

Barriers are going down



The concrete barriers were taken down today on K-27. Cones will replace the barriers as the crew moves on to pour concrete on Friday.
Photo by Doug Jackson/The Goodland Daily News

Children healthier, still face problems

By Paul Recer
WASHINGTON (AP) — American children are healthier, better fed, less likely to live in poverty and more likely to survive to adulthood than ever before, the government reported Thursday.

But U.S. youngsters statistically are still worse off by some measures than are children in other nations, and American kids are still drinking too much and smoking too often, the report said.

"In some areas, the health and well-being of American children is better than it has ever been," said Dr. Duane Alexander of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

But Alexander added: "There are some things that are not the way they should be, and even the indicators that are 'best-ever' status have room for improvement."

The report, which is the government's annual look at the status of America's children, was compiled by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics from 20 federal agencies on the health, education, economic and education trends among America's 70.2 million children under the age of 18.

The report is based on the most recent statistics, with most of the data from 1999, 1998 or 1997.

Among the highlights:
—Children represent 26 percent of the U.S. population, compared with 36 percent in 1964, the end of the post-World War II baby boom.

—The 1998 infant mortality rate — meaning death before the first birthday — is unchanged from the 1997 rate of 7.2 deaths per 1,000 live births. Worldwide, the United States ranks 25th in infant mortality.

—Mortality rates for older children and adolescents have improved in the past three years, meaning children are more likely now to reach adulthood.

—The percentage of youngsters 19 months to 35 months old who have received vaccinations against disease is at an all-time high. For 1998, the rate was 79 percent, a 3 percentage point increase from the previous year.

—The rate of teen-agers giving

birth continues to drop, following a trend first noted in 1991. There were 32 births per 1,000 females between the ages 15 and 17 in 1997, while the latest data, from 1998, puts the rate at 30.

—The percentage of low birth weight babies (under 5.5 pounds at birth) continues to go up, increasing from 7.5 percent of newborns in 1997 to 7.6 percent in 1998.

One reason may be an increased in multiple births caused by a more common use of fertility drugs and medically assisted conception.

—The percentage of children living in homes where the income is below the poverty level dropped from 19 percent in 1997 to 18 percent in 1998, a rate last measured in 1980.

The percentage of children living in poverty reached a peak of 22 percent in 1993 and has been declining since.

Alexander said health officials are concerned that the rate of drinking, smoking and drug use among American youngsters remains "stable at unacceptably high levels despite our efforts to reduce these."

The report found that the rate of youthful cigarette smokers was essentially unchanged from 1998 to 1999. The percentage of 12th graders who reported smoking daily, for instance, increased by a percentage point, to 23 percent, during that period.

Alcohol use was also essentially unchanged, with 31 percent of 12th graders reporting frequent drinking during 1999, and 32 percent in 1998.

Illicit drug use among 12th graders was 27 percent for both years, the report found.

Alexander said efforts to combat sudden infant death syndrome by teaching parents and caregivers to put babies to sleep on their backs instead of on their tummies has been a major factor in the reduction of infant mortality.

"We have reduced SIDS by about 50 percent with this effort, but we can achieve an even greater reduction," he said.

The increase in low birth weight babies is a major contributor to the infant mortality rate, said Alexander.

Babies born prematurely are more

fragile and less apt to survive, although Alexander noted that American medical workers now "are able to save more and more" of such infants.

Death rates among children ages 1 to 19 "are the lowest they have ever been," said Alexander. The biggest drop was among adolescents, ages 15 to 19.

In 1997, the death rate was 79 per 100,000. The latest figures, from 1998, put it at 75.

Alexander said the drop in death rates among children can be traced, in part, to an aggressive campaign to lower traffic accident deaths, but car crashes are still a significant factor in childhood mortality.

"We made major progress in reducing injuries with car seats and seat belts," he said, "but two-thirds of children killed in auto accidents were not using seat belts or car seats."

On the Net: The report is available at <http://childstats.gov>

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Actors re-enact evolution trial

By DAVID MILES

LAWRENCE, Kan. (AP) — Seventy-five years after the Scopes "Monkey Trial" in Tennessee over the teaching of evolution, actors re-enacted parts of it Wednesday in Kansas, where debate on the theory continues.

The People for the American Way Foundation sponsored the dramatic presentation, as well as a panel discussion and debate on evolution and creationism following the performance.

The event, titled "Origins: Exploring the Evolution-Creationism Dispute Through Drama and Debate," was at the Lied Center on the University of Kansas campus.

Actors read from transcripts of the 1925 trial, held in Dayton, Tenn.

As a result of the trial, biology teacher John Scopes was convicted and fined \$100 for teaching evolution. His conviction later was overturned by the Tennessee Supreme Court on procedural grounds.

About 1,500 people attended the premiere of the theatrical presentation, and they were encouraged to applaud, murmur, hiss or shout "hallelujah" or "amen" throughout the performance.

One sign on stage simply called for "hubbub."

The audience didn't need any prom-

pting to respond to many of the barbs between prosecutor William Jennings Bryan, played by Ed Asner, and defense attorney Clarence Darrow, played by James Cromwell.

One exchange elicited both laughter and applause. Bryan said, "You may guess; evolutionists guess."

Darrow responded, "But when we do guess, we have the sense to guess right."

Ralph Neas, president of the foundation, said the State Board of Education's decision in August 1999 to de-emphasize evolution in science testing standards made Kansas a natural venue for the event.

"Kansas is today's ground zero in the battle over evolution," Neas said during a news conference before the event.

"How Kansas resolves this dispute will ripple out in all directions to affect the education of millions of children who have never even set foot in this state."

Neas said the debate over evolution also is occurring in other states, including Alabama, Arizona, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Oklahoma and Texas.

He said activities in those states have ranged from efforts to delete evolution from science standards and tests to including a disclaimer in textbooks

downplaying the importance of the theory.

In Kansas, the science standards that de-emphasize evolution also make no mention of the big-bang theory of the origin of the universe. The standards are used to develop statewide tests for students.

The board's decision to approve them focused national and even some international attention on Kansas and made evolution a major political issue. Five of the board's 10 seats will be filled in the Nov. 7 general election.

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, a conservative Republican, has endorsed Linda Holloway, who was the board's chairwoman when it approved the new science standards and is now seeking re-election.

Greg Musil, a moderate seeking the Republican nomination for the 3rd Congressional District, is backing Holloway's opponent, Sue Gamble, of Lawrence, in the Aug. 1 GOP primary. Musil has tried to make evolution an issue in his congressional race to get moderates to the polls.

Holloway, a Shawnee Republican, said that while the evolution debate continues 75 years after the Scopes trial, creationists are the ones under attack now.

Thanks for telling me what's on your mind!

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Perhaps that is what I really want to say, I am not asleep. I am working hard for you and want to continue to represent you in Topeka. Thanks for the opportunity, and thanks for telling me what's on your mind. It is the best way I know for me to do the best job I can for you.


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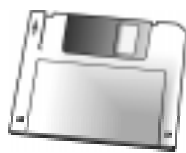
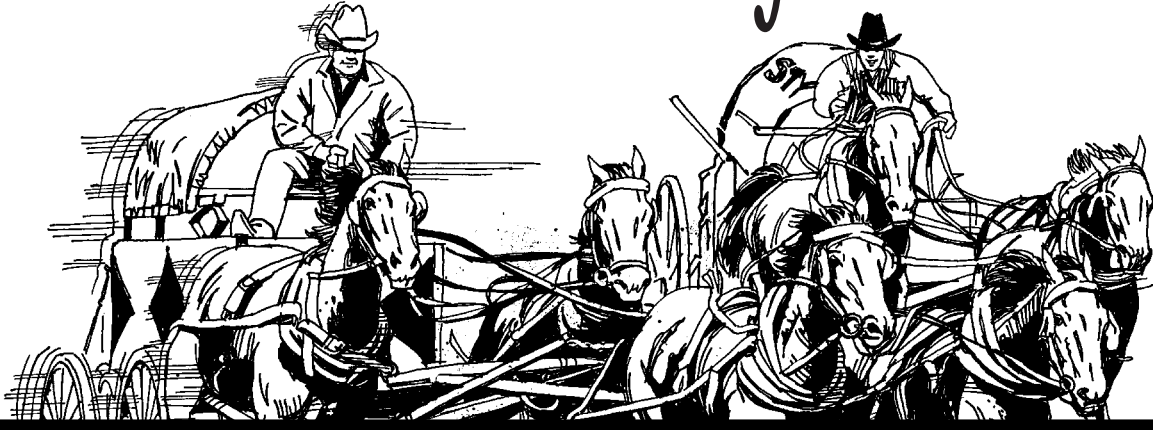
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