

## Other Viewpoints

# Immigration laws don't top agenda

Good for Gov. Sam Brownback, House Speaker Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, and Senate President Steve Morris, R-Hugoton, for signaling last week that they are in no hurry to see Kansas pass an Arizona- or Alabama-style crackdown on illegal immigration.

"I've made it pretty clear that my preference this year, like the governor, would be that we not address immigration. But if we do I want it to be something that gets a lot of buy-in," O'Neal said Friday. "My focus is to get people to reach some kind of consensus."

As for whether Kansas needs to penalize those who harbor illegal immigrants or to compel local police to detain people who can't prove their legal status, Morris said, "I don't believe that gets any traction in the Senate."

The unwillingness to do as Arizona and Alabama have done may frustrate Secretary of State Kris Kobach, who wrote the laws in those states and remains one of the nation's busiest and most strident critics of illegal immigration. Kobach argued in House hearings last week that "Unless Kansas acts, we will become the No. 1 destination for illegal aliens in the Midwest."

But the legal challenges and costly problems that Kobach's handiwork has created in those states are reason enough for why Kansas shouldn't follow their lead. Lawmakers heard last week about crops rotting in fields in Alabama and Georgia after residents both legal and illegal fled the states; about a German Mercedes-Benz executive having been detained in Alabama after a traffic stop until his passport could be retrieved; about churches and charities fearing their ministries would be harmed by an anti-harboring law; and of state Rep. Ponka-We Victors, D-Wichita, who is of American Indian and Latino heritage, having been hassled and detained by border control agents while visiting family in Arizona.

A measure to require employers to use the online E-Verify system to check job applicants' immigration status seems like common sense. But a state that wants to show it's open for business shouldn't rush to mandate something that business groups argue would create legal and regulatory problems.

Bills on the opposite end of the issue also seem unlikely to pass, including one sought by a coalition of business groups that would help qualifying illegal immigrants work legally in industries with labor shortages.

"There has to be another, better way," Victors told her fellow lawmakers, in arguing against the enforcement bills.

With the 2012 Legislature halfway through its allotted days and nowhere near the end of its overflowing agenda, the federal issue of illegal immigration should not be a priority for state lawmakers.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: [colby.editor@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansas.com)

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**Sharon Friedlander - Publisher**  
[sfriedlander@nwkansas.com](mailto:sfriedlander@nwkansas.com)

### NEWS

**News Editor**

[colby.editor@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansas.com)

**Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter**  
[colby.sports@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.sports@nwkansas.com)

**Marian Ballard - Copy Editor**  
[mballard@nwkansas.com](mailto:mballard@nwkansas.com)

**Christina Beringer - Society Reporter**  
[colby.society@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.society@nwkansas.com)

**ADVERTISING**

[colby.ads@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.ads@nwkansas.com)

**Kathryn Ballard**

**Advertising Representative**  
[kballard@nwkansas.com](mailto:kballard@nwkansas.com)

**Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design**  
[khunter@nwkansas.com](mailto:khunter@nwkansas.com)

### BUSINESS OFFICE

**Kylie Freeman - Office Manager**  
[kfreeman@nwkansas.com](mailto:kfreeman@nwkansas.com)

**Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator**  
[support@nwkansas.com](mailto:support@nwkansas.com)

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# Medicaid program needs streamlining

In Kansas, we have a strong tradition of helping our neighbors in times of trouble — assisting those in need with a hand up, doing what we can with what little we may have.

The last few years have been financially difficult for the state of Kansas. Dramatically reduced tax revenues forced dramatic cuts in spending for state services.

When Gov. Sam Brownback took office last year, the state faced a \$500 million budget shortfall and more difficult spending choices. But the governor refused to cut spending to the state's Medicaid program, a crucial safety net for 385,000 mostly low-income Kansans that provides health benefits, long-term care and support. Instead, he transferred more than \$200 million from the state's highway funds to ensure no one lost his or her Medicaid benefits and health care providers didn't have their payment rates reduced.

The costs of Medicaid continue to rise. But that's not the only challenge the system faces. Thousands are on waiting lists for assistance and those who receive benefits often receive uncoordinated and fragmented care that results in poor health outcomes.

As a craniofacial surgeon who takes care of Medicaid patients, I often must deliver bad and good news. The one thing I've learned in difficult situations is we must focus on getting the best result possible for the patient. For decades, Medicaid in Kansas has been a "one size fits all" program that didn't always help the person get the best outcome. The results can be disastrous, especially for our most vulnerable disabled Kansans.

Life expectancy for a disabled person is at least two decades less than that for the comparable population. A University of Kansas



## Other Opinions

• Lt. Governor Dr. Jeff Colyer

study found Medicaid for the developmentally disabled was fragmented, poorly coordinated and did not consistently provide recommended health care, like screenings for breast, cervical or colorectal cancer. Poor access to care and lack of care coordination led to increased care costs and poor outcomes.

Skyrocketing costs, growing waiting lists and fragmented care, none of these are acceptable for our most vulnerable Kansans.

That is why the governor and this administration spent the past 14 months developing a reform plan to improve health outcomes while finding cost savings. It has been one of the most transparent and highly involved planning processes in state history. Thousands of Kansans participated. The administration traveled the state conducting public meetings, conducted conference calls, held web chats and solicited hundreds of ideas and comments online. This feedback and the ideas provided set the framework for Kansas solutions.

Given our difficult situation, the Kansas consensus was: Don't cut off thousands of Medicaid recipients like Missouri; don't make double-digit rate cuts to providers like California; coordinate care to focus on the best outcomes for the individual Kansans, especially for those with greatest needs, while saving money; reward positive outcomes; and provide

choices and creative options for Kansans.

The Kansas Medicaid reform plan known as KanCare will reduce the number of people unnecessarily living in institutional settings, decrease re-hospitalizations and manage chronic conditions through coordinating and integrating behavioral health, medical care and long-term services and supports.

The plan also includes \$500 million in incentives to provide better care for the disabled, improved outcomes and whole-person care. This will ensure those whom the state partners will focus on what is best for the patient, not their bottom line. If they don't meet the expected patient outcomes, this funding will be withheld. As detailed in the proposal, the chosen companies will be experienced in coordinating care for vulnerable populations.

Change can be difficult. That is why the Brownback administration is taking its time with these reforms. Many states have implemented rate cuts and eliminated thousands of needy recipients in less than nine months. Gov. Brownback insisted we take two years to develop and implement these reforms. Roughly 74 percent of Medicaid beneficiaries already are under some form of managed care, albeit without care coordination or outcomes incentives. To delay reforms guarantees more costs, rate cuts or possibly cutting off needy Kansans. That does not improve the health or wellness of anyone.

We are focused on getting the best possible results for Kansans who rely on Medicaid. Kansas can and must do better.

I encourage all Kansans to learn more from the Kansas Department on Aging's website, [www.agingkansans.org](http://www.agingkansans.org). Feel free to submit any questions to [KanCare@kdheks.gov](mailto:KanCare@kdheks.gov).

# Legislature has been busy

By the end of this week we will have reached turnaround, meaning each chamber will begin debating bills from the other house. The process has been slow, moving bills out in a timely manner. Budget, tax and education bills are still not ready for debate by committees as a whole.

The redistricting committee has looked at three different maps drawn from western Kansas. I made a motion to keep all districts whole in order to get the debate going. The committee will not vote until the next meeting because of a member being absent. Now I am really concerned about future of the 36th district. At the pace the committee is working, it could be awhile before a senate map is produced.

The Secretary of Labor plans to have a conference call with legislative members of the 40th District and carnival chairs next week to try and resolve the safety issue. We will see if I can get the governor's staff to also listen in.

Also, we have passed two very emotional veterans bills that honored Kansas heroes, who paid the ultimate price. The first was for Bryan Nichols from Hays. He was buried at Palco in my district. I was privileged to meet his parents. His father was a decorated Vietnam veteran, who was so proud of his son, and his mother still grieves and prays that she will someday understand.

The other bill honored the Frankfort Boys of World War II. With a population of 20,000, Marshall County had 529 men and women from the area who served in World War II. That was



## Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

just a part of the 2,106 who were drafted or enlisted. The town of Frankfort lost 39 individuals. That was the most per capita for any small town in the U.S. Frank Benteman, one of the surviving World War II veterans, was honored for his work and effort in getting the Frankfort community this honorable recognition.

SB393 would require the Board of Regents to establish a career technical education incentive program, which would award \$1,000, subject to appropriations, to a school district for each high school graduate who graduates from that district with an industry-recognized credential in a high-need occupation as identified by the Secretary of Labor. In addition, the bill would allow governing bodies of technical schools and community colleges to apply to the Board of Regents permission to establish a new technical program, outside the institution's service area, if the program is not currently being offered. The bill would require the Board of Regents to initiate the development of a statewide agreement on career technical education among high schools, community colleges, technical colleges and the institute

of technology. This bill could very easily fill a void with graduates that don't intend to attend a four-year college. These technical degrees take less time and will definitely help the student be more qualified to get employment in a specific area.

We will be traveling to the 121st District. I appreciate contacts on all issues and I hope for a smooth finish.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 225-E, Topeka, Kan., 66612, or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is [Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov](mailto:Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov).

## Where to write, call

**U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774 [roberts.senate.gov/public/](http://roberts.senate.gov/public/)

**State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 [ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us](mailto:ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us)

**State Rep. Rick Billinger**, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7659 [rick.billinger@house.ks.gov](mailto:rick.billinger@house.ks.gov)

## Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

