



Other Viewpoints

Speaker's snub rude to chief justice

Incoming Kansas House Speaker Ray Merrick, R-Stilwell, has a point about it not being an annual tradition for the Legislature to hear a State of the Judiciary report, meaning he wasn't obligated to let Chief Justice Lawton Nuss speak to a joint session this year. But in the wake of such speeches in 2012, 2011 and 2009, Merrick's snub seemed needlessly rude, as did his reason.

"It's just another thing to take up time. I just think it's time that could be put to better use on other things," said Merrick, who instead asked Nuss to put his report in writing.

Maybe the Kansas court system's concerns are old news for Merrick and new Senate President Susan Wagle, R-Wichita, who are Statehouse veterans. But the 49 new members of the Kansas House, and at least some of the 16 new state senators, could use the primer on the judicial branch, which makes life-and-death decisions for Kansans daily and relies on whatever funding legislators provide it.

In fact, allowing Nuss to speak would have been a well-timed gesture of good will from one branch of government to another. That's because Gov. Sam Brownback and the Legislature seem determined to needlessly alter how Kansas chooses members of the Kansas Court of Appeals and perhaps even the state Supreme Court.

"There is strong support for changing the system. We're discussing the options," Gov. Sam Brownback recently told the Topeka Capital-Journal - unwittingly demonstrating why lawmakers need to hear firsthand from those closest to the appellate courts and the current judicial-selection process.

"Strong support"? If there is strong support for replacing the nonpartisan nominating commission with either direct elections or a clone of the federal system, with the governor's picks subject to Senate confirmation, that support is being directed at Brownback from activist voices and groups, not from the general public. Besides, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver recently rejected a challenge to the current selection process, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce has ranked Kansas' legal climate fifth best in the nation.

Especially with a controversial overhaul looming, would it have killed Merrick and Wagle to play the gracious hosts and hear out the chief justice?

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press

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Don't cut seniors' lifeline

Social Security is the greatest anti-poverty program in American history.

Thanks to this program, many elderly Americans have been able to live out their final years with the grace and dignity they deserve after a lifetime of hard work. Given the inestimable importance of this wildly popular program, it's disturbing to see it under attack by deficit scolds who wrongly imply that so-called entitlement programs are the drivers of the federal deficit.

In truth, today's increased deficit is the result of the economic recession that occurred when the housing bubble burst. Although the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy and two unfunded wars didn't help, if the economy hadn't gone into a recession, today's deficit would be rather modest.

But, alas, for whatever reason, a large number of serious sounding people, including the fun-loving conservative columnist George Will, are convinced there's an urgent need to reform (read cut) benefits for "entitlement" programs like Social Security.

In one of his erudite columns for the *Washington Post*, Mr. Will quailed: "First, there will be no significant spending restraint. Democrats - you know: the people respectful of evidence and science - even rejected a more accurate measurement of the cost of living that would slightly slow increases in myriad government benefits."

I assume what the esteemed conservative



Andy Heintz

Wildcat Ramblings

intellectual was referring to is the Chained Consumer Price Index that experts have said would provide a better indicator of the cost of living adjustments households make each year to account for inflation. While the consumption metric today rests on the idea that when a price on a good rises, people will continue to buy that same good despite the higher price, the Chained CPI assumes people will instead opt to buy a cheaper, yet similar product. If the Chained CPI were to replace the current method used to measure annual cost-of-living adjustments, it would mean a slower increase in Social Security benefits over time.

Dean Baker, co-director for the Center for Economic and Policy Research, wrote that this would have the effect of reducing benefits by 0.3 percentage points for each year of retirement.

"This means a beneficiary would see a 3 percent cut in benefits after 10 years, a 6 percent cut after 20 years and a 9 percent cut after 30 years," Baker wrote. "Since Social Security is more than half the income for almost 70 per-

cent of retirees and more than 90 percent of the income for 40 percent of retirees, the hit to the affected population would be considerably larger than the hit to the top 2 percent from ending the Bush era tax cuts."

While the Chained CPI probably is a better way to measure cost of living adjustments for most Americans, the elderly typically spend more on health care than most Americans. When health care costs rise, it's different than, say, when the cost of an apple rises, because there are no cheaper alternatives available. Baker wrote that a Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index for the elderly actually showed that the rate of inflation seen by the elderly is somewhat higher than the overall rate.

So, instead of cutting Social Security benefits for those who really need it, Congress should raise or eliminate the cap on income subject to Social Security taxes (it's \$113,700 in 2013) so this essential program remains solvent for future generations. Social Security isn't just any program; it's a symbol of our nation's respect for the lifelong contributions and sacrifices the elderly have made for this country.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate and former Colby Free Press sports editor now living in Ottumwa, Iowa, loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing. You can find his blog at www.orble.com/just-one-mans-vision.

Apply 'assault weapon' ban to abortions

To the Editor:

"Tragedy points to need for weapons ban." This was the headline of an article written by Andy Heintz in his "Wildcat Ramblings" in the Friday, Dec. 28, issue of the *Colby Free Press*. In it, he decries the violent, senseless taking of the lives of children. He goes on to say the 20 children of Newtown, Conn., had their whole lives ahead of them. These children were taken long before their time, he says.

Andy goes on to say that the so called "assault weapons" used by the attacker should be banned along with high-capacity magazines for weapons. He is willing to do "whatever it takes" to achieve this goal. He must believe that this applies to the changing of the Constitution by getting rid of the Second Amendment or replacing it with the United Nations gun ban being pushed by Democrats and President Obama.

Andy and I agree on an assault weapons ban. He wants to ban every semi-automatic weapon, as do most of the Democrats in Washington. The "assault weapons" I want to see banned are the ones used to commit approximately 4,000 murders per day in the United. They are used exclusively on children, children who will never get to see a ray of sunshine, their mother or father, brothers or sisters. They will never get to go on their first date or have children of their own. Why?



Free Press Letter Drop

Our readers sound off

Because people like Andy believe it is the mother's right to kill their child before any of this occurs. These weapons of mass destruction include the vacuum aspirator, uterine curette, spinal needle, forceps, tire-tete, the cranioclast and a decapitator. This is only a partial list. Since the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, nearly 55 million abortions have been performed in this country. That's 1.4 million per year, 4,000 per day, 360 days per year. And no outcry is heard in the Democrat-controlled media. Not even this community, with its liberal-leaning editor and two frequent liberal contributors, Andy Heintz and Ken Poland.

The deaths of those 20 children in Newtown was a tragedy committed by someone who may have been mentally unstable. The 4,000 lives taken daily in this country by willing mothers, doctors and nurses is far more a tragedy than this one incident. And, incidentally, the people performing these procedures are being hailed

as compassionate, but never as mentally deranged as is the Newtown murderer.

My heart goes out to those parents that lost their children in Newtown. But how many tears were shed over the murders performed in the rooms of Planned Parenthood or other so-called safe-haven hospitals.

Gun control is on the tongue of every Democrat in Washington, but none is willing to address the real murdering scheme of this country and the rest of the world. Isn't it ironic, Andy, that you have the right to call for your will to be done on the rest of the country simply because your mother chose to give you life instead of the Democrat alternative of abortion?

Should Roe v. Wade be revisited? Is it time for this nation to restore civility? Are lives as precious as we claim? Has God turned his back on this nation that was once called blessed? I believe so.

Russia is the only nation that performs more abortions than the United States. What a distinction, to be listed so highly with our arch-enemy. Maybe what Obama's pastor said in his pastoral rant was right.

Yes Andy, let's ban so called "assault weapons" and weapons of mass destruction. But leave the Second Amendment and ownership of guns alone. They are not the problem.

Gene Schoenberger, Brewster

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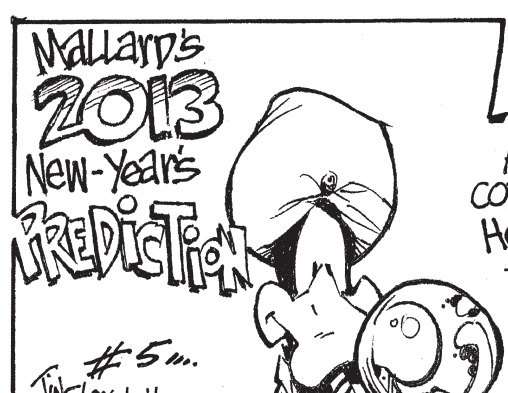
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A NEW POLL IN WHICH MORE AMERICANS CAN CORRECTLY IDENTIFY HONEY BOO BOO THAN EITHER SENATOR FROM THEIR HOME STATE...

