

Other Viewpoints

Guns and voting just do not mix

If Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt decides that concealed-carry of guns must be allowed at polling places...

As the House and Senate voted 104-16 and 32-7, respectively, for the bill last spring and Gov. Sam Brownback signed it...

That will be mission accomplished for lawmakers - though 55 percent of Kansans polled in the Docking Institute of Public Affairs' most recent "Kansas Speaks" survey said they oppose allowing concealed-carry of guns in schools, hospitals and government buildings.

Because the law is ambiguous regarding polling places, Secretary of State Kris Kobach recently requested a legal opinion from Schmidt. Polling places usually are located where concealed guns are not allowed...

If Schmidt's verdict is that the guns need to be allowed, expect some churches and other private entities to stop being polling places. That will limit the options for some communities.

Guns and voting seem like an uneasy combination at best. As it is, somebody who displays or brandishes a firearm at a poll can be prosecuted for voter intimidation.

So it will be a significant change for Kansas if polling places must welcome concealed guns, in some cases trampling on not only the local control of public entities but the property rights of privately owned buildings.

Sedgwick County Commissioner Richard Ranzau, a leader of the local effort to open more public buildings to concealed-carry, said the polling-place issue "is something that is going to have to be sorted out at the state level."

That sorting out should have happened before the law was passed at the Statehouse - where, it should be noted, no such gun mandate applies.

- The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press



Ag secretaries talk past, present policy

With more than three decades of collective service under their belts, six former U.S. agricultural secretaries discussed and cussed climate change, international trade, subsidies, crop insurance, food stamps and a bushel basket full of other ag issues Oct. 21.

As part of Kansas State University's Landon Lecture series, participants included Kansan Dan Glickman, John Block, Mike Espy, Mike Johanns, Ed Schafer and Ann Veneman.

Glickman, who served as ag secretary under President Clinton from 1995 to 2001, said there are great things happening in agriculture. "Food and agriculture are hot topics today," Glickman told those who packed McCain Auditorium.

The farm economy has never been better, Glickman continued.

"After years, and years, and years of low prices and bad economic conditions, we're in an era of a much stronger farm economy," the former Kansas ag secretary noted. "That's not to say there won't still be ups and downs, but the era of agriculture being the weak sister of American economics is over."

The challenge for farmers will be to double food production by 2050 to help feed an estimated 9 billion people, Block said. Block served as ag secretary under President Reagan from 1981 to 1986.

"We can't let the critics stop us from using new technology," Block said. "We have to use it or not meet our objectives."

Mike Johanns, who served under President Bush from 2005 to 2008, stressed the impor-



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tance of hammering out a farm bill but said this wouldn't be enough.

He said this country's farm economy will grow and flourish with an enlightened approach to taxation, university research and world trade.

The lack of consensus on a new farm bill demonstrates the deep philosophical divide in Congress threatening the future of farm legislation, Espy said. He served under Bill Clinton in the early '90s.

The political middle no longer exists, Espy said. Urban Democrats are drawn to food programs and away from production agriculture while rural Republicans push to cut federal programs to the bone.

"The attitude in the House and Senate has changed," Espy continued. "In the line of fire will be agriculture. We've got a real problem, guys."

California's Ann Veneman was sworn in as the first woman Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture on Jan. 20, 2001, Secretary Veneman presided over one of the most historic times in American agriculture. Her tenure included record farm income, record agricultural exports and the creation of stronger pest and disease protection systems for the country

Cutting food stamps would hurt Kansans

With the economy still recovering at a sluggish pace, it's hard to understand why the House of Representatives is so intent on taking a meat cleaver to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps), which keeps millions of people from falling below the poverty level.

The Republican-dominated House approved a bill that, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would remove nearly 4 million people from the program. The House split the agricultural and nutrition pieces of the five-year Farm Bill into two parts and proposed making \$40 billion in cuts over a decade to the nutrition part.

The folks who would be hurt if this legislation were to become law include children and working-class families. A Census Bureau report found that food stamps have kept about 4 million people above the poverty level and keep millions more from becoming even more impoverished.

Aside from the moral implications of making extreme cuts to an anti-hunger program that has helped a lot of working families, children, the elderly and the disabled, these cuts make no sense economically. Decreasing the purchasing power of millions of Americans is bound to have a retarding effect on a tepid economic recovery: A 2008 Moody's Analytics study shows that every \$1 spent to help reduce hunger has resulted in \$1.70 in economic activity.

This shows that the impetus behind the Republican-dominated House's determination to slash food stamps is ideological, not eco-



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Wildcat Ramblings

nomic. It's based on a false belief that this program allows herds of able-bodied Americans to mooch off the government.

"Politically, it's a great issue," said Congressman Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.), who represents Kansas' Big First District and was among those pushing for larger cuts. "I think most Americans don't think you should be getting something for free, especially for the able-bodied adults."

While conservatives are correct to want to stop freeloaders from living off the government dole, they greatly overestimate the number of people who make up this notorious group. And, in their overzealous pursuit to purge the lazy and nonambitious from government assistance, they wind up offering bills that would hurt some of the most vulnerable Americans.

"The latest proposal from the House is an about-face on our progress fighting hunger," wrote former senators Bob Dole (R-Kansas) and Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) in a bipartisan op-ed in the Los Angeles Times. "It would eliminate food assistance for 4 million to 6 million Americans."

Furthermore, the Tea-Party conservatives'

claim that the program is rife with fraud and freeloaders doesn't align with facts. Agricultural Department figures show the program has lower rates of fraud than farm subsidies such as crop insurance.

"SNAP has one of the most rigorous quality-control systems of any public benefit program, and despite the recent growth in caseloads, the share of total SNAP payments that represent overpayments, underpayments or payments to ineligible households reached a record low in fiscal year 2011," according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

The Tea Party's fact-free beliefs illuminate what happens when a group chooses to listen to think tanks, cable news networks and talk-radio hosts who confirm their basic world view instead of objectively assessing the facts and taking care of the vulnerable people they were elected to represent.

"In a country struggling to emerge from the worst recession since the Depression, this is no time play politics with hunger," Dole and Daschle wrote.

Tea Party-backed Republicans should heed the former senators' sage advice.

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