



Other Viewpoints

New water laws won't save aquifer

A key change in Kansas water policy is a big step toward preserving groundwater resources for another generation, but by itself it isn't likely to be the ultimate savior of the dwindling Ogallala Aquifer in western Kansas.

Gov. Sam Brownback signed new water laws March 5 in Garden City intended to extend the life of the Ogallala Aquifer, marking him as the first governor to deal aggressively with a big problem that imperils the western Kansas economy.

Geologists didn't fully understand the Ogallala, its composition and that its water supply was limited, until the late 1950s, and by then the state had over-appropriated water rights.

One of the two new laws repeals a 1945 measure that required rights holders to use their water for the year or lose their full rights, leaving them feeling they had to pump the maximum amount of water allowed even when they didn't need it. That rule long needed to be reversed.

The other new law allows farmers and ranchers to use more than their water rights for irrigation in dry years to help struggling crops reach maturity and counting it toward a total they can use over a set period, without penalty. How this preserves water resources is questionable, but it does provide some more flexibility and again will encourage conservation in wet years. Brownback deserves credit for making water policy a top priority of his administration.

But Kansas can't stop here. In addition, the state needs to have an aggressive program for retiring water rights whenever possible. These new laws don't change the fact that water rights are over-appropriated in many areas, and the state still needs to figure out how to undo that.

— *The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press*

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/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

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

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

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Kylie Freeman - Office Manager
kfreeman@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

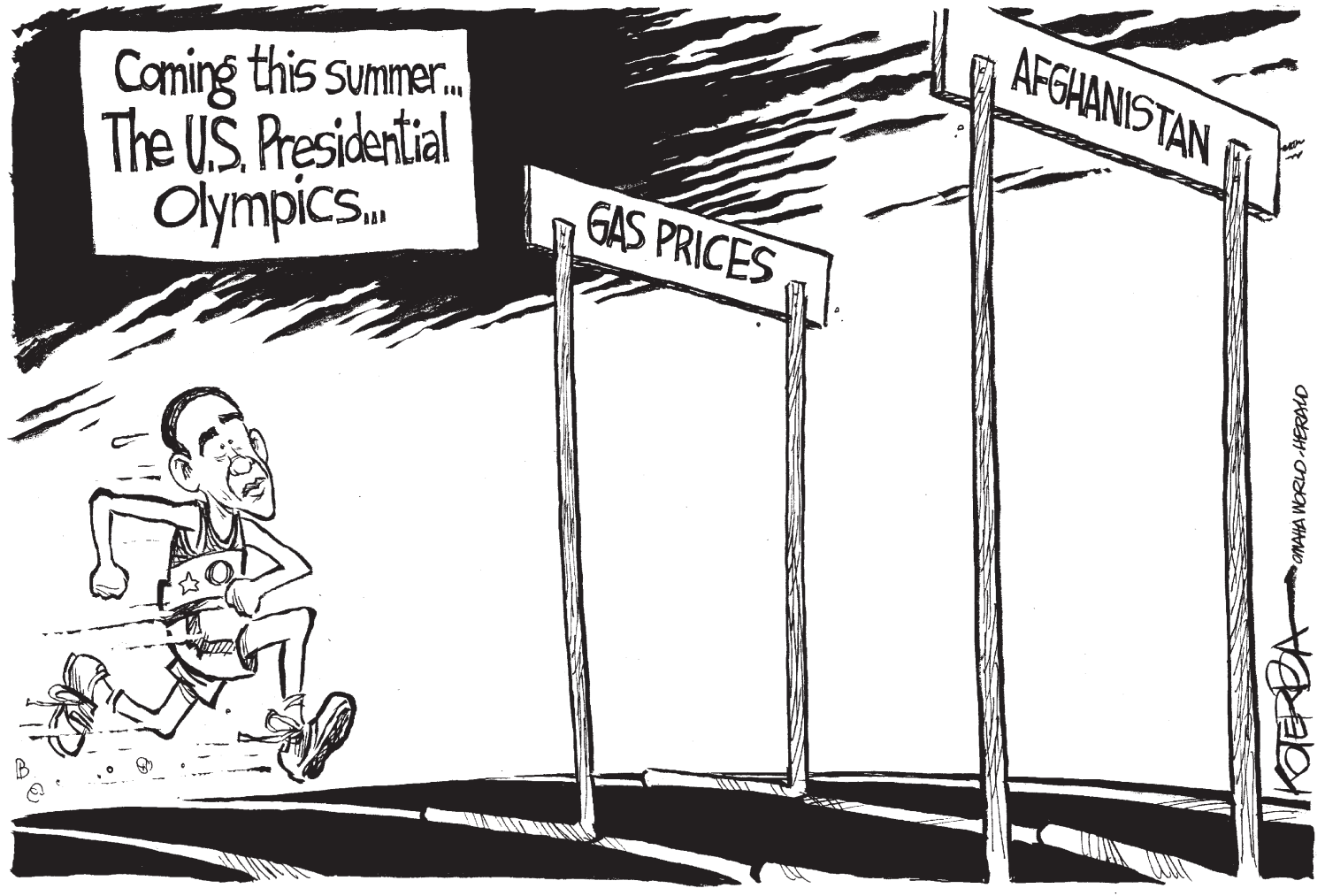
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Can we live with a nuclear Iran?

Is America likely to go to war with Iran?

It appears President Barack Obama wants to avoid this scenario, but he has made it clear that the U.S. will do anything to prevent the Iranian regime from developing a nuclear weapon.

"I have said that when it comes to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, I will take no options off the table, and I mean what I say," the president said in a speech he gave to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

He went on to say these options included "a military effort to be prepared for any contingency."

The debate about a possible war with Iran has been confined to two choices: attack Iran when they develop the capability to develop nuclear weapons, a stance advocated by right wing Israeli officials and U.S. neoconservatives, or apply crippling sanctions in the hopes of persuading Iranian leaders to refrain from developing a weapon; and if this doesn't work ... well, then war is the only option.

Within this extremely narrow spectrum, Obama's stance can be described as the dovish position.

Surprisingly, perhaps because of the narrowness of the debate, public opinion appears to be behind Obama on this issue. Despite the blood that's been spilled in Iraq and Afghani-



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

stan, a Pew Research Center poll in February shows that 58 percent of Americans favor using military force to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

After all the criticism the Bush administration received for adopting a preemptive war doctrine towards Iraq, it's surprising how many people are willing to follow Obama down a similar path.

Nonetheless, the Iranian threat to Israel shouldn't be dismissed as mere propaganda. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an ignoramus, at times pitiful man who somehow found himself in a position of power, called the Holocaust "a lie and mythical claim" and said that Israel should be "wiped off the face of the earth."

The fanatical strains and cult-like ignorance evident in Ahmadinejad's rants deserve notice, although he is not the main power in the Islamic regime. That role belongs to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

When you strip away all the rhetoric coming from both sides, the issue really boils down to one question: Are the mullahs who run the Iranian government crazy enough to commit suicide? Because attacking Israel with a nuclear weapon would be the death sentence of the Iranian regime. Mere self-interest – the self-interest being its own survival – should prevent Iran from launching a nuclear strike on Israel.

According to Juan Cole, a professor of history at the University of Michigan, Israel has 400 nuclear warheads. The U.S. has deployed 70,000 nuclear weapons since 1945 according to the book "Atomic Audit" by scholar Stephen I. Schwartz. In all-out war, Iran would be vaporized, and the mullahs know it.

No one in their right mind wants Iran to have a nuclear weapon, but if the Iranians do accomplish this task – at this point U.S. intelligence and the International Atomic Energy Agency don't know if the country has restarted its weapons program – it doesn't mean the U.S. and Israel should start a war.

This is the real question media analysts should be asking: Are Americans and Israelis willing to go to war based on the dubious assumption that Iran is committed to its own self-destruction?

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Committee considers unemployment

This is the last week most committees will meet to consider legislation this session. For any remaining bills to be considered, it is critical they be passed out of committee. There are deadlines on major legislation including the budget and redistricting maps.

Unemployment Bill

Last week a hearing was held on HB 2756, which I introduced early in the session; it was well received in committee and several colleagues thought it would be beneficial for rural Kansas.

Kansas' unemployment rates are running high in certain counties, generally larger, more urban areas. This bill will allow persons or families, unemployed one year or longer, who live within counties with an unemployment rate above 5 percent, to move within the state to a rural opportunity zone county for employment purposes.

When an unemployed person or family moves to the rural opportunity zone and accepts employment, they will receive a state tax credit equal to three years on their state income tax form. They must remain employed and living within the opportunity zone for three years to receive the total tax credit allowed.

Kansas has an opportunity through this bill to improve and lower the number of people on unemployment or state assistance while helping rural opportunity counties with an influx of new families to their communities.

When new people move into the rural opportunity counties they buy or rent homes and pay local and state sales tax. They put children in schools and make our towns a better place to live. The state also benefits by no longer paying unemployment or other state assistance. This is an opportunity to move more people from a state-supported system to private employment opportunities.

While researching job opportunities in



Rick Billinger

• This week in Topeka

western Kansas, I found 2,921 available jobs. Many of these are in ag-related businesses, retail services and administration. Hopefully, the bill will make it to the house chamber floor for debate.

Property Tax Funds

HB 2609 provides \$90 million in local property tax relief over a two-year period by shifting dollars from the state general fund to the local ad valorem tax reduction fund. The bill also provides any local governing body with the authority to levy property taxes to adjust the jurisdiction's mill levy rate on an annual basis in order to ensure the local government collects the same amount of total property tax revenue from existing properties as the previous year.

The bill provides local ad valorem tax relief not currently available to our cities and counties. Kansans are being crushed by an ever-increasing property tax burden, which suppresses economic growth and prosperity.

The property tax burden on Kansas homeowners and businesses has increased from roughly \$1.97 billion in 1997 to over \$3.8 billion in 2012, a 94 percent increase in just 13 years. This exponential increase is triple the rate of inflation and 9.5 times greater than the population growth over the same period. More people have contacted me about high property taxes than any other issues.

Happy Hour in Kansas

HB 2550 repeals the state ban on happy hours at bars, taverns, clubs and restaurants.

Current state law allows alcoholic beverages to be sold all day at reduced prices but prohibits reduced prices for certain hours of the day.

Those who supported the bill touted the possible economic benefits of the bill to restaurants and drinking establishments and praised the bill as promoting the free market. In addition, many believe current state law promotes irresponsible drinking more than happy-hour specials.

The happy hour ban was passed by well-meaning lawmakers concerned about alcohol abuse. At the time, legislators assumed drinking establishments would never allow discounted drink specials for an entire day and failed to ban "happy day" specials, thus allowing those to be available today.

IRS Warns of Tax Refund Scam

The Internal Revenue Service is warning taxpayers, especially senior citizens and those with low incomes, of emerging federal tax refund scams that encourage victims to file tax returns claiming fraudulent refunds.

The scams promise refunds to individuals with little or no income who are normally not required to file a federal income tax return. Promoters falsely claim they can obtain a tax refund or nonexistent stimulus payment based on the American Opportunity Tax Act, even if the victim was not enrolled or paying for college.

Bogus refund claims have been identified across the nation with significant activity in California, Georgia, Michigan, Louisiana, Alabama and Indiana.

Thank you for the honor of serving you.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

