



Other Viewpoints

Fictional facts go to town halls

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp apparently hasn't heard the old adage, "You're entitled to your own opinions, but not to your own facts." As the congressman from Kansas' 1st District makes his way from town hall to town hall, he apparently is carrying with him complaints, issues and facts that exist as truth only in his mind. For example, during a session in Hutchinson, Huelskamp laid out the claim that kindergartners and high school seniors receive the same school lunches. That, however, is not true. U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines step up the caloric value of student lunches, allowing between 550 and 650 calories for elementary children and between 750 and 850 calories for high-school students. Many high schools offer an a-la-carte menu that allows children to buy as much food as their parents can afford. And because Huelskamp can't resist a chance to take a shot at President Obama, he bemoaned the fact that the president's daughters attend a school that doesn't follow government guidelines. It's true; they attend a private school that doesn't accept school nutrition money and therefore isn't bound. Moving on to food stamps, Huelskamp again failed to tell his constituents the truth. "At a minimum, stop advertising for food stamps in Mexico," Huelskamp said during the town hall. Omitted, however, was the fact the program is designed to bridge the language barrier and help legal immigrants who have been in the country at least five years. He also failed to mention that this program was launched under the Bush administration and has been reduced under Obama. In another town hall in north-central Kansas, Huelskamp criticized Kansas State Research and Extension for its work in promoting "Obamacare." Again, the truth evaded Huelskamp. Daryl Buchholz, executive director of Research and Extension, said the agency is not promoting the Affordable Care Act but is working to educate and inform Kansans about changes that will affect their health care. "When the Affordable Care Act was brought into law, one of our teams began to work pretty hard to understand the elements that would be important for people in the state to understand," Buchholz said. "It is not a promotion, in any way, shape or form. Our interest is in trying to provide the best quality of information and education so people can make informed decisions. Obviously, the Affordable Care Act is extremely political and controversial, and it's our intent to lay all that information out there so people can make informed decisions. It's not about promoting." This isn't the first time Research and Extension has delved into controversial issues in an effort to educate. The agency routinely works to inform Kansans about changes to water policy, farm production practices, health and nutrition. "We've been doing this for almost 100 years," Buchholz said. Education and understanding are not the enemy of any person; that would be ignorance and anger. Huelskamp discredits himself and his positions - and performs a disservice to his constituents - by spreading as fact half-truths and misleading information that serve only to create anger, distrust and angst. But the truth always prevails in the end, and it is always the truth, regardless of how many times an elected U.S. congressman might try to alter it. - The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press



Prickly pear cactus a 'sticky' digging job

Ever hear of digging prickly pear cactus out of a pasture for 50 cents an acre? I hadn't either until longtime Phillips County resident Max Schick told me his story. Schick was a boy of 10 back in the mid '30s when the U.S. government paid people to rid their grass of prickly pear cactus. He and his older brother toiled for two years on his family's 65-acre pasture to rid the land of these sticky, nuisance plants threatening the western Kansas short-grass prairie. Extremely drought-resistant, the prickly pear cactus was thriving during the drought of the Dirty '30s, crowding out the grassland and food supply of cattle. There's a bit of untold irony here as well, Schick says. Some of the grass survived only because the cattle couldn't reach it because of the cactus spines and stickers. "Back then, the cactus hills dotted the pasture like fly specs," Schick says. "They were everywhere in the pasture." On his family's farm, located approximately seven miles northeast of Logan, Schick and his brother dug the cactus out of the ground with a shovel. They couldn't afford gloves and were always fighting the little red stickers that broke off the plants and became embedded in their clothes and skin. Every night when they finished digging cactus, the two boys would go down to the pond and try to wash themselves clean of the prickly pear cactus. "The pond was our shower back then," Schick says. "It's how we got clean."



John Schlageck Kansas Farm Bureau Insights

The Schick brothers dug from breakfast to dinner and from dinner until supper time. After about two days of digging, they'd go out with a team and wagon and load up the cactus and haul it into the farmstead and throw them in a rick or stack. "You had to dig each plant out of the ground and then take 'em clean out of the pasture," Schick says. "At the bottom of each cactus was a little bit of a root, about as round as your little finger and a couple inches long. If you didn't get the root and all, the cactus would sprout and grow again." When the brothers finally finished the prickly pear excavation project, their uncle and grandfather received payment from the government. The sum of approximately \$32.50 was considered a gold mine back then, Schick recalls. "I didn't get anything, my brother kept it all," he says. "I was just trailing along for the fun. At 10 and seven miles from a town we only went to three times a year, what did I need money for?" Young Schick has no regrets about the two years of his young life spent digging prickly

pear cactus out of his family's pasture. He prefers to look at this period in his life that made him appreciate what he did have. It was also during this time he discovered a treasure that still holds his interest 75 years later. "I can remember it like it was yesterday," Schick remembers. "It was along about 11 in the morning and I was pretty tired from all that digging. There he lay in a low spot in the pasture a few feet from a cactus I was working on." That's when the Phillips County farm boy saw his first arrowhead. "It was about two inches long and worked on both sides," Schick says. It was made of flint with a round, good point - a real beauty." Since that day many years ago, the Phillipsburg resident still collects, trades and admires his Native American arrowheads. He's walked many a mile and worn out the knees on more than one pair of coveralls in search of his passion littered across the High Plains prairie. At the spry age of 86, Schick reports he's "doin' fine." And with autumn just around the corner, he's preparing for his pumpkin patch and telling stories with the youngsters. But don't kid yourself, he still finds time to look through his collection of arrowheads - especially his favorites. 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

More lawmakers need to attend forums

Wichita State University professor H. Edward Flentje wrote recently suggesting that Kansas lawmakers should pay their own way to attend meetings of the American Legislative Exchange Council. In short, he contends that taxpayer dollars are wasted where only conservative Kansas legislators go to proselytize and to be proselytized with that fringe of American political perspectives. A deeper inspection of new policies enacted by the Kansas Legislature this year exposes a more troubling discrimination in legislative travel policy, which any Kansas taxpayers - regardless of political party or ideology - should summarily reject. The real issue is that taxpayer money is now being used, with rare exception, for lawmakers to only attend dogma-based conferences (primarily held by the conservative council), while rejecting conferences by decidedly more neutral organizations that offer legislators real-world research and mainstream national policies, including the National Conference of State Legislatures and the Council of State

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Sen. David Haley Kansas Legislature

Governments. Admittedly, our absence does little to hurt the discourses at these meetings. In many cases, these organizations, and the legislative members from the other 49 participating states, probably miss us about as much as they'd miss Fred Phelps, debates on evolution versus creationism, or other tripe spewed by America's version of the male-dominated "my-religion-knows-better-for-you-than-your-religion" that "Taliban-esque" legislators have exported by Kansas to credible national think tanks. Undoubtedly, though, inhibiting most law-

makers from participating in national discussions on policymaking hurts the development of Kansas and to the prospect of no-label, bipartisan reasonableness as part of our national image. Future budgets, as have been the tradition in Kansas and the majority of states until this year, should include pro-rata taxpayer support, allowing for a certain number of spots across the board for each conference, not just one narrowly drawn ideological conference resulting in a vast discrimination in the amount of taxpayer supported Kansas attendees. Sen. David Haley of Wyandotte County represents the 4th District in his 20th year in the Kansas Legislature. He served twice as the Democratic nominee for secretary of state. We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com.

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Mallard Fillmore Bruce Tinsley

