

Other Viewpoints

Dodging deer a seasonal sport

It's time again for deer to be out and about, and more often in the path of motorists.

The Kansas Highway Patrol recently issued its annual reminder for Kansas travelers to be even more vigilant.

The high season for deer-related accidents runs from October through December. Deer-related collisions increase in frequency in mid-November, when the deer breeding season peaks, and while they move to new locations as crops are harvested and their habitats become less secure.

Costs climb as a result of the highway hazard.

The Kansas Department of Transportation reported 15 percent of all traffic crashes in 2012 involved deer.

Beyond the danger to motorists, the annual expense of vehicle repair and other property damage – plus law enforcement resources needed to cover wrecks – point to a need for continued pursuit of ways to lessen the threat by culling a deer population estimated at about 650,000 in 2012.

To that end, the Kansas Legislature approved a pre-rut, antlerless whitetail deer hunt, which recently took place. Another sensible strategy before the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism would be in discounted permits for younger hunters to encourage their participation.

While no strategy will erase the deer danger, law enforcement officers do offer ways to be safer on the road.

The best strategy is to be aware of areas that pose danger – most are marked by signs – and to drive slowly and watch both sides of the road, particularly around wooded areas and other places deer would frequent.

Deer often travel in groups. When one crosses the road, there may be others to follow, so it's necessary to slow down and watch carefully.

Motorists also should not swerve to miss deer in their path. Doing so can cause drivers to veer into the oncoming lane of traffic or roll in the ditch, which can be far more dangerous than hitting the deer.

Even as the state seeks new ways to cull the state's deer population – and new strategies are in order – motorists' common sense and awareness will remain the best defense against nasty, costly encounters with deer on the move.

– *The Garden City Telegram, via the Associated Press*

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966.
Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp, 126 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715 or Fax (202) 225-5124. Web site: huelskamp.house.gov

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 136-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 Ralph.Ostmeyer@senate.ks.gov

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Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

R.B. Headley - Sports Editor
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Sam Dieter - News Reporter
colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Heather Alwin - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Sharon Funk - Advertising Representative
sfunk@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Office Manager

Melissa Edmondson - Office Manager
medmondson@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager
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Agriculture's up to the task

The end of agriculture in America is near. American agriculture will soon lose its competitive edge.

So say some agricultural opponents. They also think that:

The high costs of producing food in America, compared with the costs in other countries, are pushing American producers out of business as foreign competitors develop enough to serve the same markets. Overseas producers with lower input costs will increasingly be able to undersell American producers.

Other major factors that will change the face of American agriculture include energy shortages, exhausted land and limited water resources.

Opponents of today's agriculture suggest stripping away the romance and nostalgia surrounding agriculture and seeing it for what it is – a business. They argue it's a business with limited potential for long-term profits because of its competitive nature.

Look at the big picture, they say. The whole world can produce crops in 2013.

Are these startling new revelations or are they predictions of those totally out of touch with the business of farming and ranching?

Critics of American agriculture contend that crop yields will not keep up with population growth. Some predict by the year 2050, arable American farmland will decrease nearly 200 million acres.

They also say water will become scarcer, forcing a shift of farming to regions where rainfall is plentiful. Marginal rainfall regions



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

like the western half of Kansas, eastern Colorado and the panhandles of Oklahoma and Texas may be destined to revert to grassland or the Great American Desert.

Should this happen, the United States will cease to be a food exporter. Our new diet will contain less meat and dairy products, more grains and beans and a sparser variety of vegetables.

It is hard for farmers and ranchers to stomach such predictions when American agriculture remains the envy of the world.

There is no doubt agriculture, like the rest of the U.S. economy, will continue to face challenges. True, this country is already impacted by higher input costs, dwindling avenues of trade and the constant wrath of Mother Nature.

In spite of these challenges, farmers and ranchers remain dedicated to staying on the land and continuing in their chosen vocation. They, better than anyone, understand the land they depend on for their livelihood is finite.

Care for this critical resource continues to improve. Today's farmers are increasing their organic matter in the soil. With the continuing practice of no-till and reduced tillage farming,

farmers continue to build organic matter and improve the soil tilth. There is no reason to consider this practice will be discontinued.

New and improved crop varieties are continually coming down the pike. Production practices continue to evolve and improve.

As for the question of water, this is always a major concern in farm and ranch country. Producers constantly chart rainfall amounts and monitor weather conditions. In Kansas, farmers are aware of changes in the Ogallala Aquifer.

They are tuned into water and the conservation of this vital resource. Some, especially in the western half of the state are concerned about the potential of long-term climate change. If such a phenomenon should occur, there is the possibility Kansas could become more arid – more like New Mexico, for example.

Barring a major shift in our climate, crops will continue to be planted in western Kansas. Production could be less than now, but this land will be farmed and farmed wisely.

Without question, today's crop of agricultural detractors raises some interesting possibilities. But American agriculture is up to the task. This country has the minds, machinery and dedication to continue producing for people around the globe.

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 lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Improve road ahead with negotiation

Great democracies do not lurch from doomsday moment to doomsday moment. They plan ahead, they fulfill their responsibilities. Congress must stop resolving one crisis by setting up another a few months down the road.

One of the more amazing spectacles in the days after the government shutdown ended was the obsession in Washington with who won and who lost in the showdown. Yes, the capital is focused on next year's elections, but honestly! There was only one real loser, and that was the American people.

Why? Because nothing got resolved. The agreement leaves the government open only until mid-January, and gives the Treasury the ability to borrow through early February. All that effort secured us the barest minimum that we needed. Tax reform, spending, entitlements, jobs and economic growth: we're no better off than we were before a small faction in Congress brought us to the brink of an unnecessary disaster. So the question is, can we avoid a similar crisis down the road?

The record of the recent past gives no ground for optimism, though members of Congress may now recognize the enormous economic costs to the nation of a shutdown and near-default. To avoid repeating their recent sorry spectacle, however, they will have to confront three challenges.

First, Congress has to break its habit of governing by crisis. Second, its members need to take a leaf from this most recent experience and remember the essence of legislating is negotiation. Finally, they need to recognize that every time Congress fails to assert itself, other institutions gain more power at its expense.

Great democracies do not lurch from doomsday moment to doomsday moment. They plan

Other Opinions

• **Lee Hamilton**
Center on Congress

ahead, confront and resolve their challenges, fulfill their responsibilities abroad, and respond to their own people's needs. Congress can do none of these things so long as its members insist on resolving one crisis by setting up another a few months down the road.

Some people in Washington argue that this is because we live in trying times, faced with bewildering economic upheaval, social and demographic change, and a sorely divided body politic. That's all true – but politics has always been about getting things done in difficult environments. Congress was designed to be the institution where the difficulties of the moment could be overcome by legislators with the skill and temperament to work together to overcome them. Instead, we face a host of challenges with a Congress unable to address them because it can only postpone a crisis from one date to another.

I find myself thinking often these days of the skillful legislators I've known over the years. Where are their counterparts today? The negotiations that produced the last-minute settlement may have taken a lot of effort, but they do not measure up to what's required.

Congress only works well when its members understand some key things: that each party has to walk away with something; that it's cru-

cial to preserve flexibility and avoid pandering and scorched-earth rhetoric; that it needs to address the issues Americans care about most; that to avoid failure all the key players need to be at the table; and that they need the fortitude not to walk away from talks when things are going poorly.

Years ago, key players in serious negotiations went out to Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington, and were confined to the compound until they came to a resolution. We need legislators who are willing to roll up their sleeves and commit that fully to the process.

Because in our system, power never evaporates, it just flows elsewhere. So when Congress doesn't perform, it cedes power to others.

By its inaction, Congress has given power to the President, who can use executive actions to enact policy. It has strengthened the federal bureaucracy by leaving regulatory decisions to federal agencies with very little direction or oversight. It has given massive economic power to the Federal Reserve, since someone has to promote economic growth in the face of congressional failure to deal with our fiscal issues. And it has allowed the Supreme Court to become the central policy-making body on controversial issues from campaign finance to affirmative action to environmental regulation.

"Any society that relies on nine unelected judges to resolve the most serious issues of the day is not a functioning democracy," Justice Anthony Kennedy said in a recent speech. I'm sorry to say that he's talking about us.

Lee Hamilton is Director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.

Mallard Fillmore

• **Bruce Tinsley**

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