

commentary

from other pens...

Fines strange way to balance state budget

The Topeka Capital Journal on increased traffic fines:
It wasn't in the governor's State of the State address. It wasn't the subject of a lot of hearings or stories during the legislative session. But now drivers in Kansas will be socked with tripled traffic fines. The reason: Lawmakers need the money in order to make ends meet... Needing more money is a dubious justification. The intent of traffic fines ought to be deterrence against more infractions i.e., public safety. We get a little uncomfortable if courts and law enforcement officers are perceived as out to make a buck. Still, state fines have been parked at the same level since 1982. And Kansas has fallen out of line with neighboring states' fines... In addition, regardless of the more immediate reason for the rise... deterrence is definitely a factor. Fact is, even with the tripling of the fines, the total cost for that speeding ticket and court costs will only go from \$64 to \$84. Nonetheless, that's a pretty good incentive to slow down. There's new incentive to sober up, too, which is even better news: A new law going into effect July 1 stiffens fines, jail time and driver's license suspensions for drunken drivers... Whether it will make a dent in the number of DUIs remains to be seen.

The Garden City Telegram filing judicial vacancies:
A fundamental right of citizenship is access to the halls of justice. Philip Vieux, Chief Judge for the 25th Judicial District of Kansas, knows that, but struggles to assure its availability to all given the fiscal constraints demanded by Kansas lawmakers. Among the most difficult is the mandatory 60-day waiting period to fill a vacancy. It's a rule that should be abandoned. Court clerks provide an essential service in the communities they serve... Understaffed offices mean delays. Priority is given to criminal cases, and there are few who would argue the need to expedite criminal cases through the system. That means civil litigation takes a back seat. Nothing is more frustrating to a litigant than a drawn-out judicial process... Vieux's district is already one judge short, and a replacement for retired Judge Steve Nyswonger won't be on the bench until fall... While mandatory waiting periods and delay tactics on judge replacements may benefit the bottom line, they do a disservice to citizens who rely on the court system for justice.

Winfield Daily Courier on keeping B-1s at McConnell:
The Department of Defense says jobs would not be lost at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita if the B-1 bomber is no longer deployed there. This is good news. But it does not justify the proposal to reduce the nation's B-1 fleet from 93 to 62 and move those based in Kansas and Georgia to Texas and South Dakota. Nor does it justify eliminating the Kansas Air National Guard from the B-1 picture. Largely because the nine B-1s of the Kansas Air Guard's 184th Bomb Wing are based in Wichita, the "Air Capital of the World," skilled, experienced specialists are available to support them. This is not always true at regular Air Force bases, where personnel turns over faster. The Kansas Air Guard unit this year will rebuild over 100 B-1 engines, saving nearly \$60 million compared to the cost elsewhere within the Air Force, according to Sen. Pat Roberts, Rep. Todd Tiahrt and other members of the Kansas congressional delegation. They say the Air Force would actually save \$13 million a year by leaving the B-1s at McConnell... The B-1 is the only bomber we have fast enough to make a conventional weapons strike and, if identified by radar, get out of the area without a high risk of damage or destruction from air defenses. This speed will be needed as air defenses around the world grow more high tech.



Has Greenspan lost the Midas touch?

Tribal war in that pioneer village along the Potomac again? You bet. The vice Chief at the White Teepee needed a pacemaker to regulate his heart beat. That's just beltway barf. It isn't even California on steroids, in a rolling black out. They wonder if they should use a clothes line to save energy. Humm, a \$10 million estate with red wood patios and use a clothes line? That's really roughing it. Sure it is and it's a national crisis, too. Everyone knows they are not going to give up their temperature controlled pool systems in their customized homes of glass and granite. That would be worse than running into a mama bear five miles from their green house using Sport Utility Vehicles. You just got to feel sorry for those guys it's hard to run in three piece suits and their alligator shoes. You know those Californians are madder than a New Yorker who can't buy Coors beer. The hottest debate in the California legislature is a measure to outlaw discrimination against effeminate men and butch women. So don't wait for a rolling black out to turn off the lights and go after each other! California depends on the northwest power grid for its energy and so do farmers from Idaho. They will have a rolling black out for the year 2001 crop year. Their energy companies are sending the power they once used to California.



wayne gattshall

• wayne's world

It might be all right to pay \$30 a barrel for Persian Gulf oil but don't you raise our gas prices. California has more cars than people, and they have the Golden Gate Bridge too. Wonder what they are saying to the enviros who say the automobile has no useful purpose. Bet they would say the same thing about those 18-wheelers that deliver the moo moos for their fit for a queen 20 ounce steaks. To have price caps makes about as much sense as federal caps on Big Macs. This nation is just as divided now as it was over slavery. The trouble is out in that election night green part of America they don't see the pollution of Cape Cod and the Potomac river as having anything to do with the price of gas, but they think those gypsy moths (environmentalists) do. They have a strangle hold on what farmers pay for fertilizer and diesel. They don't know you can't harvest a field of corn from a bicycle. Not everyone can hop a bus to the nearest coffee shop either. These guys may look in the mirror and say I am like America, and you are all a bunch of raciest hicks in the sticks. You are letting little children drink arsenic water, too. That sure ought be a soc-

cer mom eye popper. But most of this global warming is coming from the gypsy moth part of the country. So how about a Kyoto treaty for them. All they have to do is trade carbon dioxide on the futures market. It's just the cyberspace economy, don't you know. Well not quite if they did they would have price depressing surpluses. Now everyone knows who has been making all of the money in the decade of the 90s. If the 80s was the decade of greed then the 90s was the decade of the super greed. Greenspan, your halo is slipping it was not the unimagined productivity of the U.S. economy. It was the lower than a snakes belly commodity prices, of oil and farm commodities that gave us the greatest economy in history. That is until the crude oil spike, then it was the price gougers who are putting the greatest economy in the stool. So who are those fancy guys that said higher commodity prices is a tax bracket creep on the people? They are the same geeks that say we need both a tax cut and lower interest rates. Well someone else has been paying their taxes forever, and if the big Chief in the White Teepee doesn't do something about the economy in the green part of America he will go the way of General Suharto of Indonesia. Put him under house arrest and try him as a war criminal. © 2001 Wayne Gattshall wayneg@goodland-ixks.com

Touchtone telephone service is optional

Dear Attorney General Stovall:
I just received my telephone bill today and for the first time noticed a \$1.15 charge for touchtone. I purchased my touchtone phone through the phone company and paid for the phone in monthly payments. The phone has been paid for and has been mine for at least two years. Now I see this charge. Are they trying to make me pay for the phone twice?
Dear Kansas Consumer:
We contacted the phone company and discovered that the \$1.15 charge is for touchtone service. Due to recent legislation regulated by the FCC, phone companies now have to itemize charges that they once could "bundle" together. This may explain why you have not noticed this charge before. Touchtone service is so universal, it is amazing that we still have to pay for it. However, this service is optional. If you choose not to have touchtone, the tone will be replaced by the rotary-



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

dial sound. Most touchtone telephones have a switch that allows you to change over from touchtone to rotary and back, so you can use your phone with a rotary sound. Please be aware that if you do not have touchtone service, and try to use the service, you will be charged. Touchtone service is not absolutely necessary. You can still access the internet or send faxes using a rotary system. However, a rotary system may be inconvenient when accessing services such as an automated answering system. Now that phone bills have to be itemized, many

consumers have noticed charges they did not notice before. It is always a good idea to read through your phone bill and to call your phone company to question any unfamiliar charges. If you feel you have a problem with your phone bill that is not being adequately addressed by the phone company, please contact my Consumer Protection division at 1-800-432-2310. Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, 120 SW 10th, 2nd Floor, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and an agent will return your call promptly.

Stem cell research a religious test for Bush

WASHINGTON - The moral question of whether to spend taxpayer dollars to finance stem cell research confronts President Bush with a nasty choice. Should the government underwrite medical research that kills fertilized human eggs now being stored in fertility clinics in order to extract such cells? If Bush sticks to his opposition to such funding, he faces loud and rancorous condemnation by those who back cutting-edge research in battling lethal diseases, such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. If the president relents, he betrays the absolute convictions of those who believe human life begins at conception. Politically, it's a question of whom Bush most fears to offend: the Democrats, editorial writers and opinion leaders of secular opinion who will denounce him from both left and center, or the religious communities, Roman Catholic and evangelical, who would see a Bush 180 on the stem cell issue as a stark abdication of moral authority. Religiously, I would think the choice now hurtling toward Bush like a runaway train engine is more calamitous. How does he justify using tax dollars, which people must pay or go to prison, to finance the taking of life? Several of the president's anti-abortion allies claim to have solved the moral conundrum. Some say that a human embryo, a fertilized egg, is not truly a person until it is placed in a woman's uterus. Other proponents offer moral refuge by denying



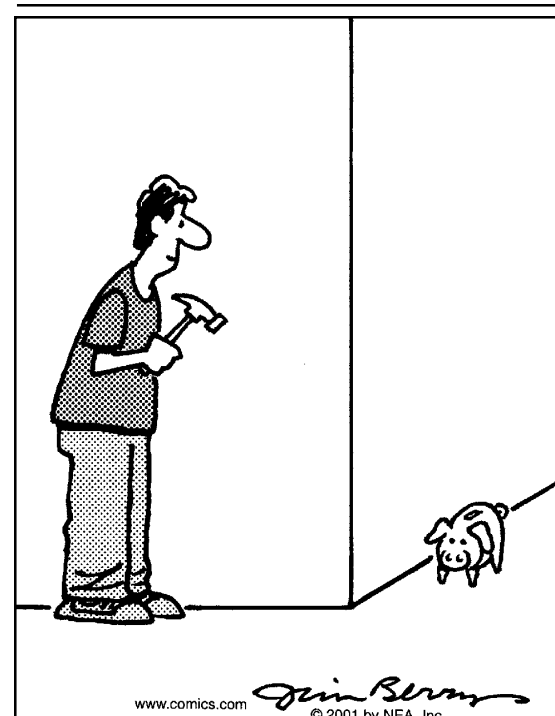
chris matthews

• commentary

federal funds for research using new embryos. For a person who believes that life begins at the moment of conception, whether in a laboratory or in a womb, those factors mitigate nothing. Unlike the debate over abortion rights, the stem cell issue is not tied up with the ongoing culture war. It is not caught up in gender politics, the right of a woman to control her body. Nor can it be tagged and discarded as another attempt to bring government "into the bedroom." The question of whether to fund stem cell research has nothing to do with sex. It's a matter of metaphysics; what you think about that most basic question: What is human life, and how should it be respected? Morally, I look for answers. Should even the most "pro-life" person want these unimplanted embryos kept alive in perpetuity? Does anyone's moral beliefs require such an extraordinary extension of this test-tube life for centuries upon centuries? This is the moral quandary now sitting on the president's desk. It requires a decision worthy of Solomon, a daring leap of faith. This is not a tax cut, where you can divide the differences. This is one baby that will not be cut in

half. Chris Matthews, a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, is host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels. The 1999 edition of "Hardball" was published by Touchstone Books.

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e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com

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nwkansas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services (nbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkansas.com)

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