

Other Viewpoints



Best about session: it was only two days

The best news from the just-completed special session of the Kansas Legislature is that it is over. The fact that lawmakers were able to complete their business in just two days is worthy of thanks from taxpayers who were footing the bill for the session.

Other aspects of the rare special session will continue to trigger discussion. The stated justification for the session was the need to fix the state's "Hard 50" sentencing law. A U.S. Supreme Court ruling found a Virginia law that is similar to the one in Kansas unconstitutional because it gave judges the authority to determine whether aggravating factors in a murder case justify a sentence of 50 years with no possibility of parole. Following the ruling, Attorney General Derek Schmidt and Gov. Sam Brownback saw an urgent public safety need to revise the Kansas law to prevent inmates sentenced under that law from being released too soon.

Thanks to a pre-session hearing on the bill by a joint legislative committee, the revisions were able to gain quick, unanimous approval from both the Kansas House and Senate.

Lawmakers also quickly dealt with a number of appointments made by Brownback since the end of the regular legislative session. Key among those was the appointment of Caleb Stegall to the Kansas Court of Appeals. Some Kansans may not have been happy with the fast track this appointment traveled — from the governor's announcement to Senate confirmation in just two weeks — but it's unlikely that additional time would have altered the outcome in the appointment. Regardless of whether observers think Stegall was the best candidate for the court, his close political ties to Brownback and the closed nature of the new court nomination process will continue to draw discussion across the state.

One issue that didn't garner much attention from legislators during the special session was the effort by some Wichita lawmakers to deal with problems related to a new law requiring people to prove they are U.S. citizens when registering to vote in Kansas for the first time. The lawmakers contended that the voter registration law was as much in need of fixing as the Hard 50 law, but their effort to amend a voter measure into that law was ruled out of order. The 15,000 voter registration forms currently on hold and awaiting proof of citizenship documentation seem to confirm this law also is not in working order and should be of continuing concern to lawmakers and other Kansas residents.

Sometimes less is more. Whether or not they are convinced that the special session was justified or agree with the actions legislators took, Kansans at least can be grateful that the session lasted just two days and didn't result in any hasty action on additional measures without the deliberation they deserve.

— Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press



Partisanship revives debt crisis

The national debt ceiling is rearing its ugly head again. Are you surprised?

Kick the can down the road, and maybe someone will run over and flatten it. Wait till the deadline and then panic.

But good decisions are seldom made in a state of panic.

After the 2008 election, leaders in the Republican Party declared their major goal was to defeat anything President Obama supported. You decide whether you think that was prejudice, economics or just plain sour grapes.

The Republicans have done a remarkable job of sticking to their goals. They can't even support programs that originated in their own historical past if the president tries implementing them. Partisan politics have trumped all efforts to reach workable solutions. Both sides are guilty in that respect.

The Democrats haven't done exceedingly well, but give them some credit. Most of the compromises have been from them and not the other way around. Opinions differ on that, but look at the record.

The Republicans want cuts in expenditures, but they don't want to make specifics a part of their legislation. They want the administration to make the cuts and then they object to those cuts. They have done a remarkable job of



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

blaming the very poorest of the population for the budget crisis. In the meantime, they continue to lavish tax cuts and subsidies on the wealthiest.

Reagan's "trickle-down" theory never worked 40 years ago, and it won't work today. The rich simply get richer and the poor get poorer. Concentrating wealth and resources has never benefited the general public. Wealth and resources equal power, and concentrated power equals revolution. It doesn't matter whether that power is economic, religious or simply muscle.

What's the solution?

Turn the lights, air conditioners and heating systems off in the halls of Congress. Send them all home without pay. Give all their aides, secretaries, etc., an unpaid leave of absence. Let them apply for unemployment and look forward to Social Security for their retirement.

Businesses could save a ton of money on lobbying expenses. Let the administration continue to administer the affairs of government and the Supreme Court can step in if needed to keep them in line with the Constitution and intent of legislative mandates already passed.

When we get the income and outgo back in line, maybe we can elect new congressmen who will understand the need to work together for the good of all the electorate and not just their political hacks and money sources.

Stop the religious bickering over who we are as a nation. Religious organizations need to start admitting that they have failed to convince their followers to practice what they preach.

Christian religionists maybe even need to start analyzing how their preaching lines up with Christ's example. The non-religious and anarchists need to look at history and see what their systems produced.

Diversity and independence is what created our nation, but our survival depends upon the cooperation of us all.

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Ruling robs photographers' conscience

Other Opinions

• Robert Schwarzwaldner
Family Research Coun.

New Mexico Supreme Court Judge Richard Bosson has written a concurring opinion regarding a case involving a New Mexico couple that photographs weddings.

His opinion states that their refusal to photograph a homosexual wedding was an affront to the larger common good. He called on them "to channel their conduct, not their beliefs, so as to leave space for other Americans who believe something different." This follows a benign allowance that the couple, named Huguenin, "are free to think, to say, to believe, as they wish; they may pray to the God of their choice and follow those commandments in their personal lives wherever they lead."

In other words, confine your faith to the four walls of your home or church. Pray privately. But don't practice your faith in any meaningful way.

Cultural consensus is the determinant of commercial and social behavior, not belief in objective truth. The temple of the mind is, to Bosson, sacrosanct; activity outside of privacy is a place of coercion and religious repression. Welcome to fascism in America, 2013.

Bosson argues that "the sense of respect we owe others, whether or not we believe as they do, illuminates this country, setting it apart from the discord that afflicts much of the rest of the world. In short, I would say to the Huguenins, with the utmost respect: it is the price of citizenship."

Surrendering one's conscience to the demands of the state is "the price of citizenship?" As one of my elderly relatives might have put it, who does this guy think he is?

Consider three elements of the judge's decision. First, he says the Huguenins are "free to say as they wish," but then he tells them they have to do something they believe is wrong. What bosh: A wedding photographer can verbally insult his clients as long as he takes their photos? Or, if he quietly declines to participate in a ceremony he believes is morally wrong, he is legally compelled to do so anyway? Within

Bosson's ruling are the seeds of free speech erosion, if not collapse.

Defenders of Bosson will argue that professing Christians used convictions to justify racial segregation. That's correct; convictions have been used to justify all kinds of bad things.

But claiming a theological basis and actually having one are two different things. No serious student of the Bible can make any case other than that racism is irrelevance. Racism, segregation and inequality wilt under truth and reason. Judeo-Christian moral teachings about sexual conduct and marital union do not.

Our founders also argued that there are objective standards determinable in logic and nature that should inform public law and morality. If male-female complementarity and natural child-bearing are the purposes of marriage, it is inarguable that marriage is by definition heterosexual and monogamous. The "laws of nature," self-obviating in biology, neurology and simple logic, make this self-evident. And it was upon an assumption of both natural law and divine revelation that America was begun, its Declaration of Independence published, and its Constitution approved.

The judge errs in another, equally serious, way: There is a profound difference between intrusive or aggressive conduct animated by religious conviction and obedience to biblical commands that is passive, non-coercive and un-repressive. The Huguenins did not prevent the couple who approached them from finding other photographers. They did not coerce the couple into religious indoctrination. They did

not insult or castigate them publicly. Based on a moral conviction grounded in 3,500 years of Judeo-Christian teaching, they declined to participate in what they believe God forbade.

Think of how Bosson's decision might play out in other arenas: A clueless Gentile woman enters a Jewish deli and asks for several pounds of ham. Politely, the owners decline, explaining that pork is forbidden by kosher dietary law. The woman sues, claiming her right of free commerce has been curtailed on the basis that at one venue, which she entered and left voluntarily, she was not provided with the full range of culinary options she prefers.

Of course, the woman had other opportunities to achieve her objective, including finding another store. The "offense" to the woman was not invasive or harmful. She was just prevented from doing what she wanted in a given location and by a given business.

Or what if a polygamist and his "wives" were to come to a studio asking for photographs: They were not asking for legal approval of their union(s) but wanted shots of themselves together and with their kids. Using Bosson's logic, the photographer would be compelled to endorse the moral validity of these relationships by photographing them.

Coercion and repression are the hallmarks of tyranny. They are also the hallmarks of Bosson's decision.

Draw your own conclusions about what those two facts mean for the future of our country, and why people of conscience (be they liberal or conservative) might wish to ponder if liberty still matters in the United States.

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