



Other Viewpoints

Kansas caucuses make a difference

Kansans always have a lot to say about presidential elections. The exciting difference this year was that Kansas Republicans’ preference actually mattered to the nomination contest, putting the state in the national spotlight and boosting Rick Santorum as he tries to close the delegate gap with Mitt Romney.

And Kansas clearly enjoys being a player, judging from the enthusiasm that greeted Santorum, Ron Paul and their surrogates at events around the state last week, and the upbeat mood of the nearly 3,000 Sedgwick County caucus-goers who voted Saturday at Century II.

By following Santorum’s urging Friday to “speak loudly” and give the former Pennsylvania senator a big win, Kansas ended up underscoring the hunger in the GOP base for an unequivocal conservative to challenge President Obama in November. Santorum’s unguarded emphasis on his Christian faith and pro-life values also suits many Kansans. And as Santorum’s wife Karen told the Century II crowd Saturday, “He is not blown and tossed by the winds of political correctness. He is who he is.”

Still, you have to wonder how Saturday’s outcome might have been different if Newt Gingrich hadn’t canceled on Kansas to concentrate on Alabama and Mississippi and if Romney hadn’t ignored the state entirely, sending the equivalent of a form letter to be read at Century II and prompting one man to yell, “Loser!”

In the end, Romney’s front-runner status and endorsements by former Sen. Bob Dole and Secretary of State Kris Kobach didn’t connect especially well with the caucusing Kansans. Even Gov. Sam Brownback, who has declined to endorse anyone else since Texas Gov. Rick Perry left the race in January, was jokingly sporting a Santorum-style sweater vest in recent days.

“We can’t lose with any one of these four guys,” concluded Douglas County Republican Party chairman Richard Todd, the *Lawrence Journal-World* reported.

That’s certainly true in Kansas, which hasn’t given its electoral votes to a Democrat since Lyndon Johnson’s landslide in 1964.

The question is whether Republicans can win nationwide in November against Obama. With Americans weary of deficit spending and high unemployment and wary of the president’s health care reform, 2012 should follow the pattern of 2010 and be a GOP sweep. But the president’s poll numbers suggest he will be competitive.

Credit goes to the Kansas Republican Party and the Sedgwick County GOP for the smooth operation of Saturday’s caucuses. Meanwhile, Kansans can hope the Legislature will find the means and will to fund a full-fledged presidential primary in 2016 and bring even more voters and enthusiasm to the process.

– The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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‘Toughest job’ includes free choices

Do you remember the tagline from the old commercial for the Peace Corps? “The toughest job you’ll ever love.”

Not to call out the marketer for that campaign – obviously it was effective – but I have to take exception. I have had a number of jobs, from manual labor to office work, from college president to costumed animal. (Yes, I put on a duck suit in high school and college and entertained as “Pro-duck-tivity” for a bank and no, you cannot make up such things.) What I have determined is that the toughest job I could ever love has been being a parent.

Let me qualify that by freely admitting I am far from perfect as a parent and I do not intend to tell you how to raise your child. But as a college educator, I would like to share a few thoughts with those who, like me, have kids approaching or in higher education.

This issue has been brought home to me by my oldest son. His 16th birthday is not until Easter Monday, but he is already receiving literature from colleges. Ostensibly, it is because he is a bright student, but because most contacts are from selective, private institutions. I am convinced they have mistakenly come to the conclusion that his family is wealthy.

Because of my profession, I have experienced I hope will assist my sons in making wise choices for the future, both short- and long-term. One thing I want to do, though, is ensure the choices and decisions are theirs, not mine.

That is not easy for me or most parents, as we are more engaged in our children’s lives than any past generation. Through Facebook, Twitter and cell phones, we can keep up with kids’ activities, friendships and emotions. Engagement can be taken to extremes, however. Some parents are unable to allow their son or daughter to become an independent adult.

Back in the 1990s, Foster Cline and Jim Fay popularized the term “helicopter parents,” for those who hover around their children, seeking to swoop in and protect from danger. That has been a problem for us in higher education due to privacy laws. Parents have called me demanding to know about grades, attendance and discipline only to be told that I cannot share any of that without the student’s consent.

Recently, this has escalated among some who have moved into the category of “lawn-



Steve Vacik

• From the president

mower parents,” those who seek to confront and remove any obstacles in their son’s or daughter’s path through intimidation and aggression. Unfortunately, by our actions as parents, we can keep our young people from realizing their full potential.

I would like to share some thoughts that may help you as the parent of a teenager for her or his transition into post-secondary education.

The simplest one is that it is OK to fail. Some spectacular successes had failures along the way. King David committed adultery and murder. Abraham Lincoln was a failed shopkeeper and lost a number of elections. John Grisham was turned down by 12 publishers before selling his first manuscript.

When and if your son or daughter begins college, there will be disappointments. She may receive a poor grade or he may not be chosen for a selective organization – and you can count on changed majors, broken relationships and poor decisions. You cannot prevent all troubles. Rather, support your kids through difficult times and ensure that failures are opportunities for improvement and not self-pity.

A more difficult axiom is that life has consequences. This is similar to my personal rule about not making excuses, but accepting responsibility.

Over the years, I have been amazed at the parents who want total absolution for their son or daughter’s actions. If someone rear ends another in a vehicle because he was not paying attention, I think it reasonable to forgive. Forgiveness doesn’t fix the vehicle, though.

For example, years ago I remember meeting with a parent, a leader in the community, about his son, who had plagiarized a writing assignment. He came to demand that the instructor give his son – who was 20, but who never spoke up – a chance to rewrite the paper. His rationale was not that his son hadn’t

cheated, but that he should not be punished for doing something others have done without getting caught. I listened politely and sent him on his way.

The reality is that when a student fails a class, often due to poor attendance, it is not the instructor’s fault. When a student is stopped for driving under the influence, it is not the policeman’s fault. Talk with your sons and daughters about choices and consequences. You may not want to see them punished for poor choices, but a lawful society tends to disagree.

Finally, give your young person a voice. I remember an old parable about the man who drove under the influence, it is not the policeman’s fault. Talk with your sons and daughters about choices and consequences. You may not want to see them punished for poor choices, but a lawful society tends to disagree.

Finally, give your young person a voice. I remember an old parable about the man who drove under the influence, it is not the policeman’s fault. Talk with your sons and daughters about choices and consequences. You may not want to see them punished for poor choices, but a lawful society tends to disagree.

When a student comes in with parents, I always addressed the student and elicited her or his responses. Older teens are capable of holding adult discussions, and the sooner they learn to speak up for themselves, to ask questions, to take control of their education, the sooner they will be behaving as the adults we parents should expect.

Listen to your daughter or son. Help her or him craft the right words and manner. But put the burden on her or his shoulders to address problems with the proper authorities – without you hovering around or second guessing.

Being a parent is a tough job. But the reward is great.

I am not telling you to simply turn your kids loose. I still talk often with my mother, and she still tells me what I ought to do. Most of the time, her advice is profitable. But in the end, the decisions I make, people will expect that I have reasoned, I have acted and I have accepted the responsibility.

The same expectation will be on our children. As they head off to college and into life, step back and encourage them to take the next steps without you holding their hand.

Before you ask, it will be hard for me, too.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before moving to Colby.

Carnival-ride law moves forward

There has been much discussion about SB 356 – carnival rides – for my district. The definition will remain “home-owned amusement ride” in the statute. This would mean that home-owned amusement rides would not be subject to all of the inspections and training regulations.

A new section might be added to the regulatory act that would require home-owned amusement rides to file proof of insurance with the Kansas Department of Labor. It could include posting of the insurance certificate, too.

I joined Gov. Sam Brownback March 5 in Garden City to sign into law legislation that provides regulatory relief to irrigators and ensures rural Kansas communities continue to thrive economically. I have often said irrigation is crucial to the health of western Kansas. Without changes that allow farmers to adapt to the recent drought, our communities will be facing a serious economic situation.

The first bill, SB 272, amends water law to provide Kansas farmers and ranchers with



Ralph Ostmeyer

• State Senator

the flexibility to carefully manage their water resources and balance usage in years where a lack of rainfall may require additional resources. Known as multi-year flex accounts, this legislation gives Kansas producers the option to spread the amount of groundwater they pump over a five-year period, allowing them to fully protect their crops in dry conditions while holding the line on overall water usage.

The second bill, HB 2451, would amend “use it or lose it” practices in Kansas. Current law encourages the overuse of water, particularly of the Ogallala Aquifer. This amendment would instead encourage conservation in nor-

mal and wet years and protect our state’s water supply for future generations.

As the chair of the Senate Natural Resources committee, we are reviewing another plan currently in committee. Senate Bill 310 would amend water law regarding water use control in Groundwater Management Districts and ensure that the Chief Engineer of the Division of Water Resources of the Department of Agriculture would approve all recommendations related to water quality or water supply made by a Groundwater Management District.

I hope to return to western Kansas and witness the signing of this bill in Colby. I am pleased to join with the governor in emphasizing the importance of water in our state.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

