

## Other Viewpoints

### Is turnpike merger really best choice?

It may make sense to merge the Kansas Turnpike Authority with the Kansas Department of Transportation, particularly if it really can save the state \$15 million a year without degrading the quality of the Turnpike.

Gov. Sam Brownback proposed the merger during his State of the State address, saying having in effect two highway departments was one of the clearest examples of duplication in state government.

"It is time we realize the efficiencies to be gained by placing these two operations under the same umbrella," he said.

But lawmakers are understandably skeptical about those savings and about whether the real motive of the merger is to divert toll revenue to help cover state budget shortfalls.

The governor's budget projects those savings to be \$30 million over the next two fiscal years, with that money transferred to the state general fund to be spent elsewhere. But it's unclear where the money will come from.

Brownback has noted how the agencies both have salt storage facilities in Emporia. There also might be some efficiencies by combining work on snow removal or road design, though the same work still has to be done.

But does that really add up to \$15 million a year in savings? Turnpike officials note that there is already a lot of cooperation between the two agencies, and a merger isn't required to increase that. In fact, state law already requires it.

Lawmakers also question whether it makes sense to get rid of authority, which uses no state tax money and has kept the Turnpike in top condition since it opened in 1956.

"We really need to be very careful with the changes that we make," said Sen. Les Donovan, R-Wichita.

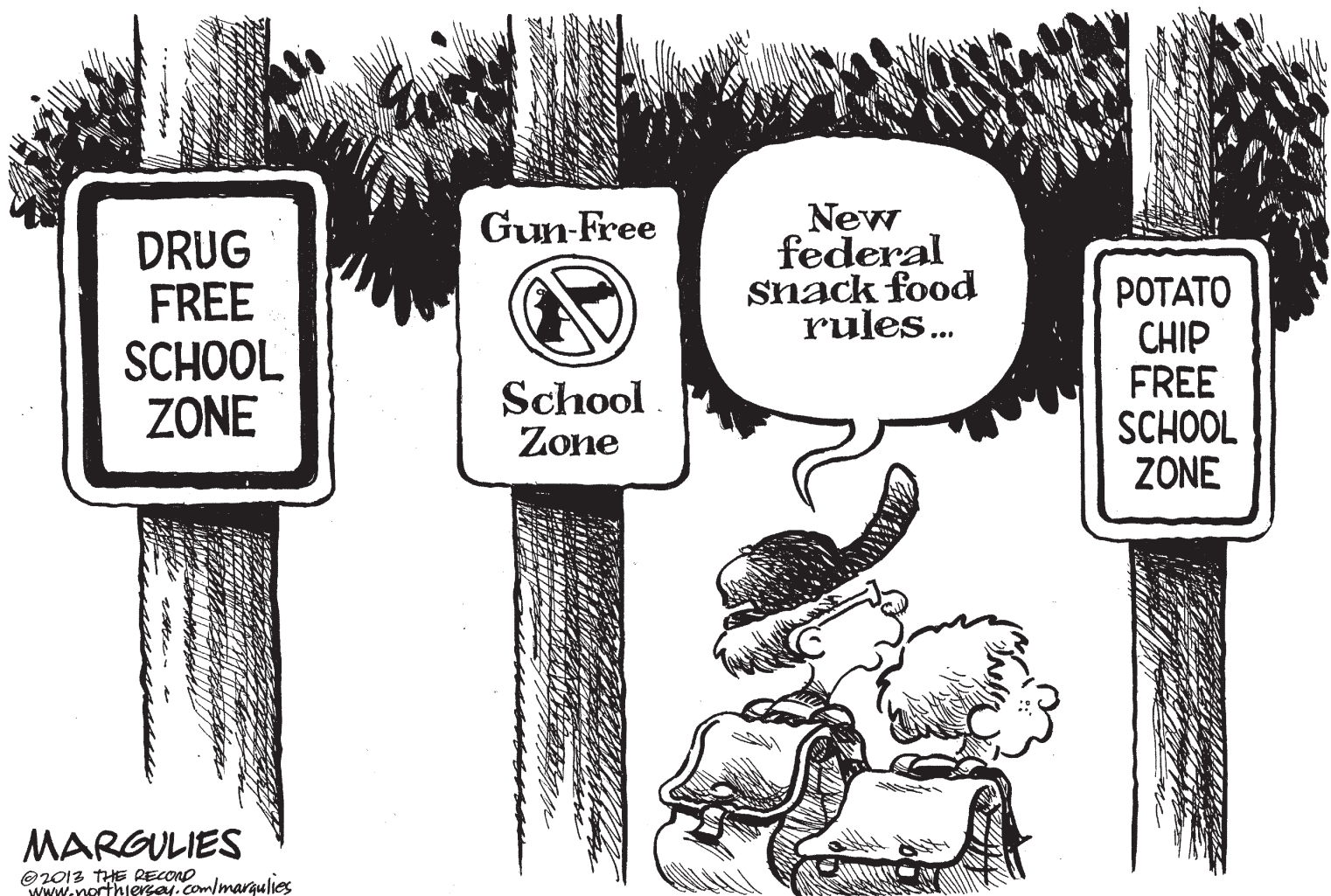
The Kansas trucking industry, which accounts for 39 percent of turnpike revenues, also is concerned. Tom Whitaker, executive director of the Kansas Motor Carriers Association, wrote in a message to his membership that the change "would subject the turnpike to the bureaucracy of a state agency, as opposed to the business model used by KTA, and diverts highway user fees generated through tolls to the state general fund."

That said, there also has been some criticism over the years about a lack of transparency at the turnpike. And cost never seems like much of an object for the authority, which has a sizable cash reserve.

Combining the two might save some money, but the administration needs to spell out those savings and show they are real.

If the merger really will save \$15 million a year, and those savings won't hurt the quality of the Turnpike, then great. But if the savings are a lot lower, it doesn't make sense to "fix" something that isn't broken.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



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### Motorcycle caravan goes to ... church?

We were walking to church Saturday evening when the noise began to build behind us.

The caravan arrived, led by a single police motorcycle with flashing red and blue lights.

Behind the wheel man, as the cops would call him, came the first few bikes, three and four abreast. Then more and more and more, bikes clogging the narrow street, taking up all the lanes, revving their engines and sounding their horns, their sirens, their pipes.

Not a muffler among 'em, at least by the sound of it.

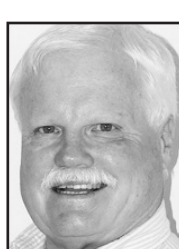
And on they came. Bikes with lone riders, bikes with couples, bikes with dads and kids. Yeah, kids.

I was pretty sure it wasn't Hell's Angels or one of the other notorious motorcycle clubs from American California. Not even Mexican bikers from some border town like Nogales or Tijuana, though their gear was typical: leather vests, blue jeans, studded belts and bracelets, Nazi-style helmets.

For one thing, the bikes were too nice. They had saddle bags, wide seats, trim and decoration, not the stripped-down "choppers" favored by outlaw bikers. All kinds of bikes, all sorts of colors.

Where were they going in the heart of Cabo San Lucas, a tourist town at the tip of the Baja California peninsula, with a police escort?

"Probably to church." someone wise-



Steve Haynes

#### • Along the Sappa

cracked.

Ah, but when we finally made our way through the stalled procession and across the town square to church, that was exactly where they were going. Saturday Mass.

They lined the bikes up in a row, tail-end to the sidewalk, 123 of them, one rider said. They filed into the little church, taking up two of three wings of the cross-shaped sanctuary. Bikers read the lessons and the psalm. Bikers took up the collection. It was a regular biker Mass.

It turned out to be an annual ride around the Baja. There were members from the local club, the Baja Bikers, at least two chapters, and several from the capital city, La Paz, up north. American bikers from the Harley Owners Group. Hangers on and riders of all descriptions, almost all wearing club "colors."

They filled up the wings of the church, the spaces between the locals and the tourists, every bench and doorway and space. Someone

said there were 254 of them, men, women and children. Give or take.

After Father said the Mass, everyone shook hands and exchanged the peace. Pleasantries were had. We went off to dinner.

And where were the bikers going? "Probably to our place," someone wise-cracked.

And that was not far from wrong. When we got back, a loud, loud rock band was playing in the arroyo off the beach next door. All those bikers were out there dancing. The old folks were complaining it was past their bedtime. Heck, some of the youngsters were complaining. The fishermen like to get up at 5.

Wasn't much could be done about it, however. The guitar player wasn't bad, the songs American '70s, the singer was, well, he was there, and all the intros were in Spanish. Apparently, the band had promised to stop playing at midnight. And they did, but then some guy got the mic and yelled at the crowd for half an hour. Then they played recorded music until 2.

I just went to sleep.

It was, in all, a more interesting day at church than most.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters.

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### Science is elementary (school)

When researchers ask elementary students what is their most favorite time in school, the answer is clear: "Science!"

When they ask elementary teachers which class they feel least prepared to teach, the answer is just as unanimous. Science.

Our elementary teachers receive a pitiful amount of science training. But not in other countries. China has difficulty recruiting teachers for schools in their poor countryside. As a result, some schools have teachers with only a high school education. But China, similar to other Asian and European countries teaches three times more science in kindergarten through high school. So these Chinese emergency teachers with a high school education know more science than American elementary teachers who graduated from college.

The American situation has become worse during the No Child Left Behind emphasis on math and reading tests. George Griffith recently presented research to the Kansas State Board of Education showing that many elementary teachers have decreased or eliminated science under the pressure to raise reading and math test scores.

Don't blame these teachers. I work with them in workshops and many tell me they want to teach science but are limited to 20 minutes a week. One had 20 minutes a month.

Don't expect this situation to improve. Our Kansas waiver from No Child still requires increasing math and reading test scores and closing the gap between high- and low-performing students. Kansas legislators may even make teachers' evaluations mostly dependent on raising these narrow test scores.

But American kids are starving to learn more science. And we desperately need more American kids graduating in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

Our science "pipeline" is running dry. Na-



John Richard Schrock

#### • Education Frontlines

tionwide, a total of approximately 4 million students in 2005 were in each elementary grade. And we know that a large proportion love science. We produced 2,799,250 high school graduates that spring, reflecting about a 30 percent dropout rate. That fall, 1,861,501 entered college although only 1,303,050 were "college-ready."

In 2005, 277,550 majored in science, technology, engineering and mathematics areas. But only 166,530 graduated with a bachelors degree in those areas by 2011. Some transferred in. Many transferred out.

About 60 percent of U.S. students who enter college intending to major in one end up graduating in a non-science field. Overall, the percent of college graduates in science and engineering in Singapore is 55 percent, China produces 49 percent, South Korea has 39 percent and only 16 percent of U.S. college graduates are in those fields. This U.S. production is one-third of the scientists America needs.

We cannot make up this shortfall by producing a surge of inspiring high school science teachers. Few students "turn on" to science in high school. Students' interest in science begins much earlier.

The study "Eyeballs in the Fridge: Sources of Early Interest in Science" appeared in the March 2010 issue of *International Journal of Science Education*. Researchers Robert H. Tai and Adam V. Maltese analyzed interviews

of scientists and science graduate students asking what first attracted them to science? When did it happen? What was the experience like? Their journal article's title comes from one participant who, as a child, brought home extra cow eyes after her third-grade science teacher helped students dissect them. She placed the leftovers in a paper bag into their home refrigerator. Her mother, unaware of her daughter's project, screamed when she opened the bag. Many years later, this woman scientist identified that moment as a youngster when she made her commitment to science.

So did nearly all of the scientists - their interests began when they were very young.

We must dramatically increase the science in our K-12 curriculum. That requires far better educated science teachers at all levels.

- And more science teachers.
- And more class time on science.

The "Less Science, Not More" movement by educationists has led this country into science illiteracy.

Read-about-science does nothing to keep the science fires burning in our youngsters' hearts. Toys, television and videogames isolate them further from real experiences.

It is the very labs and field trips that we have canceled that must re-enter the school curriculum.

Bring nature into the classroom and each child pleads: "Let me see!" They have outstretched hands. They want to feel, manipulate, experiment.

Science is not about answers. Science is about asking questions.

We must stop neglecting science. We can fill the science pipeline.

Science is elementary.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia.

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley

CONGRESSMAN VENER, CAN I GET YOUR REACTION TO THE LATEST DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES STUDY...

...THAT FINDS THE SACROSANCT "HEAD START" PROGRAM TO BE AN ABJECT FAILURE?

I MUST ADMIT I'M SHOCKED, MALLARD...

...THAT H.H.S. HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A BUNCH OF EVIL, RIGHT-WING TEA PARTIERS!!

TINSLEY 2-7

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