

Other Viewpoints

Ditch voting plan that discriminates

Kansas' new proof-of-citizenship requirement has suspended the voting privileges of nearly 20,000 Kansans. It is causing headaches in multiple state offices, and there is a good chance it will be overturned in court.

So how does Secretary of State Kris Kobach propose to handle this debacle? By moving to a system even more discriminatory and cumbersome.

Kobach wants to create a framework whereby some Kansans would be eligible to vote in congressional and presidential races but not for state or local candidates. Other Kansans could vote for all candidates and issues on the ballot.

And some people wouldn't be able to vote at all, even if they thought they had registered properly.

The problem begins with a new law requiring Kansans to submit proof of lawful presence, like a birth certificate or passport, when registering to vote. The only other state with such severe requirements is Arizona.

The Kansas law clashes with the federal "motor voter" law, which says citizens must be offered the opportunity to register to vote at vehicle registration offices. Ruling in a case brought against Arizona, the U.S. Supreme Court said this summer that states can't require more documentation for voting than they do for driver's license applications or renewals.

In Kansas, citizens don't need proof of citizenship to renew their driver's licenses. If they register to vote at the same time, they don't necessarily have proof of citizenship documents with them. These are the would-be voters whose registrations are in "suspended" status because they are transmitted to election offices without the documentation required by Kansas law.

Kobach has sued the U.S. Election Assistance Coalition, seeking to adopt the terms of the Kansas proof of lawful presence law for Kansas elections. His contingency plan is to allow newly registered voters who have complied with federal registration requirements - but not with the more stringent state law - to vote only in federal elections.

Those voters would have to fill out a federal form. If they use a Kansas voter registration form but don't provide proof of U.S. citizenship, they can't vote at all.

If this sounds like a mess, it is. It's also a stain on Kansas, harkening back to post-Civil War days in the South when black citizens sometimes had to register multiple times and meet stiffer requirements to vote in state elections than the federal government required.

The solution to this tangled problem is beautifully simple. There is no evidence that non-citizen voting is a problem in Kansas. The Legislature should repeal the law requiring proof of citizenship - or risk a fiasco in the 2014 elections.

- The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press

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Stop debating health insurance - fix it

I'm tired of hearing political debates about health insurance. I just want someone to fix it.

I'm too busy living in the mess to waste time placing blame about who caused it. (Although, I do have opinions about the goofballs who decided that forcing health insurance companies to pay for so many extra benefits would be a good thing for those who have to pay the increased insurance rates.)

My family has health insurance only because I have COBRA coverage from my previous job, but that is quickly coming to an end. Since my husband doesn't have coverage through his employer and I work part-time jobs, we pay for the pricey coverage because it's kind of all we can get.

That coverage will run out in March, and then we'll be up the proverbial creek without a health insurance paddle.

In theory, we should be able to get health insurance from the state's health care exchange. But Kansas decided to let the federal government take care of its own mess by hosting the Kansas exchange instead.

Unfortunately, the federal government is exercising its usual incompetence, this time by designing a website that doesn't function.

The exchange opened Oct. 1 with dismal failure. The site crashed multiple times and was too overloaded. I tried dozens of times to access it with no luck.

I couldn't even find out how much health insurance will cost for my family because I couldn't get in to fill out an application.

It's like trying to buy something on Amazon but you can't see the prices until you put the item in your cart. Oh, and you can't see your cart because the website is down.

After days of trying, I decided to call tech support since I was getting apparently random error messages from the site. I waited over 20 minutes on hold to get a real person, but the tech support folks said "just keep trying." They suggested the middle of the night when the site might be less busy.

Apparently, the government gurus don't understand that I have a job and a life that doesn't



Heather Alwin

• Frankly Frugal

afford me the luxury of camping out on their website to "keep trying."

Finally, after trying multiple times a day for over a week, I was able to log in and fill out most of an application.

The process was ridiculously long and time-consuming since the slow-loading webpages reloaded as each bit of information was added.

It took me nearly two hours to complete the application; then the site wouldn't let me submit it because my identity wasn't "verified."

Seriously, people, I'm not a terrorist. I just wanted to find out how much health insurance will cost!

Verification involved a phone call to Experian, the contracted verification service.

Experian isn't open during the late-night hours when the website was available.

And when I called Experian the next day, they weren't able to verify my info based on current data. The girl on the phone suggested I call the government people back.

At this point, I lost my cool. I had too many years of government nonsense in the military to play a game of it's-not-my-problem-so-try-another-office.

I insisted she try again, and she was finally able to verify me based on two-year-old data. Let me get this straight - my identity couldn't be verified based on current data, but two-year-old data is fine to prove I'm not cheating the system?!

I wasn't able to get back into the website for a few days. At this point, I discovered I still could not submit my application.

The site forced me to go back through each page, waiting what seemed like forever.

Again, at least an hour wasted only to find I

still wasn't verified in the government system so I still couldn't submit my application.

Admittedly, my patience for this process was already wearing so thin you could see through it. So I called tech support back.

"Try another browser," the girl said. As if my browser has anything to do with their system's verification issues. Besides, I'd already tried three different browsers.

She told me the tech support people are looking at the same website the public looks at; they can't see anything more than that, so she couldn't help me.

I told her that wasn't good enough, so she called a supervisor.

Unlike private companies, the government won't let callers talk directly to supervisors. Instead, the first person talks to her supervisor, then relays the information as if we're in a government game of telephone.

Her supervisor supposedly had the same advice, so I hung up the phone.

Not believing that advice, I called back immediately and talked to another person. This one couldn't help me either but at least did not suggest that my browser was the problem.

After another game of telephone, she said her supervisor couldn't help, so she walked me through the process I was supposed to use. It didn't work.

"You're doing everything right," she told me. "I don't know why it's not working."

Welcome to my world.

She elevated my case to their "advanced" tech support team and someone is supposed to call me in a few days. I won't hold my breath.

At this point, I'm torn between frustration over the incompetence of a system that is supposed to solve our country's healthcare woes and gratefulness that the government system is only managing insurance rather than actually attempting to provide medical care.

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Halloween costumes get out of hand

Aunt Hazel was in Atlanta a week before Halloween. She went shopping at the dollar store, and the employees were wearing costumes. At least, to Aunt Hazel they were. In our society they could just have been some teenagers wearing their regular assortment of beads, chains, and license plates.

Thus it was that when she went to the drug store to pick up her one week supply of pills, the seven of which required a mortgage to pay for, she had Halloween on her mind.

As she entered the drug store, no one was in sight. She marched to the counter and pounded on the bell. "Hey! Can I get some help here?"

From behind her she heard a hoarse whisper. "Lady, we're being robbed. Get on the floor."

She turned to see a man, dressed in a white lab coat, acting like a doorman. Aunt Hazel figured this was part of an elaborate Halloween joke. She was not in any mood to be teased. "Of course we are being robbed," she replied, "this is a pharmacy. Everyone is being robbed. That is what pharmaceutical companies do."

"No, lady," he countered. "We are really getting robbed."

Aunt Hazel looked at him with his lab coat. "If you are going to pretend you are getting

Other Opinions

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robbed, don't you think you should be dressed like a customer and not a pharmacist?"

Before he had a chance to reply, a teenager wielding a gun appeared. "Lady, get on the floor!" he demanded.

Aunt Hazel thought this joke was going too far. "Don't you be impertinent, young man. I'm here to get my medicine, and I don't want any of your funny business. If you work here, I want you to get it for me."

The young man was flustered and waved the gun at her. "But, lady we are..."

This annoyed Aunt Hazel, who didn't like guns. "Didn't your mother ever tell you you shouldn't point guns at people, even toy guns?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Then don't you think you should do what

you are told?"

"Yes, Ma'am," he replied.

"Then quit waving that toy around and be a good boy and get my medicine for me."

He slipped behind the counter and set the gun down and started rummaging through the previously prepared prescriptions. "What did you say your last name was?" he asked. "Thompson."

He was rummaging through the prescriptions when an older man came from the back room. He looked at the teenager with great disdain. "What do you think you are doing?"

"Um," the teenager stammered, pointing at her. "I was getting this lady's prescription."

The older man just snorted. "Let's get out of here." With that the two men left.

"What about my prescription?" Aunt Hazel called after them.

The people were just getting off of the floor when the young man reappeared. "Forgot this," he said, retrieving the gun.

Aunt Hazel just shook her head. "People around here take Halloween stuff way too far."

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

