

Other Viewpoints

Voting safeguards need more review

If Gov. Sam Brownback and Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt feel a responsibility to safeguard voting rights, Kansans wouldn't know it from their comments Monday related to the state's 8-month-old requirement of proof of citizenship to register to vote.

The voter registrations of nearly 14,000 Kansans, including more than 2,400 in Sedgwick County, are "in suspense" because they haven't provided the necessary birth certificates, passports or other documents – or they have, to the driver's license office where they registered, and the papers just haven't been passed along to election officials. Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach had promised lawmakers that the document sharing would be seamless.

When Brownback was asked Monday about the problem, he acknowledged an interest in the voting booth being "open for people" but said, according to the *Lawrence Journal-World*: "It's in the secretary of state's purview." He also said: "We'll watch and review the process as it's coming forward, but there is a constitutional officer that's in charge of that."

In fact, if documents submitted to the driver's license offices aren't making it to local election officials in a timely manner or at all – because of problems related to a delayed Kansas Department of Revenue computer upgrade or otherwise – that makes the systemic suspension of voting rights Brownback's problem as well as Kobach's.

Also Monday, Schmidt said his office was evaluating whether Kansas' proof-of-citizenship law is enforceable in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that struck down a similar Arizona law. The court ruled 7-2 that the 1993 federal "motor-voter" law requires states to "accept and use" the federal voter registration form, which only asks that people swear they are U.S. citizens.

Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, D-Topeka, had heard nothing from Schmidt since requesting a formal opinion about Kansas' law weeks ago. After his speech Monday to the Rotary Club of Wichita, Schmidt said he hadn't decided whether to issue such an opinion. "We are right now focused on the legal questions surrounding that decision and how it may or may not apply to existing Kansas law," he said. And asked about Kobach's bizarre idea to limit some voters to participating only in presidential and congressional elections, Schmidt said: "I'll leave it to the policymakers to decide whether that's the desired response to the Supreme Court decision."

The remarks by Brownback and Schmidt came a day before the 48th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act. As then-Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson argued in 1957, advocating for the law he would later proudly sign as president, "This right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people, people as individuals, control over their own destinies."

That basic right is in limbo for nearly 14,000 Kansans. The state's CEO and top cop should have a problem with that.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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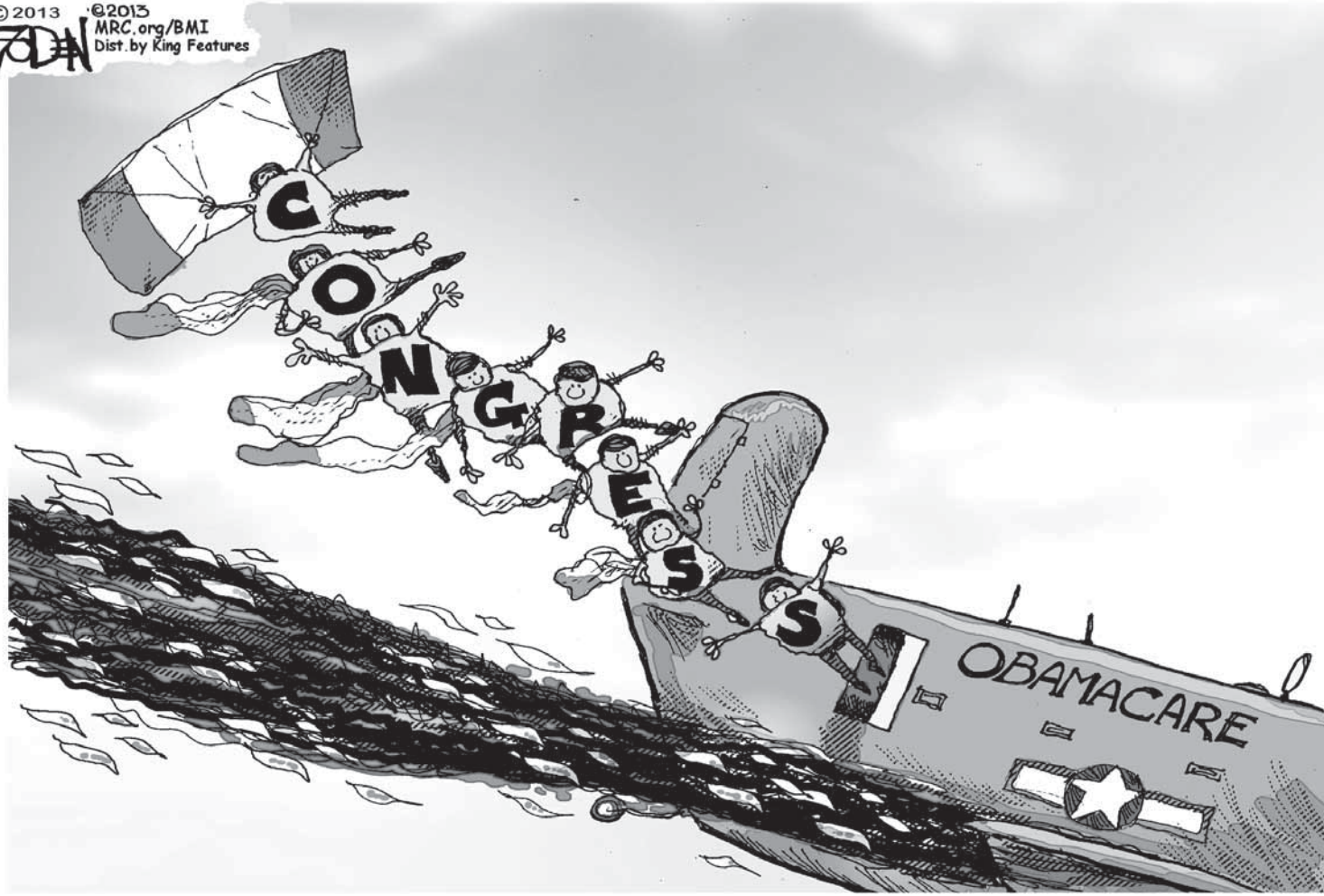
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Farmers still ahead on property taxes

We just spent two months entertaining three great-grandchildren, a rewarding, frustrating and sometime exasperating experience.

One of those kids remarked about how everywhere we went, someone knew me. I explained that I was a senior citizen in the community I had been born and raised in, and had spent most of my adult life involved in community activities, church and politics. I didn't explain that as a member of a woefully minor political party I was not bashful around the coffee shop and places where politics and economic issues were being discussed or debated.

Well – here I go again. One of my peers and good friends had his opinion published recently. He was complaining about the inequity of taxation on the farmers. He thought we were paying way too much. And who doesn't think he or she is paying too much in taxes?

I'm a third-generation farmer and have benefited from tax-free accumulation of value in land. Land that had only the cost of homesteading, or a \$10 or \$15 dollar sheriff's auction or creditor claim, was handed down through estates without any income tax on the gain in value. Compare that with someone who paid income tax on earned income and through frugal living and savings managed to buy land. They paid from \$100 in the 1950s to the present thousands per acre, and all that money had to be after paying income tax every year.

I purchased land in 1979 (my down payment came from earned income) and the tax base was only 4 percent of what I actually paid. Personal property and other business properties had a tax base equal to 20 to 30 percent of value. How fair was that?

That inequity has been partially corrected, but the tax system is still not fair. I now pay on the basis of annual income potential of farmland, but my land can still be passed to my



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

heirs without tax liability on the increased value from \$1,000 to \$5,000 or \$6,000 per acre. There are nuances involved, but the fact is: Most farmers have tax advantages not available to many other businesses or wage earners.

It bothers me when I hear farmers, who have thousands of acres and incomes into the hundreds of thousand of dollars, complain about food stamps, subsidized lunches and free breakfast for school children. That's welfare to people who don't deserve it, they say. But those tax dollars are peanuts compared to the thousands of tax dollars per farmer the government spends to subsidize crop insurance.

When farmers extend themselves beyond their capabilities by paying exorbitant cash rents and bidding beyond production potential for land, why should they expect the general population to pay up to 70 percent of the premiums for crop insurance? In fact, I've known instances where some have collected thousands from insurance and then gone out and bid to acquire more land and take on more risk.

If you can't afford the risk, maybe you should not take on more.

Those farmers don't depend on this tax subsidy to feed their families. They don't need public money to pay for their winter vacations. Most of them don't have to worry about retirement funds, dependent parents, disabled children, minor or even major illnesses.

In my opinion, graduated income-tax sched-

ules and equitable property and personal taxes are the fairest way to pay for government agencies and programs. The sales tax is the most regressive form of tax we have. You don't pay sales tax on investments for land, houses, stocks and bonds. The wealthy have no greater requirement for the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter than lower-income folks.

Those in the lower economic levels spend the vast majority of their income on necessities and most of those are hit by sales tax. If you avoid income taxes you can use that extra money to acquire resources to earn more money. The poorer folks have no money left to invest after meeting life's necessities and taxes.

The latest statistics indicate the average family income is \$50,000 to \$60,000. These people are paying a higher percentage of their earned income to support government and social programs than those in higher categories.

Money is not evil. The love of money is. And it seems to me the more we have, the more we want and the greedier we get. When we let greed and love of money overrule compassion and care for the less fortunate, we contribute to misery, violence, and unrest in society.

Incidentally, Jesus didn't instruct his disciples to interrogate the five thousand and only feed the wealthy or the poor. The need was there and he met that need. Businesses and investors need protection from marauding invaders and financial risk. Individuals need protection from misfortune, whatever the cause. As citizens of a democratic republic, we need to accept responsibility to use our resources and talents to meet the needs of everyone.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rwinc@cheerful.com.

'Singapore Effect' hits young Chinese

"Would you prefer a boy or a girl?" was my standard question with an assortment of biology education doctoral students assembled for an evening meal after my presentation at Beijing Normal University, their national university for teacher training. Of course the students could not get married until they were 24 or 25, but most have their ideal future planned out. But their answers were unexpected.

"I have a boyfriend and we will get married, but we have too much to do in life to be burdened with a child," said one.

"I'm not getting married," replied another. "Many good friends, but no marriage. I want to travel and research in my area."

This was not expected. And as I turned to my host, their major professor, his jaw had dropped too.

We probed further. They were serious in their departure from custom. Chinese parents are notorious for wanting that grandchild at the first possible moment (after finishing education, of course). But here was a portion of their next generation ready to break that link.

China's one-child policy has been in effect since 1979, after a two-child policy started in 1970. After 1949, everyone was equal, which is to say equally poor. With nearly five times the population of the U.S. but less farmland, "too many people" defines China. China's scholars have always asked "why didn't Mao move to a two-child and then one-child policy sooner, as his advisors recommended?" With-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

out the policy, China's population today would be over 300 million more, equal to the total population of the U.S. That would have guaranteed starvation. Unmanageable pollution. Misery and instability. There would be no developed China today.

But the one child that was allowed was precious to Han Chinese families who value their family lineage extending from ancient times into the far future. So why are some students considering breaking this lineage?

I am calling this the "Singapore Effect." The island nation of Singapore has been the most advanced, progressive city-state in the world for 20 years. They ditched currency for electronic cards and cell phones acting as debiting devices 15 years ago. Their cell phone technology is ahead of the U.S. The percentage of citizens who have bachelor's and master's degrees leaves all other countries far behind.

That is the phenomenon we are seeing among highly-educated Chinese students. When you rise to a high level of scholarship, any desire for children takes second place to

academic excitement and interests.

We have long known that people in poverty countries had many children because so many died young. With higher education for women, along with better health care, the number of children per family plummets. But this declining birth rate continues with even higher education, as found in Singapore.

To produce just enough children to replace those who die is called zero population growth. For several decades, Singapore has been below zero population growth, not producing a replacement generation. As a result, Singapore television broadcasts big tax rebates as an incentive to have a baby. And they pile on more tax breaks and ads asking "Doesn't your child deserve a brother or sister to play with?"

China has not yet reached that level. While their school-age population is shrinking, their increase in lifespan still keeps China above zero population growth.

The countryside, where rural families often had many children, is rapidly migrating to cities. Add this "Singapore Effect" where some of the new college graduates are electing not to have children or even marry, and reaching zero population growth is imminent.

The result is the increased usage of a new Chinese term – "kong chao" – the empty nest.

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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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