

Other Viewpoints

Elections need local supervision

A report recently released about serious problems Sedgwick County experienced during the November elections may bolster the argument for having county commissioners, rather than the Kansas secretary of state, appoint top election officials in the state's largest counties.

Secretary of State Kris Kobach announced Dec. 21 that his office had completed its investigation of why Nov. 6 election results were delayed for hours at the Sedgwick County election office in Wichita. Kobach determined that insufficient training on the vote-counting software caused workers in the office to report early returns from advance and absentee ballots as the full and final count. He also noted that, although similar problems had occurred during the Aug. 6 primary, "sufficient steps were not taken" to identify and correct the problems.

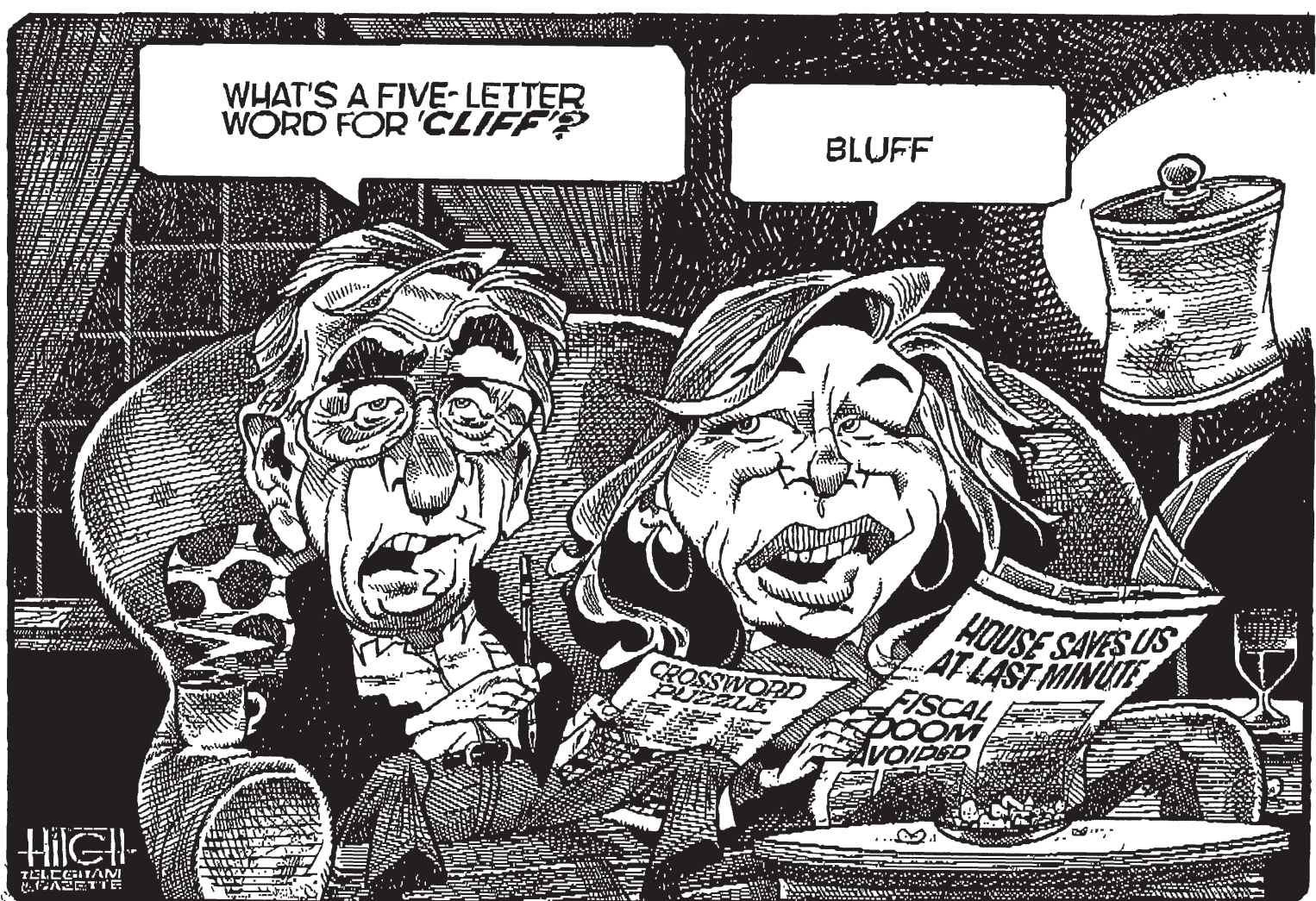
Kobach's recommendation was that Sedgwick County increase the number of employees at the election office and provide intensive training for those employees in how to use the vote-counting software. Money for that additional staff and training will have to be provided through the Sedgwick County budget, which presents an interesting connection to legislation that Democratic leaders say they will propose in the upcoming session.

Currently, elected county clerks run elections in 101 of the state's 105 counties. In the state's four largest counties — Sedgwick, Johnson, Wyandotte and Shawnee — elections are run by election commissioners appointed by the secretary of state. The purpose of the law probably was to ensure that elections in the largest counties are run in a professional and efficient manner. The downside to the system, however, is that it makes election commissioners in those counties less responsible to the local voters and county commissioners who fund their operations and depend on them to run their elections. The legislation proposed by Senate Majority Leader Anthony Hensley would require county commissioners in those counties to hire their own election commissioners and address all problems arising from the general election.

Since he took office in 2010, Kobach has appointed two election commissioners: one in Sedgwick County and one in Shawnee County. It may be simply coincidence, but both of those counties had serious election problems this year. Shawnee County had a significant dispute after a number of Topeka voters received the wrong ballots during the August primary.

This year could have been an aberration, but the fact remains that election commissioners hired by elected county commissioners would be more accountable to the officials and voters most affected by the work they do. The secretary of state may be unhappy about election glitches, but no one is more unhappy than county commissioners and voters who are concerned and embarrassed by debacles like the one that occurred in Wichita this year.

—Lawrence Journal-World, via The Associated Press



Change today, not on New Year's Day

Today is the best day to begin to change your life.

New Year's resolutions, and columns about them, have been at the top of the list of timely topics for columnists this week. Understandably so, since this is a family newspaper and the alternative New Year's topic has to do with excessive partying on New Year's Eve and its consequences.

No adult that I've encountered, either face to face or in print, really seriously makes New Year's resolutions. At least not out loud. The potential for humiliation is too certain, since it's almost a guarantee that on Feb. 1, the clown at the next desk will pull out a hidden memo and ask, "Whatever became of your commitment to jog 15 miles every day?"

Now the person at the next desk may seem like the very nicest person around, but do you really want to give him the chance to say, "I told you so." Not to mention your husband or wife or teenage kids — who would make very sure that everybody in town knew about your failed resolutions.

Regardless of this fact, our columnists have made the effort to persuade us to resolve to be healthier, nicer, better informed, more involved in the community.

Resolutions are fine. The problem is the tim-



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

ing.

There is nothing magical about changing a number on a calendar. To the contrary, it can be rather aggravating for those of us who still use paper calendars. You have to get it; you have to put it on your desk or on your wall; you have to transfer all those memos and phone numbers and bits of critical information you need to know but can never remember without writing down.

Yes, it's great to start with a clean slate, er, calendar. But by the time you actually settle down to using it, you find it's just as cluttered as the old one. Sort of like getting a new car: beautiful inside and out until you drive down a dusty or muddy road while eating French fries from a drive through. You've got mud on the outside, French fries and wrappers on the inside, and your shiny new car has taken on that "lived-in" look.

Same with calendars. As far as picking the first of January as an auspicious day to begin to live your new life, I hate to dampen your enthusiasm but it's just another day. Take a lesson from the Mayans — whatever their calendar meant, it obviously wasn't the big deal some people thought.

But if you're serious about resolutions, the best day to start is probably today. Whichever today is handy.

If today is Sept. 24, it's a good time to take up jogging, though a realistic goal would be wise.

If today is May 19, it's a good time to get healthier, quit smoking, stop spreading tacks on your neighbor's driveway.

That's not to say that community-wide efforts timed for January are a bad idea. But postponing personal efforts to learn or grow or just be a better person seems like a waste of time to me.

After all, just think how many miles you could have jogged by now if you had started in October?

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor, and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

Airplane security sashes along

I hadn't traveled on a plane in years, and I was only slightly aware of the heightened security. I found out a person can't have a container with more than a few ounces of liquid in it. Basically this allows for enough shampoo for someone to lather up their eyebrows. Likewise, it requires a person to use one tube of toothpaste for each tooth.

After discarding half of my luggage into the round receptacle, I finally got to my water. When I was told I would have to dispose of that, I balked. It isn't that I am belligerent or anything, it was just that I was heading to Peru and had been forewarned about drinking the water there. I have this aversion to going a long time without liquids and therefore deemed it necessary to take as much with me as possible.

"But it's just water," I objected to the woman who was the luggage elimination enforcer.

"Sir," she said stubbornly, but firmly, "it could be something such as nitroglycerin with which to make a bomb."

I opened my bottle and drank about half of it. "See, it's just water."

She looked at me skeptically, as if I was an alien that could digest nitroglycerin without the least bit of problem to my digestive system. "Sir, if you want to finish it, you may take the bottle with you."

Not knowing if I would need the bottle, and not sure how far it would be to the next watering hole, I downed the rest of it. I'm sure a camel couldn't have done better. I stuffed the empty bottle into my carry-on pack, and sashed my way to the rest of the security check. There I was required to take off my shoes. I think the reason for this is so everyone can air out their feet before entering the aircraft. There are a few people I know who, if they took their shoes off in the tight confines of an airplane, might possibly eradicate every living thing aboard. I obediently took my shoes off and tried to roll the holes in my socks to the bottom side of my feet where they would be

Other Opinions

• Daris Howard Life's Outtakes

less conspicuous. These were my lucky socks, which I wouldn't let my wife throw away, and I felt I needed all of the luck I could get while flying.

Finally I stepped through the electronic portal. It didn't "beam me up, Scotty," but it did set off a resounding beeping as if it wanted to. Emptying everything from my pockets and trying again didn't make it any less perturbed at me. The scowling guard checked me over and asked if there was any other metal object. I informed him that I had had surgery many years earlier and had enough hardware in my knee to hang an oak door.

I was required to pull my pants up and he ran his Harry Potter wand along the scar on my leg, while everyone passing by had to shield their eyes to avoid being blinded by the whiteness of my untanned skin. His metal paddle voiced its concern and, finding nothing more than my normal strange self to be out of the ordinary, he waved me on my way.

After recovering my pocket contents and what little dignity I could, I waddled my way down to my flight gate, the water in my stomach sloshing like a tanker truck over a washboard road. The foolishness of drinking the whole bottle of water never hit me fully until I was boarding the plane. It was then that I found out a plane has only two types of bathrooms: "busy" and "out of order."

The bouncing of the plane was worse than standing by a roaring waterfall when it comes to the effect it had on the call of nature. Thus I sat on the long plane ride feeling as a friend of

mine once said in a similar situation: "I'll be gladder when my bladder is flatter."

Captain Bumpy finally landed the plane and bounced us over to the gate. I expected to make a quick charge to a nature park, or where I could park for nature, but found out that all such edifices were only available after a person again went through customs and security.

But there was one thing that was available, even before going through customs. There were water vendors everywhere. But this time I thought I'd pass.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



Once again, calls for handgun bans ring out from the same people...

...who think banning drugs keeps criminals from getting them...

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