



Other Viewpoints

Sex offenders shouldn't get a pass

The Kansas State Board of Education Aug. 13 lifted the teaching licenses of four people convicted of sex crimes against students.

The teachers, three men and one woman, will never see the inside of a Kansas classroom again. Others who are inclined to prey upon children will, however. It's difficult to identify sex offenders among beginning teachers.

Identifying teachers who have a history of preying on students should be easier, but that's not always the case.

School districts in Kansas and elsewhere have the ability to change that, and they should.

During the recent Kansas State Board of Education meeting, board member Carolyn Campbell said she was aware of cases in which school districts had allowed teachers to resign. The teachers later got jobs in Topeka and offended again.

Board member Ken Willard also noted some district attorneys were not reporting all felony convictions to the Kansas Department of Education, as required by law, so they can be checked against employment rosters. In Kansas, all felons are prohibited from teaching unless granted a waiver.

District attorneys should comply with the law, even though there is no penalty for noncompliance. But when it comes to keeping sex offenders out of the classrooms, school districts can take matters into their own hands.

All they really have to do is end the disgusting practice of letting some offenders resign to avoid prosecution. Allowing someone to resign – apparently with the consent of the victim and parents – can save a district some embarrassment but the result is a teacher is sent away without a criminal record and is free to go to another school and prey on children there.

It is unconscionable that people in positions of authority would allow that to happen.

If all sex offenses against students resulted in prosecution, school districts across the county could share information about their own teachers and other employees convicted of sex offenses, creating a central database that could be checked against employees and job applicants. Even if court records of an offender's conviction somehow failed to follow him or her to another state once released from prison, the database would prevent the offender from getting a teaching job.

Personnel rules often limit the amount of information about teachers that a district can release to the public. There are no such limits on court records. They are subject to the Kansas Open Records Act – and similar laws in other states – and can be publicly shared.

School districts everywhere must ensure sex offenders are prosecuted, then share all conviction records.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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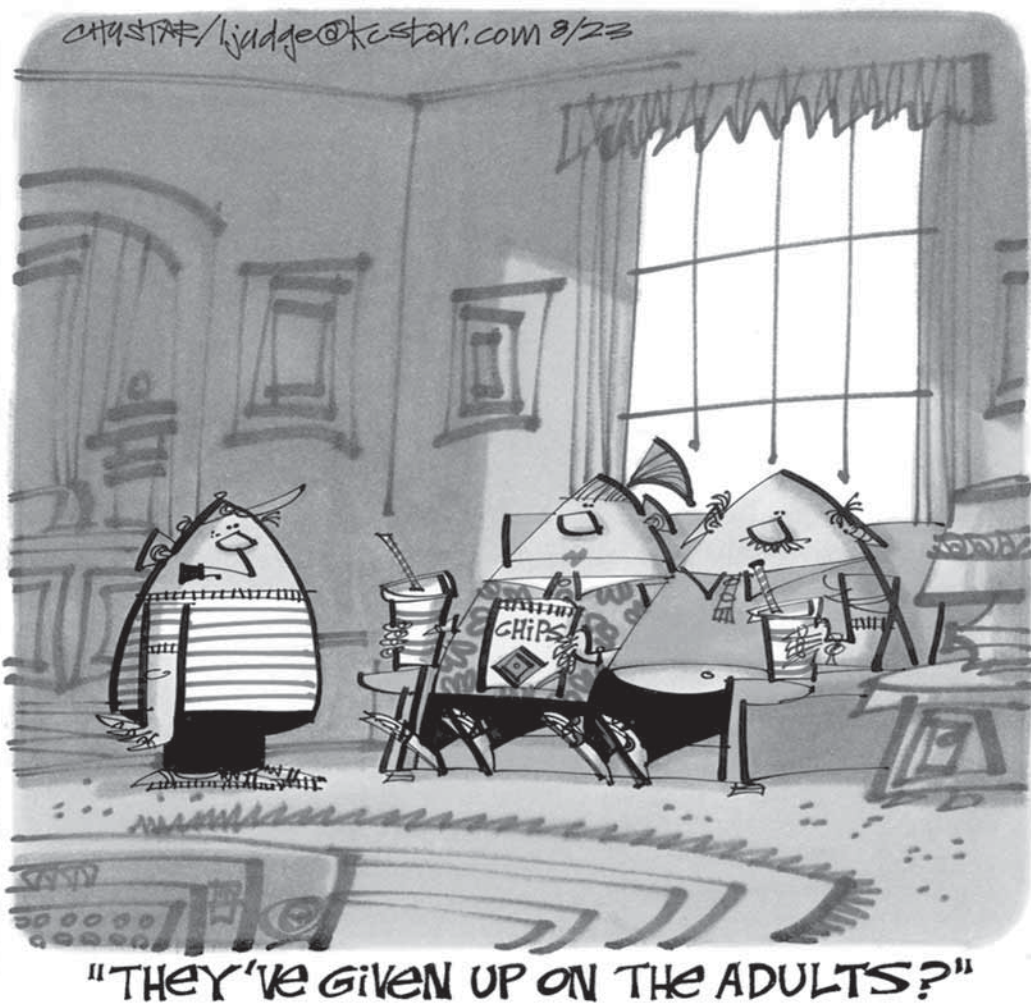
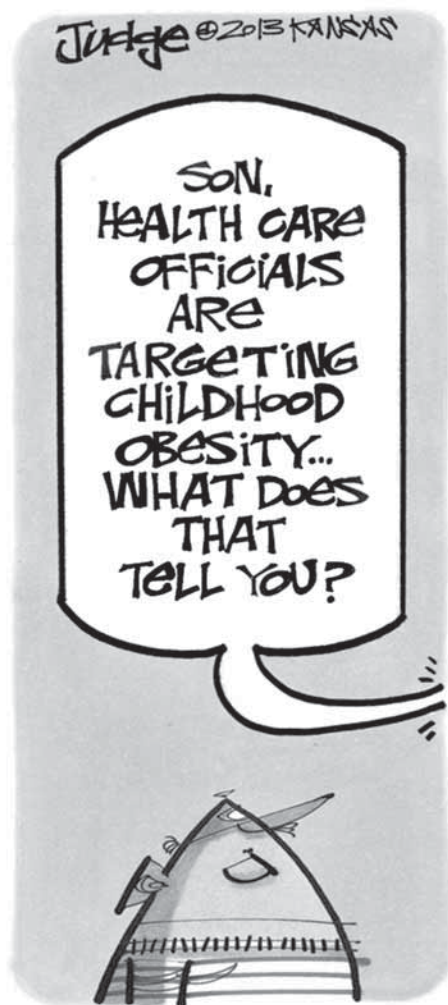
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Colby pressed for first swimming pool

Information for this Fike Park series was taken from research done by Opal Linville at Colby's Prairie Museum of Art and History.

In an earlier Fike Park column, I told about the start of construction for the City Hall.

Due to government red tape, the building was not completed until September 1936. Its final dimensions were 94 by 52 feet; total cost was a little over \$23,000. The federal government allotted \$15,094.50. Of that amount, \$10,766.13 went to labor, \$2,409.50 went to supervision, and \$1,888.58 went for the rental of trucks, according to the *Colby Free Press Tribune*.

Sometime before the summer of 1937, a new swimming pool was built in Oakley. Because of that, many people from Colby stopped going to Hemstrom's pool north of Colby and started going to Oakley to swim.

On July 7, 1937, a news story in the local paper mentioned a strong sentiment was growing that a public swimming pool should be built in Colby's Fike Park. When I read that, it gave me a feeling of déjà vu. Wasn't one of the reasons we got our new water park here in Colby because Colby citizens were going to Oakley's new pool in 2011? Oakley leaders must be quite forward-thinking.

It was estimated that a pool in 1937 would cost the city around \$40,000. The news article suggested that the city should go ahead with plans for the pool while federal aid through the Works Progress Administration was still available.

When that story was printed, Hemstrom was



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

perturbed. He wrote an article letting everyone know that there was no reason for anyone to drive to Oakley, because, for the past 10 years, his family had operated a nice place north of Colby for people to swim. However, he said he had no objections to the city building a new pool.

According to an article in one of the recent Thomas County Historical Society's *Prairie Winds*, on Aug. 10, 1938, 500 signatures were submitted to the Colby City Council requesting that a city election be held to allow the community to vote on bonds for a swimming pool. The council submitted the proposed plans to Works Progress for assistance. That approval was received in October 1938.

Pools in various towns were visited by Colby council and chamber committees and they eventually agreed the Colby pool should be similar to the one in Hays. The total project cost would be \$59,480. That would include \$28,136 for materials and equipment and \$31,344 for labor and supervision. The government would furnish 60 percent of the total cost and Colby would furnish 40 percent, or approximately \$25,000. That would be taken care of by a 2.74 mill levy.

The bond issue passed 792 to 419 and the pool was located on land just east of the Opelt Hotel (later the Cooper Hotel) where a number of citizens had donated property. The pool was 150 by 75 feet and provisions were made for a separate wading pool for smaller children.

The bathhouse was constructed of monolithic concrete. It also contained a concession stand on the first floor and the entire roof of the bathhouse seated spectators. That roof area was later closed off from the public for safety purposes. It was rumored that someone had dived off the roof into the pool. However, I won't name names since it was a beautiful dive and he wasn't injured.

The pool had a modern gravity sand filtration plant that purified 600 gallons per minute of the pool's 320,000 gallons. That plant was beside the bathhouse on the west. It had the capacity to filter all of the pool's water in eight hours.

June 5, 1941, was the grand opening day. The pool was open from 1 to 10 p.m. every afternoon and evening for the summer months. Admission for adults was 20 cents, 10 cents for children. A season ticket was \$6 for adults and \$4 for children. Suits and towels were available to rent.

Next I'll tell about what happened to those cannons that used to be in the park. Please look for it.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Art of thinking at risk of disappearing

The bell rang for class to begin. My writing teacher announced that today our class time would be spent on a writing assignment. After giving instructions, she released us to begin. Most of my high school classmates immediately took pencil to paper. But a few of us did not. Instead, we sat back in our seats and "thought." You know the look. You could wave your hand in front of our faces and we would not notice. We were deep in thought.

This could continue for 10, 15, even 30 minutes before we would "snap out of it" and begin to write furiously. We had found our stories. We had them organized in our minds. And now we wrote to beat the clock before class was over.

Those who had started at the beginning of class had plenty of time to hand in their papers. And those efforts usually produced uninspired stories of not much interest. But those of us who spent time thinking before we wrote had the stories she found worth reading aloud the next day. Many of us ran overtime, finishing and handing in our paper just as the next class was about all seated. I remember looking back as we left the classroom – our teacher was moving these last papers to the top. She would choose to read them first.

"Sitzfleisch" is the ability to sit quietly and think through a problem over a long time. It is a German term. It has no equivalent in English but we recognize the general concept. I value and promote it with my student teachers. But I only recently encountered "Sitzfleisch" in an essay by the Princeton scholar Freeman Dyson about the great Robert Oppenheimer who led our scientists to develop the atomic bomb during World War II.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

Many great scientists have described how they solve problems. The solution never comes as a mechanical process of observation-hypothesis-test-results. Nearly all problems are solved after spending much thought-time on them, what we might call "mulling it over."

Linus Pauling described this in an interview. He had learned that xenon, an inert element that never forms chemical bonds in the human body, was a pain-killer. "I thought about it day after day for several days; in the evening when I would go to bed, I would lie there and think about the problem.... Then, seven years later, I was reading a scientific paper on crystal structure, and I said to myself, I understand anesthesia. I worked for about a year gathering data, and then I published my [classic] paper...."

Oddly, Dyson brings up "Sitzfleisch" because Oppenheimer did not have this ability: "He could never sit still long enough to do a difficult calculation. His calculations were often done hastily and were often full of mistakes." Oppenheimer's contributions were in organizing other scientists. He could never extend his initial speculations on black holes and other physics by completing the difficult calculations. That task was eventually accomplished by others.

My concern today is that when I visit schools, I see teachers give students far fewer opportunities to sit and think. Thanks to often-inappropriate technologies, many students have lost the ability to be alone with their thoughts. More and more, teachers are taught to channel every student thought to get the desired consequences, often test results. Students are never allowed to be "alone with their minds." Under constant external bombardment with entertainment, many students appear unable to be alone with their internal thoughts.

One of the best places to be alone with your mind, quietly soaking up the environment around you, is on a field trip in the woods. One high school biology colleague of mine, in the center of the state, has led students on these popular experiences for years. But lately, her students insist on bringing their mobile phones and ear plugs – a practice that totally destroys the experience of being immersed in the wild. When she sets her foot down and prohibits the devices, she receives heavy pushback from both her school administrators and parents that are blinded by the new technology that they think can do no harm.

"Sitzfleisch!" They should stop and think deeply about that – if they still can.

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.

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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