



## Other Viewpoints

# Drunken driving deaths sobering

If you find it discouraging that Kansas had the nation’s second-largest increase in drunken-driving fatalities in 2010, as such deaths declined 5 percent nationally, think of how the survivors must feel. Most important, think before taking the wheel while drunk.

Nearly 4 in 10 driving deaths in Kansas that year were related to alcohol – 168 total, which was 45 more than the year before. As state Rep. Pat Colloton, R-Leawood, told the *Kansas City Star*: “That statistic is stunningly bad.” Kansas’ rate of alcohol-related fatalities was 40 percent higher than the national average in 2010, and the state’s rate had increased more than 50 percent between 2005 and 2009.

In 2010, 15 of Wichita’s 29 traffic fatalities were alcohol-related and three members of a Wichita family were killed by a drunken driver going the wrong way on the turnpike. If there is any consolation in the 2010 statistics, it’s that they don’t reflect some sweeping legislation on driving under the influence passed by the 2011 Legislature and in effect since July.

The legislation emerged from a two-year study by a state DUI commission, which was formed after a four-time drunken driver killed a 4-year-old and her mother outside a Wichita elementary school in 2008. The new legislation sets up a central repository for law enforcement, prosecutors and judges to use to track driving under the influence offenses across jurisdictions. It also imposes higher fines and other penalties, including a minimum \$750 fine (up from \$500) for a first offense and, after a 30-day license suspension, required use of an ignition-locking device in order to drive for at least six months.

As Colloton said last May, when the bill passed the House 121-0 and the Senate 39-0, “It’s a good law that will save lives.” For example, research has found that ignition interlocks, previously used only in Kansas for repeat offenders, can reduce recidivism 67 percent. Some argue the 2011 legislation didn’t go far enough, though, especially in failing to make it a crime in Kansas to refuse to submit to an alcohol or drug test. The repository won’t account for any DUIs committed before July 1, 2001. And the law needs to be supported with sufficient state dollars, to realize its promises of more substance-abuse treatment and greater supervision of repeat offenders.

But because the state can’t outlaw addiction or stupidity – a Hutchinson man apologized for the latter Friday as he got a year in jail for his ninth driving under the influence conviction – the Legislature has only so much power to deter drunken driving. If ever there were an issue in which Kansas could use a surge of personal responsibility to rival its love of liberty, this is it.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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WHERE THE STATE OF IOWA GETS ITS FERTILIZER

# Former titles no longer count

Is it just this Man of the Plains who gets tired of hearing people call others what they aren't, but at one time were?

A year or so back, media folks were all excited because five presidents were together in the White House! Sorry, that can't happen and it didn't happen.

Factually, what happened was four former presidents met with the current sitting president, President Barack Obama. The former presidents were George Herbert Walker Bush, William Jefferson Clinton, George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter.

These guys were presidents but upon leaving office they also left their title behind for the next president to lay claim to. That's the way this thing works.

But we toss around titles like they are a forever charm that is worn around the wrist. Not so.

How often have you heard Mitt Romney called Gov. Romney in this campaign season? Often! It's been many years since he was a sitting governor.

Or Newt Gingrich called Speaker Gingrich? Far too often!

There are many former mayors still referred to as "Mayor," as is the case with governors.

Donald Rumsfeld, believe it or not, was recently introduced as Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, as a member of a panel discussing military affairs.

Even high-ranking retired military officers find themselves still referred to their rank despite wearing civilian clothes.

Whatever happened to the word "former?"

This may be an insignificant concern to many readers, but sadly accuracy just seems to have



## Tom Dreiling

- Man of the Plains

taken a back seat. One of my instructors at Fort Hays State (not a university in 1954 when this took place), Katherine Rogers, told me that accuracy is everything and without it you have written nothing. We were briefly discussing something I had hoped would find itself into the college newspaper. It didn't, a real blow to this tiny seed in the garden of developing journalists. But I learned from that rejection.

So, now that I am retired, do I now consider myself a former journalist? I am still writing, aren't I?

Did you look over the greeting cards you received in the mail this Christmas season? I mean, really close? I did, although I usually don't. I was speechless to read on the back of several of my cards these words: Hallmark, MADE IN CHINA. China? You got to be kidding! What's more American than the name Hallmark? I rarely read the back of cards so I don't know if this is something new or if it's been in play for quite a spell.

Regardless, it turned my stomach!

I've been following newspaper and television reports as they relate to the OCCUPY bunch and I am still waiting for them to occupy probably the most important place around.

I'll give you a hint: my bottom and a seat in the place I call "most important," were made for one other. Give me a newspaper to read, and I'm good to go.

### SNIPPETS

"... At least Ron Paul has an excuse for his insanity; he's from Texas! ..."

"Gingrich might be what the last four letters of his name spell, but he still hasn't got enough to finish the job...."

"Romney reminds me of a high school kid who just got his first kiss. So excited he swallows his words...."

"... Looks like House Speaker Boehner is between a rock and a very uncomfortable place. The Tea Party's out to get him after he caved in to the Democrats on the payroll tax holiday issue.... The stage is being set for a GOP/TP showdown!"

"The Bachmann girl needs to take some night classes to bring her up to speed on the courses she apparently flunked while wasting a desk in school. President? She's gotta be kidding!..."

"...Texas Guv Perry is nothing more than political waste."

"Some call Joe Biden the best vice president ever. Now that's what I call a real gaffe!..."

Snippets to [milehitom@hotmail.com](mailto:milehitom@hotmail.com). Please keep them within three sentences. Peace!

*Tom Dreiling of Denver is a former publisher of the Colby Free Press and The Norton Telegram, and a former long-time editor of the old Goodland Daily News. He is a life-long Democrat, a curmudgeon come lately and a newly minted Coloradan.*

# Postal problems largely political

If anyone doubted Thomas Frank's thesis in his book "What's the Matter with Kansas?" he or she need look no further than the current drama playing out with the U.S. Post Office.

For those who haven't read Frank's bestseller, he made the case that Kansans frequently vote for their politicians based on social issues, particularly abortion, and the leaders they elect, once in office, tend to vote against the economic interests of the very constituents they represent.

As most know by now the U.S. Postal Service is in financial trouble. But the reasons for their problems are quite different than popular perception. Yes, according to Regional Post Office spokesman Brian Sperry based in Denver, postal volume has dropped 22 percent in the past five years, including a 26 percent drop in all-important first-class mail. In response the Post Office has taken numerous measures including the streamlining of processing and closing of many facilities. A new round of closings is under consideration.

But there's a bigger boogeyman in the room. It's Congress. In 2006 Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act. In this bill the Postal Service was given ten years, or until 2016, to prefund seventy-five years worth of retiree health benefits. No other government agency or business is required to do this. According to Sperry this payment amounts to approximately \$5.5 billion annually.

No business in the private sector could be reasonably expected to survive under such



## Alan Jilka

- A Voice of Reason

onerous requirements. Although no one appears willing to say so there clearly was a political agenda behind the passage of the Postal Accountability Act. It would appear that many in Congress want to entirely privatize the Post Office.

Many make the case that, given the burdensome regulations included in the Postal Accountability Act the Postal Service has been one of the best-manages entities around in the past decade. Other federal requirements have resulted in overpayments of billions into the federal civil service pension funds which have not been refunded. Ralph Nader, for one, argues in a recent letter to Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), that without such federal regulation the Post Office would actually be in the black. He uses official government statistics to make a compelling case.

Clearly the Postal Service must change and adapt with the times. But they should also be treated fairly by the Feds and not be used as a pawn to serve a political agenda. Legislation has been introduced in Congress, HR 1351, which will take steps to remove these onerous

rules. Only one of Kansas' four congressional representatives, Lynn Jenkins, has signed on as a co-sponsor.

A large number of Kansas towns are on lists circulating for possible post office closures. Many of them are in the 1st Congressional District. We've seen too many western Kansas towns lose their livelihood in recent decades. Usually the process involves the loss of a school, grocery store, and finally, a post office. Some of these are the result of natural economic forces. But what's happening to the post office is being pushed by other ideological forces.

Given the current, largely artificial crisis one would think that Congressman Huelskamp would be fighting to save jobs in his district. Yet he and his office are strangely silent.

Huelskamp has unquestioned credentials on conservative social issues. Some say he concerned himself with little else while in the Kansas Legislature. He also exhibits extreme political hostility towards most endeavors of the federal government. He is the type of ideologue who would jump at the chance to privatize anything whose function could be taken off the government's hands.

The matter of whether the measure is good for the constituents of his ever-expanding congressional district is trumped by ideology. He fits neatly into the thesis of Thomas Frank.

*Alan Jilka is a former Salina city commissioner and mayor. He was the Democratic nominee for Congress in the 1st District in 2010.*

## Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

