

Other Viewpoints

Driver's license line new system failure

Renewing a driver's license shouldn't take multiple attempts and a wait of three, four or five hours. That it does for many people in the Wichita area these days is a failure to deliver one of the most basic of government services.

And the time- and productivity-wasting lines don't bode well for "Phase Two" implementation of the state's new \$40 million motor-vehicle computer system, to incorporate driver's licensing.

Continuing to withhold \$2 million of the state's \$25 million contract with 3M because of the computer woes is a good step, to hold 3M accountable, but there has to be more the state can do.

The delays aren't getting the media attention that accompanied Phase One of the Division of Vehicles' computer system upgrade, which has been in the works since 2006. Last summer people newly encountered daylong waits for tags and titles in several populous counties. Lines for driver's licenses seemed long then, too — something the state blamed on the antiquated computer system.

A year later, with Phase Two still pending, "the system is running within normal parameters, and any issues we're seeing now are localized," Jeannine Koranda, spokeswoman for the Kansas Department of Revenue, told the *Topeka Capital-Journal*. "You aren't seeing the lines we had this time last year."

That may be true in Topeka, where waits ranged from 12 to 44 minutes Friday at the driver's license office.

But at various times Friday at the Wichita and Andover offices, people were looking at three- to five-hour waits. Trying to use the QLess line management system that day — a great idea intended to allow people to reserve a spot in line via cell-phone or computer — often meant being told it was unavailable. And on a recent visit to the Andover office, an estimated 90-minute wait stretched to three hours as computers repeatedly went down.

As one Wichita reader recently commented to Opinion Line, "Waiting six hours (after the text message told me my wait would be two hours) to spend three minutes at the counter was ridiculous."

During a May legislative hearing, Kevin Cronister, chief information officer for the Department of Revenue, assured wary lawmakers that the department had worked with 3M to resolve nearly all problems, that Phase One was running smoothly, and that "stress testing" would prevent trouble in Phase Two.

But getting a driver's license is a stress test itself at the two offices expected to serve Sedgwick County, home to half a million people. Whether the problem stems from lousy software, inadequate resources or incompetent management, it needs to be fixed.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*



Make harvest season a safe one

Long hours, a flurry of activity, less-than-ideal weather and work involving large machinery combine to make wheat harvest a potentially dangerous period.

To say farmers are busy during this time would be an understatement. Try to call one after 7 a.m. or before 10 p.m. and you'll be wasting your time. They're not home; they're in the field or shop preparing for harvest.

Wheat harvest marks the pinnacle of nearly a year's effort to produce this crop. Farmers and custom cutters work long, hard hours. Fifteen-minute meal breaks are about the only real time off in days that often stretch 14 hours or more. If the weather cooperates, cutting usually begins about 9 a.m. and continues until midnight, or when the grain becomes too moist or too tough to cut. People and machines are pushed to their limits.

While every machine — combine, truck, grain cart, tractor or auger — provides its own unique hazards, operator stress or error account for the majority of harvest accidents. Years of safety features built into these machines are useless without operator safety. Exceed human limitations, and accidents are bound to follow.

Operator knowledge and attitude remain the key to a smooth, well-oiled wheat harvest. A safe operator knows his skills, limitations and condition, both physical and emotional.



John Schlageck

• Insights
Kansas Farm Bureau

The safety-conscious operator knows his equipment, its condition, capacities, limitations, hazards and safety features. Such an operator is constantly monitoring field and weather conditions.

In Kansas, thousands of acres of wheat need to be cut. Add to the pressure the need to slice through those acres before hail or windstorm destroys the bountiful crop. With this added pressure comes the desire to take chances, short cuts and extend working hours. Such behavior only adds to fatigue and high levels of stress and tension.

Remember, harvest will take its toll if you don't take breaks. Eating balanced meals, even if you only take 15 minutes, is important.

Stop the machine. Crawl off and relax a few minutes while you're eating.

Drink plenty of water, tea or other cold liquids during the hot, dry days of wheat harvest. Jump out of your machine for these breaks at

least every hour.

Walk around the machine to limber up. This will also allow you to check for possible trouble spots on your combine.

Before harvest begins, check your equipment and perform the proper maintenance. Consult your operator's manual or dealer if you have any questions. Well-maintained machinery reduces the chance for breakdowns and related aggravation in the wheat field.

Delays due to breakdown only force harvest crews to work longer and harder to catch up. Such delays also increase the chance of accidents during this catch-up period.

Some farmers may have kept some combines longer than they should have. Treat these "old-timers" with care. They'll need additional preventative and routine maintenance.

Pulling preharvest maintenance is easier and less frustrating than fixing problems in the heat, dirt and sweat of the harvest field. Reduce your chances of aggravation now. It'll be worth it.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan., 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.

Plagiarism definition varies by culture

One of the things I perform in China is to proofread and correct science paper drafts being submitted for journal publication.

Therefore I was alarmed when I read a manuscript that began "please note the sections in red are plagiarized." Upon further discussion with the research student, I discover that these words were taken from her earlier lab write-ups and were all her original words. But because plagiarism is defined in China to include use of words from prior work, students across China have come to understand this as plagiarism too.

In Western journals, we do not consider this plagiarism (although it is sometimes called "self-plagiarism"). Teachers must tell their students if they cannot submit work that they have done before in another class. And if the same material is published in two journals, it is "double publication" and a definite no-no. But this was not stealing words or ideas from others without attribution.

An American student would never have said what the Chinese student said above — and it shows a difference in culture. To understand people's attitudes today, you have to understand where they are coming from. What is their history leading to this moment? And in doing so, you gain a new appreciation for your own history.

Throughout Asia, from India through China to Japan, large classrooms of students (often 60 or more) sit in front of a teacher. The teacher is master and they are apprentices assigned to learn what is in the textbook and what is said by the teacher. Recitation — "everyone repeat after me in unison" — is the widespread method of teaching. And being able to repeat back the exact words on tests is rewarded. That is what being a good high school student in Asia has been about.

Contrast that with the U.S. classroom that has the luxury of fewer than 30 students per



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

class. The good teacher asks students to read items A and B, then put it all together in their own words and even argue the points. But our students are not led to claim the original ideas or words as their own.

This contrast between memorization and applied thinking is the contrast between our two past educational cultures. It is the reason the U.S. has hundreds of Nobel Prizes in science and China has none — yet. They know they have to change their system away from memorization. Meanwhile, the U.S. is stupidly continuing the No Child Left Behind teach-to-the test memorization system and destroying that critical thinking.

Before we get feeling unjustly superior about plagiarism, I will translate another p-word that is commonly posted on the doors of schools, industries, and government offices here in China: "propaganda."

To Westerners, this word has nothing but bad connotations: false information commanded by oppressive governments. Why in the world would any office translate its function as "propaganda"?

Here it is China that has the upper hand. We use the term "public relations." The product of their offices is no different from all of our promotional materials that are produced to convince customers that they must have this worthless product or that some diploma mill's online course is just as good as a bonafide class with a real professor.

When our public health departments try

to convince citizens to get annual flu shots, China sees that as "propaganda" that is good. I consider the fraudulent claims by storefront "schools" in America — that spend more money on propaganda than on faculty — to be far more harmful than any "propaganda" I see here in China.

In America, there are good schools and bad schools. And there are schools that promote themselves and schools that do not. The good and bad schools that promote themselves will survive. The good and bad schools that do not promote themselves will go under. So we cannot avoid "propaganda" either.

If we limit "propaganda" to only the disinformation used in political and commercial society, then our recent elections and our daily bombardment by media and online make the United States the propaganda capital of the world. America is awash in it. But because of the same-word, different-meaning confusion represented by my "plagiarizing" student, we do not recognize it.

Feel free to pass on this propaganda (hopefully it is not disinformation). However, I would appreciate the credit.

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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