomology classes. Last May, while at the agricultural university, I asked if there was a

standard book or syllabus that I must follow. The Chinese educational system has a teach-to-the-test system that allows no variation for problem-solving and creativity. I was told to design my entomology course as I would in America: structured uniquely by the teacher for unique students. They want the creativity and variable problem-solving that is the hallmark of U.S. universities.

The American system where the teacher decides what, when and how to teach a course is being lost. This system, that has produced over 270+ Nobel awardees, is being changed into cookie-cutter courses with common syllabi and common tested outcomes. That was a system that China had for over 1,600 years. And they have no Nobel Prizes. They are eager to change to a system that provides professional responsibility and freedom to promote creativity.

Kansas is abandoning a successful system for political reasons. By ignoring the academic judgement of our four-year schools, and standardizing syllabi and testing, the Board of Regents is contributing to the decline in creativity that has been measured over the last decade of students under No Child.

I will have more academic freedom teaching in China next spring, than when I return to Kansas next summer.

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.

## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

