



Free Press
Viewpoint

Congress tackles
immigration, again

A bipartisan group in Congress – that’s hard enough to believe – is making another push to “reform” the long-broken federal immigration system.

“About time,” you might say, and you’d be right. We will, too, when we see a bill that looks like it might actually work.

Our immigration laws have been somewhere between ineffectual and totally worthless for the last 30 years or so, ever since Congress decided to make it next to impossible for many people to come here to work.

Unfortunately for all concerned, the lure of jobs and a better life proved much stronger than the law. It always does. Any attempt to keep something out of a country that people want and need – whether it’s beer, cigarettes or workers – is doomed to failure.

In the case of our immigration policy, the longer Congress refused to do something, the worse the situation got. That’s how we got to have an estimated 11 million illegal aliens on this side of the border, many of them Latinos, but including people from all over the world who entered the U.S. illegally or simply overstayed their visas.

It’s been five years since the last attempt to change things failed, but maybe it’ll be different this time. We hope so.

One thing that is different is that business and labor have been meeting, trying to come to an agreement on the bill. They’re represented by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which knows that businesses depend on foreign workers, and the AFL-CIO, which knows that also, and which smells the sweet smell of growth if more legal workers can join unions.

One thing the bill must address: What to do with those 11 million illegals in the country today, most of them gainfully employed. It’s not a huge group, only a little more than 3 percent of our population, but it’s still a lot of illegal aliens. And the chances we can just send them all home are nil.

Any “amnesty” proposal will be unpopular with some, but if you don’t like it, just try to figure out what else will work. Meantime, the administration has stepped up programs to deport illegals who commit crimes or cause other problems. And yes, the administration is working with Congress, the unions and management to put this bill together.

And the bill will need to provide a simple and easy way for guest workers to come fill jobs that go begging, either in the fields or in high-tech offices. Today, doctors and engineers can come to work, though there are many roadblocks. For farm hands and road workers, however, it’s next to impossible to come here legally.

Our current policy has brought us nothing but grief. More border guards, a higher fence and tough enforcement have not worked. Our policy has failed, and it’s time to try something else. If we make it easy for guest workers to come for a set time, people won’t have to risk their lives in the desert.

And as a nation of immigrants, we should welcome newcomers who come legally and have work to do here.

We should not pay welfare or provide a good life for anyone who comes and does not have work. There’s no point in that, but then, it’s hard to say how much of a problem there has been, either.

Let’s hope this effort succeeds. It might be the beginning of bipartisan solutions to a lot of our country’s problems.

– Steve Haynes

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Turning 65 yields ‘hereafter’ moments

Since my Medicare card arrived in the mail last week and my birthday is Friday, I thought maybe I should share some deep insights on turning 65.

Now why am I sitting down at this computer?

It’s not that I’m getting more forgetful, it’s just that I’m having more “hereafter” moments. You know, I find myself in the basement and look around in confusion, wondering what I’m here after.

My hearing isn’t all that great, but I can’t say it’s worse than it used to be, because my hearing was damaged when I was a child, and it’s never been all that great. It’s just that these days, I can hear what Steve is saying but I seem to be in a different conversation.

When he says, “What do you want for dinner?” I assure him that his hair is not getting thinner.

I had Lasic surgery on my eyes about 10 years ago and have not had to wear glasses or contacts since then. Lately, however, I’ve noticed that things are being printed in much smaller sizes and I need a pair of reading glasses to read the ingredient label on food packages, the printing on medication bottles



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

and sports results coaches send me for the paper.

Each time I get a haircut, I notice that there are more silver strands among the gold. Steve, who had nearly pure white hair by the time he was 40, isn’t giving me any sympathy and I haven’t reached for the Lady Clairol bottle yet. I will point to genes for this.

My father had more color in his hair when he died at age 69 than my husband did that same year, and our oldest daughter, who isn’t 40 yet, has been dying her hair for years to keep the gray at bay.

I had a facelift about 15 years ago and that held off nature and gravity for quite a while, but nothing lasts forever. If I don’t decide to go see that doctor in Denver again soon, I’m going to look like someone’s grandmother –

which I am, come to think of it.

Retirement is not in my immediate future, and I’m not taking my Social Security yet. Both Steve and I still enjoy our jobs and love doing what we’re doing. So why should we quit?

My parents both retired at 62 and had a wonderful time living in Kansas in the summer and Texas in the winter. Mom had been in the classroom for more than 30 years and Dad, who loved to work with his hands, was stuck at a computer terminal, which he hated. They were ready to move on to other things.

All in all, turning 65 isn’t so bad. The only really annoying thing is that Steve doesn’t hit the big 65 until July and I’ll have to put up with him razzing me about being an old lady for the next five months.

Well, at 5 foot nothing and 65 years of age, I guess he’s right. However, if he gets too obnoxious, I might just hit him with my cane.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of Nor’West Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

Education finance faces statewide reform

One of the key issues in the Kansas Legislature this year is the subject of education finance reform. In January, a panel of district court judges issued a ruling regarding the adequacy of school funding, and that is one of the driving forces in the discussion. Additionally, significant turnover in the Legislature has led many to look at our system of public education with fresh eyes. Several subtopics are percolating.

Constitutional amendment

According to Article 6b of the Kansas Constitution, “The Legislature shall make suitable provision for finance of the educational interests of the state.” In spite of that explicit language, in recent decades Kansas has been involved in three court suits on the question of suitability. The fact that courts have gotten involved has created great consternation among many in the Legislature, and this year there is an effort to stop that cycle of lawsuits and get the courts out of school funding.

Sen. Jeff King (R-Independence) has introduced a resolution to add the following sentence to Article 6b: “The financing of the educational interests of the state is exclusively a legislative power under Article 2 of the constitution of the State of Kansas and as such shall be established solely by the Legislature.”

Some believe that this stronger language would make it much harder for the courts to become involved in the future. However if this is true, those of us who live in rural Kansas should be concerned. As the population shifts from rural to urban, we are increasingly outnumbered in the Legislature.

This raises the possibility that some future Kansas Legislature may decide to enact school finance laws that disadvantages rural children. We cannot allow that to happen. In a democracy, the judicial system exists to provide justice for all, including protecting the rights of the minority from the rule of the majority. The principle of equitable funding is central to the goal of providing all Kansas children with the best possible education, and placing



Don Hineman

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the responsibility exclusively in the hands of an increasingly urbanized Legislature would present grave threat to rural Kansas.

School vouchers

Our system of free enterprise is founded on the principle that free and open competition is a good thing. Certainly that is true for private enterprise, and some are suggesting that Kansas should insert competition into its public education system in order to produce greater outcomes and reduce costs. I believe we should strive to foster competition among educators, individual attendance centers and school districts. But some in the Legislature are proposing to go further, to issue school vouchers whereby the state’s current annual cost of educating a student would be paid to a family so the student could attend any school, even a private school.

It is easy to imagine that might create some competition, but remember that the playing field is very uneven. Private schools, by their very nature, can select who attends. So the result would be that the best and the brightest would migrate to private schools while those students who are more costly to educate would left behind in public schools with a shrinking level of funding. How can that be good for Kansas?

Interestingly, the voucher idea is surfacing at the same time that some are again beginning to talk about further school consolidation. In rural Kansas, where entire school districts may have enrollments of 100 or less, and the closest school outside of the district may be 30 miles away or more, a new private school springing

up to offer “competition” just doesn’t make much sense.

The 2010 census revealed that 77 of Kansas’ 105 counties are losing population. A voucher system that encourages private schools and draws students away from public schools that are already shrinking could threaten the very existence of many rural schools in Kansas.

I have high respect for the private schools throughout Kansas and the great work their dedicated educators perform. But in order for Kansas’ system of excellent public education to remain strong, the private education system must remain private. Public dollars must always be reserved for public education.

It is an honor to represent the residents of the 118th District, and I welcome your input. You can reach me at Rep. Don Hineman, (785) 296-7636 or dhineman@st-tel.net

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