

commentary

from other pens...

State should change redistricting method

The Iola Register on redistricting:

Kansas should change the way it redraws its legislative and congressional districts before the 2010 census rolls around.

After nearly five months of rancorous effort, the Legislature's score on congressional redistricting turned out to be zero, nada, nil.

Now a three-judge panel will take over and do the job in a few days.

But that may not be soon enough for Sec. of State Ron Thornburgh to do all that needs to be done to hold this year's primary on Aug. 6, the traditional date.

The redistricting fiasco has already pushed the filing deadline up from June 10 to July 9. Thornburgh's office says that's so close to Aug. 6 that it would be difficult to get sample ballots printed, send ballots to members of the armed services and provide for advance voting.

It doesn't have to be this chaotic or this uncertain.

Kansas should follow the example other states have set and establish an independent board of citizens to draw new districts after the next census — and for all the censuses to come.

Apparently there is no other way to prevent legislative majorities from taking advantage of the constitutional redistricting mandate to reward themselves and punish their political opponents.

The Garden City Telegram on drug law:

For several years, Garden City has attempted to keep potential intoxicants out of the hands of children. Now Kansas has a law makes huffing a crime.

Huffing is the practice of inhaling toxins, generally everyday household products like spray paint and glue, to get high...

Law enforcement had a difficult time prosecuting someone for driving under the influence, for example, because there was no legal definition of huffing to pursue a DUI conviction.

Now they can.

The law makes sense because the mind-altering effects of inhaling such toxins can impair judgment and reaction as much, or worse, than alcohol...

That huffing has been tabbed as another vehicle that leads to more illicit drug use is reason enough to make the practice illegal.

The guess here is no one will take issue with the new law and the hope is that publicity about it will draw attention among youth workers, school officials and especially parents to be on the lookout for behavioral patterns that would suggest someone has been huffing.

The new law is not a preventative measure, it's an enforcement one. Prevention is the ultimate objective, however, and that comes with increased awareness, which is a fuse that can be lit by the new law.

where to write

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Be cautious buying a car in an on-line auction

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I recently saw a car advertised on an on-line auction site that I believe would make a great car for my daughter who is in high school. The current bid is several thousand dollars less than a similar model car I have seen locally, and I am tempted to make a bid for it. However, a neighbor of mine once purchased a vehicle through an on-line auction, and when the car was delivered it did not meet his expectations. Attorney General Stovall, what advice can you give?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

On-line auctions can be a way to find bargains and unusual items from across the country. However, some buyers never receive the items they paid for or they may receive items that are not what was represented. Imagine if you go to a car dealer and the salesperson only shows you a couple of pictures of the available cars with a list of options and specifications for each. The salesperson asks you to bid against other buyers for the car you choose, without letting you inspect the car or have it inspected by a mechanic. Then, if you are the winning bidder, the salesperson is nowhere around when the car is delivered. This is what happens during an Internet car sale.

To reduce some of the risks associated with buy-



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

ing through an on-line auction, you should take some precautions. First, remember that buying something from another individual, about whom you know nothing but an e-mail address, is far riskier than purchasing from a local company or individual. You should contact the website and ask if any complaints have been filed against the seller. Second, since you cannot physically test drive the car, you should contact a reputable mechanic where the car is being sold to check the car before you close the deal.

This same precaution should be applied to other high dollar items that you would normally test and/or inspect yourself. Third, because of the difference in locations, you should be aware that local laws may not protect you in the transaction. This is particularly true when the seller is located in another state or another country.

Before you decide to make this transaction, find

out what method of payment is to be used. If possible, protect your money by using an escrow service. For a fee, this type of service will take your payment and hold it until you confirm that you have received the item you purchased in the condition in which it was represented. The service then releases your payment to the seller.

Most importantly, get everything in writing. Be sure to print out and save the auction listing for the item, your winning bid confirmation, the feedback report on the seller, and all correspondence and e-mails between you and the seller. If there is a dispute, this information can be useful and may be required to file a complaint with the auction site or with law enforcement agencies.

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 your call will be returned promptly.

Kansas has a bountiless harvest

To the Editor:

Across Kansas, combines and harvest crews are wrapping up another wheat harvest. This year, the harvest story is not about the wheat being cut, but about the wheat that should have been cut — wheat destroyed by drought and wheat plowed into the dry ground. Where there has been wheat to harvest, low yields are evidence of the ravages of drought. While farmers see harvests come and go every year, this one will certainly not soon be forgotten. Unfortunately, this year it's the dry weather and failed crop that will be remembered.

Last year drought took a heavy toll on Kansas. This year will be far worse. In Kansas, almost a million acres of wheat have been abandoned — an area larger than the state of Rhode Island. In southwest Kansas, the driest area of the state, as much as 90 percent of the wheat planted was lost to drought. This translates into a loss of over \$277 million in farm income this year. After last year's dismal crop, few thought things could get worse.



from our readers

• to the editor

But Kansas farmers now have \$277 million less than last year to pay their bills and to care for their families.

Behind the millions of dollars lost from the agricultural economy are real people. I am contacted daily by farmers and ranchers hurting from last year's drought, whose difficulties have been compounded by this year's losses. In Hugoton, farmers have seen less than an inch of rain in the last year, and cracks in the earth run several feet deep. Here, there is not even enough moisture to replant failed crops. In Rolla, where the federal grassland is being closed due to drought, ranchers are sell-

ing the cattle herds they have spent a lifetime building. All across western Kansas, ranchers are liquidating herds, as the little grass that was there has been grazed to the ground.

For the last two years, farmers in drought-affected areas have worked tirelessly, only to come away with less than what they started with. Crop insurance alone cannot relieve the cash flow crisis of these farm families. The need for assistance is greater, and more urgent, than it was a year ago. Farmers and ranchers need help to compensate for this natural disaster.

These are tough times in farm country, and we cannot close our eyes to the severity of this drought or the magnitude of its consequences. A dark cloud is hovering over the future of many producers in western Kansas; unfortunately, that cloud holds no rain. Without disaster assistance, this year, some producers may simply dry up and blow away.

By Congressman Jerry Moran
Hays

Bush's ultimatum boosts Arafat

Washington — George W. Bush has sent Palestinians the same ultimatum John F. Kennedy sent the Cubans: dump your leader!

Ditch Yasser Arafat, Bush demanded; then, and only then, we can do business. It's the same command JFK issued to the Cuban people the week before a pro-Castro zealot assassinated him.

Fidel — if you failed to notice — is still calling the shots in Havana four decades later.

So what good can we expect from this latest U.S. ultimatum to an angry Third World people? Will Arafat step aside in the interest of better American-Palestinian relations? Will the Palestinians vote for someone other than Arafat to show their respect for the wishes of a country they see as hopelessly pro-Israeli?

Or, more likely, will the Bush ultimatum give the fragile cat holed up in Ramallah an added political life? Will it arm Arafat with an incendiary applause line to use on the West Bank and Gaza Strip stumps during this emerging political season? "Do you want George Bush to pick our leaders," he can lob out the grenade, "or the great, suffering Palestinian people?"

You must understand that Arafat really wants these elections. Like every politician past his prime, he wants a last hurrah to emboss his name in the Arab history books, to defy his enemies in Israel, to trump his critics. Bush's demand for his removal now gives him the nationalistic battle cry he can bring to the streets of Jericho, Nablus and even Jenin:

"Vote for the man Sharon and Bush fear most! Yasser! He's our baby!"

Monday's ultimatum plays directly into Arafat's strongest role: victim. When Sharon circled his camp with Israeli Defense Force tanks, his numbers went through the roof. Expect something like that



chris matthews

• commentary

to follow Bush's decree.

We know that the PLO leader is eager for elections to show he's still top man. It was the only topic he wanted to talk about when I met with him last month. "They are asking for new elections. They have the right after this long a period. They have a right to say their opinion, what is wrong, what is right. We are proud of our democracy."

Arafat made a big deal out of the role former President Carter and the international community played in monitoring the 1996 elections. What happens if he invites those same figures, including Carter, to validate these new elections? Would Bush dare to denounce a victory by Arafat or his people? Would any American president be comfortable saying that democracy isn't the right way to choose a leader?

"I call on the Palestinian people to elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror," Bush demanded on Tuesday.

There is nothing wrong with an American president making that kind of demand at home. Bush may call for the election of Republican governors or senators this November. If voters choose Democrats, instead, it's no big deal. That's how democracy works.

But if Palestinian voters ignore an American president's call, it carries a far direr consequence. At the very minimum, the world will know that the people of Palestine do not believe that George W.

Bush has their best interests at heart. A billion Arabs and other Islamic peoples will be confirmed in their opinion that this Mideast conflict is between Israel and its American backer on one side, them on the other.

You can spot the winners from this us-against-them deal.

One is the Republican Party. Bush could use bigger support in the Jewish community. Certainly his brother Jeb could use it in Florida this fall. I can hear the two Bushes leading the elderly condominium crowd in a delirious chant, "It's time for Arafat to go!"

The simplicity of the anti-Arafat position will also sell among conservative Christians who care for biblical Israel and evidence neither interest nor sympathy in the plight of real, live Palestinians.

For the people charting Bush's politics in 2002 and 2004, the map to study is the Electoral College. To win re-election in a hazardous economy, the president needs to hold his base in the Bible Belt and get the most votes in Florida. Most urgent of all, he needs to get his brother re-elected this November in a state where the black vote will be historic in both size and anger. He will need a swing to the Republicans among high turn-out Jewish voters to overcome it.

Dumping Yasser Arafat may, judged by short-term politics here at home, be a political masterstroke. But it may carry a big-time price in the long run in a region of the world that already has too many matches being thrown at the gasoline.

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

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