



Other Viewpoints

State integrity rank nothing to celebrate

News that Kansas was ranked ninth among the 50 states in a study of state government transparency, accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms appeared, at first blush, to be reason to celebrate the state's accomplishment.

A second look at the study results, however, showed Kansas received only a grade of C from those who conducted a month-long, State Integrity Investigation for the Center for Public Integrity, Public Radio International and Global Integrity.

The Center for Public Integrity was founded in 1989 and bills itself on its website as one of the country's oldest and largest nonpartisan, nonprofit investigative news organizations dedicated to revealing abuses of power, corruption and dereliction of duty.

No state received an A and only five states received a B, B+ or B- on the recent study, billed as a first-of-its-kind look at transparency, accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms. Eight states received a failing grade and 18 earned Ds.

Clearly, the Cs dominated. The average score compiled by the states was 75, exactly the score Kansas received with its C. The highest score, and only B+, was an 87 earned by New Jersey.

The lowest score, 49, was earned by Georgia.

To finish in ninth place when so many did poorly or failed miserably is a dubious distinction, but we'll accept it with the caveat the study showed Kansas has room for improvement in terms of transparency.

Researchers who conducted the study looked at 330 "Corruption Risk Indicators" in 14 categories of government. The State Integrity Investigation looked at laws and practices that encourage open government and deter corruption. A State Integrity Index measured the risk of corruption.

To give credit where it is due, the state received an A on its redistricting process, a B+ for internal auditing and a B for its state budget process and State Pension Fund Management. Those marks should surprise no one who follows the news regularly.

Legislators are in the midst of the mandatory redistricting process now and the debate on the different maps proposed for the Kansas House and Senate districts and the state's four congressional districts has been well documented. The state's budget process also creates good drama and extensive news reports annually.

The State Integrity Investigation study gave the state failing marks for lobbying disclosure and the Kansas Insurance Commission. The state's ethics enforcement agencies received a D+. In seven other categories examined during the study, Kansas received a C+, C or C-.

Because the study was the first of its kind conducted by the Center for Public Integrity – and apparently involved research of state statutes rather than "boots on the ground" experience – some Kansans might not be quite sure what to make of it.

But if Kansas laws come up short in the areas of transparency and accountability, clearly we have work to do.

– *The Topeka Capital Journal, via the Associated Press*

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COLBY FREE PRESS

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

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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

Ray Schindler - Office Manager
rschindler@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Gary Meyer, Pressmen

Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel, Mailing

THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE: paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

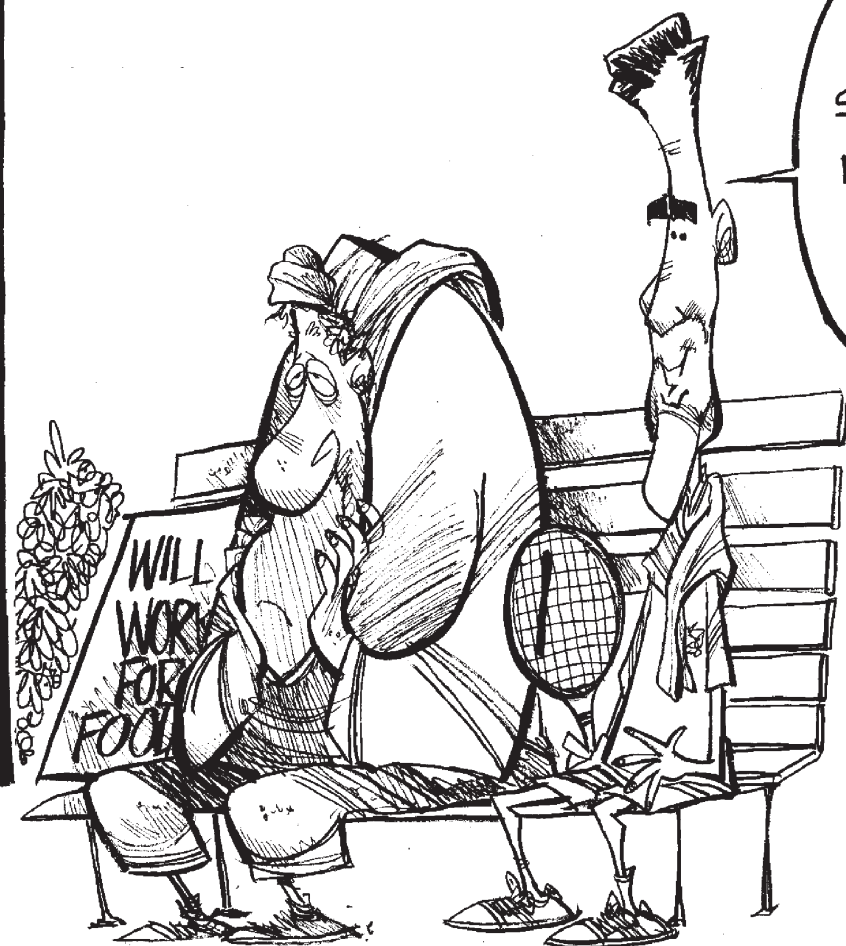
THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.



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Email: kristofblahn.com

WHICH MITT ROMNEY LACKS



To green or not to green?

Caring for the environment used to be tough duty. During the last couple of decades, however, it's become a marketing opportunity.

Manufacturers are churning out more and more "green" products and retailers are finding in many cases these can be sold at a premium. But beware – not everything sold in the green garden is all roses.

Over the long haul, selling green may be a lot more difficult than selling soap flakes.

Phosphate-free detergent, lead-free gas, aerosol sprays minus the chlorofluorocarbons and other green garden goodies have been available in some form or another since the early '80s. Today, they are nearly as common, or in some cases, more so than farm-fresh eggs, free-range chickens, hogs and cattle, fresh vegetables – you name it.

During this nearly 30-year period, consumers embraced the notion of buying green with a zeal that was almost patriotic. As they become more environmentally tuned in day by day, week by week, month by month and year by year, greenies bought beyond what was even required by law in a religious frenzy.

Some companies have launched their own private-label green brands. I can't list all the names here or I wouldn't have room to continue my column. Needless to say, many of these companies have grown their lists of green products by the hundreds.

Many of these items are simply repackaged old ideas. You know, what's old becomes new when introduced to a new generation of consumers, especially those who choose to paint themselves green. One such item is baking soda, which has been marketed as a more en-



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

vironmentally friendly way to scour pots and pans.

Can you believe it?

My mother and her mother before her used and understood that baking soda was the only real way to keep their kitchens clean or green nearly a century ago.

Another green product that has rocketed off the supermarket shelves is biodegradable garbage bags made from corn extract.

One item that's become green is dishwasher detergent, and it's worthless. The only way to clean your dishes, knives and forks and pots and pans with today's detergent is to run your machine half full or a couple times. I know this, because I've had to do.

I've even visited with appliance dealers who have told me today's dishwasher detergents no longer have the phosphates (banned as unsafe for our environment) which cleaned our tableware and did it right. Today's detergents are not formulated to remove hard-water minerals during the main wash cycle. Lemi Shine solves this problem.

Combined with your dish detergent, Lemi Shine removes tough hard-water spots, stains and film during the main wash cycle, says the product commercial. You will be pleased to

know that Lemi Shine is made of 100 percent all-natural fruit acids and oils. That's right, Lemi Shine contains no phosphates or fillers.

Now don't you feel better? I know I do.

I could go on, but I know I may be losing some of you, dear readers – and that is not my intent.

One last thing, even that revered group that I now belong to, the aging Baby Boomers, is boarding the green train.

Why, just the other day, I read that U.S. residents older than 55 are opting for unbleached bathroom paper. Not only is it a correct way to help Mother Earth, it's also softer and easier on the ole' bottom. I swear to God I didn't make this up, although I kinda wish I had.

When will the pendulum swing the other way – toward a common-sense compromise?

Maybe it already is. Some companies who have wrapped themselves in green are finding that doing so has not raised their credibility with consumers. Some in the public who walk among us are skeptical of any large organizations that boards the green bandwagon, particularly those that have little direct contact with the environment.

Although consumers, myself included, may want to accept social responsibility, few want to forgo quality in the products they buy.

To green or not to green?

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

New farm labor rules endanger way of life

My dad is one of nine children. I used to kid my grandma that at supper time, she must have put a feed bag on dad, given the baby a bottle and thrown the rest in a trough for everyone to fight over.

Certainly, that supper was usually hard-earned by the kids. Nine "child laborers" came in handy back in the day on a dairy farm.

The chores usually extended beyond the family farm. A son or two might be sent to help an uncle put up hay on one day, while some daughters may have gone to help an aunt clean some chickens on another.

If a neighbor should get laid up by illness, everyone around would rush to their aid, doing whatever was needed, whether finishing harvest or milking the cows. This kind of community kindness would now be considered illegal for anyone younger than 16 under rules proposed by the U.S. Department of Labor.

I can recall a day in the mid-1990s, a couple of years before my grandfather died, when we had a surprise visitor on our farm. Grandpa, my dad, my brothers and I were talking shop when a Cadillac with Johnson County plates pulled up. This is not a common occurrence in rural northwest Marshall County.

It turns out the surprise guest had been on the farm before. Decades earlier, this young man had spent a few weeks as part of a special program for "at-risk" minority inner-city kids. For those few weeks, he had been the No. 10 child in the family, and he had worked and lived like the other nine. On this particular day, he had returned to our farm unannounced to thank Grandpa for those few weeks he had been a country boy.

Other Opinions

• Aaron Harries Kansas Wheat

He relayed to us how the work ethic, family values and faith in God he had experienced during his time with our family had likely changed his course in life for the better.

He was a successful businessman with a family of his own. A little hard work as a kid on a farm meant more to him than we could ever imagine. Growing up and being able to work on a farm changes lives, and I would argue, makes the lives of others better.

Now, the U.S. Department of Labor is trying to change the way of life that we hold so dear. Their effort represents another move to make us citizens less dependent on each other and more dependent on the government. That's not a road I want to travel down.

This is not a time to sit idly by and assume our good representatives in Washington, including Sen. Pat Roberts and Sen. Jerry Moran, will be able to fix the problem. Believe me, they are doing everything they can, but after hearing both of them address the topic last week, I sense they are concerned. They need the help of the voices of agriculture, the farmers.

What can you do?

• Visit the "Keep Families Farming" web-

site at www.keepfamiliesfarming.com to learn more about the proposed rule.

• Support your commodity grower associations by becoming members. These associations are your voice in Washington.

• Submit a letter to the editor to your local paper so our non-ag neighbors know what the threat is and how it could affect rural economies.

A "revisiting" of the proposed regulations by the Department of Labor is not enough. They must withdraw the proposal completely. Our way of life depends on it.

Aaron Harries has been the director of marketing with Kansas Wheat since July 2006. He was raised on a farm in Marshall County. He may be reached at aharries@kswheat.com.

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

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

