



Free Press Viewpoint

Patrol car changes should reflect safety

The Kansas Highway Patrol tapped into nostalgia for its last 20 full-sized cars, Ford Crown Victorias dressed in the traditional blue and grey from half a century ago. They are only a drop in the bucket compared to the 400-some cars and sport utilities the agency fields, however, and your chances of seeing one driving down the road are slim. This area has one, posted in Oakley, among a sea of multihued patrol cars.

The patrol started buying cars in random colors years ago when someone figured out that the resale value of these vehicles was much higher than cars painted to look like a police car. Instead of driving the blue-and-greys until they were worn out, troopers started getting a new car every year or two. The used vehicles are sold while they still have good value.

Usually, only white cars get roof-mounted lights. Most of these are sold to city and county police agencies that don't mind the holes drilled in the roof. Colored cars get lights mounted inside or behind the grill, then are sold on the open market.

Because this program so reduces costs, it's not likely we'll ever see more grey-and-blue cars. However, another change may be putting troopers at risk on the road, especially at night.

Seems the cost of the huge "state trooper" screen print shot up this year, so the patrol decided to go without it. Some cars came out with only a small shield on the door and much smaller reflective lettering. Lately, the patrol has gone to larger shields, still reflective, but the cars don't show up as well at night or look as good on the road.

The bigger decals turned the cars into beacons at night, ensuring that people would see a parked patrol car beside, or blocking, the road. For cars without roof-mounted lights, that could be vital. Their lights don't show much to the sides, but the stickers sure do.

With the new, small lettering and just a reflective shield on the door, a car's visibility from the side might be as low as 10 percent of what it has been. It could make a lot of difference to a trooper out on the pavement at night.

If we had our way, and we suspect a lot of troopers would agree, we'd paint all the cars blue and grey. They look sharp. But we understand just duplicating the single-light red flasher of the old cars in electronic form costs upwards of \$1,000 each. Then there's the money saved by the early trade-in program, and in tight budget times, that counts.

However, we think the patrol should consider safety first and find a way to get more reflective material on the sides of the cars, either with a return to the big screen-print "state trooper" or something else.

The safety of the public, and the troopers themselves, is too important to compromise. — Steve Haynes

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Blazing color heralds autumn in Rockies

The hills were ablaze with color. Actually, these babies weren't hills; they were part of the Rocky Mountains.

We were in Creede, Colo., in the southern Rockies. On all sides are mountains — the La Garitas, the San Juans, the Sangre de Cristos. As you might guess, the Spanish got the naming rights for the area. About the only places around here that don't have Spanish names are Creede and its silver mines. The Last Chance, Holy Moses and Kentucky Belle produced thousands of ounces of silver in their day, and with mineral prices on the upswing, modern miners are climbing all over these ancient cliffs.

But we weren't here for the mines. We were here for rest, relaxation and maybe a play at the repertory theater.

We got all three. We each finished a book and started another, browsed through several magazines, saw two plays, listened to the Rockies lose some baseball games and played with our new iPhones.

We also did a little work, but we tried to keep that to a minimum.

Mostly we enjoyed the fresh mountain air and walked in the woods. Steve did some fishing while I tried a couple of new recipes.



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

It was a great week, and we had an added bonus. The aspen were early this year.

After a dry spring and summer and a damp August, the aspen in the high country were turning at a rapid rate.

Only a month ago, it was hard to tell the aspen from the spruce, fir and pine trees. Everywhere you looked, the mountainsides were a deep green.

Then a couple of weeks ago, we were out here and noticed that you could pick out the aspen groves on the mountainsides. They were turning a lighter shade of green.

Now, the mountainsides are a rainbow of light and dark green, yellows, gold and bright reds. The evergreens are still their dark green selves, but the aspen have gone into autumn splendor.

If you've never seen the mountain aspen,

take a drive to Colorado and check them out. It's an amazing sight and a lot easier and cheaper than going to see the beautiful hardwoods in New England, although they say that's a worthwhile trip, too.

Anyway, while we were up in the mountains I picked up leaves. I can't help myself. Everywhere I looked, the ground was covered with the beautiful leaves, each one more gorgeous than the last.

I brought my treasures back and arranged them in a candleholder my nephew made for us several years ago. I've done this before, and I know that the leaves will dry up, but keep their colors. They get brittle, but if you don't touch them or open a window near them — like someone did last spring — they'll be fine until next fall.

Remember that, Steve. Don't open any windows near my leaves like you did last year, or you get to sweep them up this time.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

School scores hit the ceiling in Kansas

Scores on school assessments are no longer going upward in Kansas. This may be the only good news in education for the last decade.

Why celebrate the leveling off of student achievement scores? Simple. It finally brings some common sense to the insane idea that 100 percent of students can be proficient at grade level.

That scores gradually increased over the last decade attests to the ability of Kansas teachers to drop everything else of educational value and teach to the tests. But that effort has reached its limits.

The curriculum narrowed as schools reduced or eliminated time for anything that was not tested. Students who were not making progress were double-scheduled into more math and English. Students above grade level were often left behind. In some cases, veteran teachers of art and music, courses that are not tested, were fired. The whole climate of Kansas classrooms changed from kindergarten to high school. Administrators became foremen and teachers became assembly line workers in test-prep factories. Many teachers no longer enjoy teaching and many students no longer find learning exciting as lessons reduce to drillwork for the test.

Some Kansas educational organizations proudly pointed to rising scores as proof of better learning outcomes. But these rising scores were merely an artifact of teaching-to-a-narrow-test.

Kansas student scores on the ACT and the National Assessment of Educational Progress never went up. Nor did university professors



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

see any corresponding increase in language and math abilities in this last decade of students. Schools just taught more students to take the tests better, and lost the soul of teacher professionalism and the excitement of genuine learning in the process.

Why can't we close the gap and move 100 percent of students to proficiency level?

Prior Education Secretary Spellings always cowed anyone who said it couldn't be done by asking "What if it was your child?" But that was a cheap shot based on Pollyanna reasoning.

Of course we want every child to learn just as we would want everyone to live.

But the best of doctors lose patients and the best of teachers lose students. And for much the same reasons.

Some patients come to a doctor already terminally ill. And some children enter school after living in a home where parents were cooking meth. Some teenagers fry their brains on drugs.

Less dramatic but no less debilitating are the cases of children who have never had a book read to them before they entered school. Others may be quite capable — but not in English

— and communication is the skill central to teaching and learning.

Half of Americans get divorced and single parents who have to work may not be at home for their child after school. Teachers cannot undo all the damage that poverty causes.

Even the most advantaged and high work-ethic child who just learns that his or her parents are getting a divorce is not going to be able to concentrate and learn well until home life becomes more secure.

These situations and others exacerbated by rising childhood poverty are the reasons that the student achievement curve, no matter how measured and no matter how valid, will never climb to 100 percent.

These are not excuses but descriptions of the realities that teachers face and politicians ignore. Single high-stakes tests based on everyone reaching a standard level are not what American education has been about, and the damage they have done trying to reach that goal can be undone if we realize that examinations are not the full measure of an education.

We shouldn't standardize students and now we know that we can't.

Just as we shouldn't penalize doctors for losing patients, this curve leveling off shows why we shouldn't penalize teachers for losing students.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

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