

# commentary

from other pens...

## Nice to see church step up to pay taxes

**The Topeka Capital Journal on church paying taxes:**

By law, churches and other religious organizations don't have to pay taxes, but one Topeka congregation has decided to pay anyway.

Last week, the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of Topeka presented a check for \$1,323 to the Topeka School Fund.

Members felt the payment in lieu of taxes was a way they could make a stand for education. They say they hope their donation inspires other tax-exempt groups to do the same.

The Topeka School Fund is a non-profit foundation, separate from Topeka Unified School District 501, that supports public education in Topeka.

Governed by a volunteer board, it provides grants for projects that otherwise wouldn't be funded by the district. The organization also funds a summer arts program for students from all districts in Topeka.

The Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship's move is certainly rare, if not unprecedented, in Topeka. The congregation's generosity and sense of conscience exemplify the true religious spirit of caring and giving.

In these tough times, as schools and other publicly funded programs are forced to cut back on spending, it would be nice to see others step up with similar contributions in lieu of taxes.

**The Garden City Telegram on Sept. 11 anniversary:**

The eerie part was the cleanliness of the sky. The stillness in the air that lasted for days.

On a clear night in western Kansas, you can sit on your patio and stare up at the jet trails, spot the tiny image of a jetliner thousands of feet above, and wonder where they're headed and where they're from.

And then they were gone. The sky was clear, silent, seemingly holding its breath. It was strange. We didn't need news updates to tell us something was terribly amiss, we needed only look to the sky.

Strangers landed on our lap and we took them in, as good people do without a second thought. We sheltered, fed and entertained the distressed, displaced travelers. And eventually they were gone.

Planes were once again flying overhead and we recaptured a hint of normalcy. ...

We did the things caring people do in time of need. Without fanfare, without notoriety. ...

A year later and that resilience hasn't waned, though we may not think about it as much. There's a sense of security in routine. ...

Resilience and vigilance are core values in a free society. Americans didn't ask to have to put either on display a year ago today, and in the time since. But for anyone who thought Americans didn't have what it takes, we've proven to the world otherwise.

Our guiding principles, still the laws of the land today, etched so eloquently by our founding fathers more than two centuries ago, are worth the effort.

## where to write

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## Avoid car problems with proper maintenance

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I am starting college this fall and my parents have purchased a used car for me. So far I have not had any problems with it, but I am sure that some repairs will be required eventually because the car is several years old. I know very little about cars and I am afraid that I would be an easy target for an unscrupulous mechanic. Attorney General Stovall, do you have any tips for novice car owners like me?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

The best way to avoid car problems is through proper maintenance. Check the car owner's manual and follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule. Become acquainted with your car and know how it works. Keep the fluids at proper levels and change them at recommended intervals. Keep a record or log of all maintenance and repairs, listing the date, mileage and what was done. Keep the log book in your glove compartment for easy reference.

You should choose a mechanic before repairs are needed. Ask friends, relatives, co-workers and acquaintances for recommendations, and call my Consumer Protection Division and the Better Business Bureau to see if there are any complaints filed against the mechanics you are considering. By taking this action ahead of time, you can avoid



**carla j. stovall**

• consumer corner

making a last minute, uninformed decision.

When the time for repairs arrives, ask your selected mechanic for a written estimate before the repairs are started, and do not be afraid to obtain a second opinion from another mechanic.

You should understand what your mechanic charges for parts and labor. Parts are classified and priced depending on if they are new, re-manufactured, rebuilt or reconditioned, or salvaged. Keep in mind that comparison shopping at discount automotive stores could be inaccurate as the brand and quality of parts can differ, not to mention the fact that the mechanic may charge you more for parts he gets from his supplier.

Labor charges can also vary. Some mechanics use a "flat rate" which comes from a reference book that provides a standard estimated rate on how much time the repairs should take. Others charge on the basis of the actual time the technician works on the repair. You should also ask about the war-

ranty. The Kansas Consumer Protection Act (KCPA) requires that parts and labor are warrantied for merchantability and fitness for a particular purpose. In many shops the parts are warrantied through the mechanic's supplier.

If a repair fails, you must give the mechanic the opportunity to fix the problem under warranty. If the mechanic has performed work that is "shoddy" and subsequent trips to remedy the work have failed, you may consider small claims court if the repairs are under \$1,800.

If you feel the mechanic has taken advantage of you and sold you parts or repairs that were not needed, you may file a complaint with my Consumer Protection Division at (785) 296-3751 or 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 your call will be returned promptly.*

## Son stands up for himself

My son stood by himself for the first time about a week ago.

I know nobody cares, but one of the joys a father has is telling tales about his family and boring everyone to tears.

There weren't any witnesses, and it didn't last very long. I'm not sure the wife believes me, but I know what I saw.

Not only did he stand, but if you hold his hands he'll kick out his feet like he is trying to walk. He's a smart kid, and if daddy tells him to stop squirming during a diaper change, he stops.

He's cuter than your kid, too. Just had to throw that in.

Actually, it's a good thing he's so cute. He might knock a lamp off a table or almost beat you to the cat food, but how can you stay mad at a kid when he turns to you and gives you one of those smiles where his eyes twinkle and his whole face lights up?

Just not possible.

**Order of fries. Hold the fat, please**

As I mentioned in this column last month, an overweight 56-year-old New York man is suing several fast-food restaurants, including McDonald's for "misleading" him about the fat content of their food. Now we learn that the company which uses a clown as a mascot plans to use a new French-fry oil which will lower trans-fatty acids about 50 percent and saturated fat by 16 percent.

I hope the two aren't related.



**doug stephens**

• wisdom from babes

I don't have a problem with the corporate giant changing its recipes, they are their recipes to change, but for them to take seriously such an absurd lawsuit doesn't make any sense.

Fast-food is not good for you. Who doesn't know this? True, it is now possible to eat healthy at most restaurants. There are salads and wraps and all sorts of veggie-goodness, and you can hold the cheese on that triple-megaburger if you want to watch the calories.

Greasy hamburgers, fries dripping with oil, and high-fat milkshakes, these things are not good for you. These are my favorite foods, and I know how tempting they can be, but too much can cause health problems.

Anyone who claims he did not know this just hasn't been paying attention. This man, Caesar Barber, says he's been eating fast food four or five times a week for almost 50 years, and blames his diet for his diabetes, high blood pressure and many heart attacks.

He's asking for money to help pay for his medical expenses, and wants restaurants to offer a wider variety of food, including vegetarian menus.

This lawsuit has been compared to the actions against tobacco companies, but has little of those legal merits. I haven't heard anyone claim French fries are addictive.

We know it's bad for us, and we choose to eat it. Is Barber trying to say we aren't smart enough to feed ourselves, that we need the government to decide for us? That's what a restaurant industry group spokesman says.

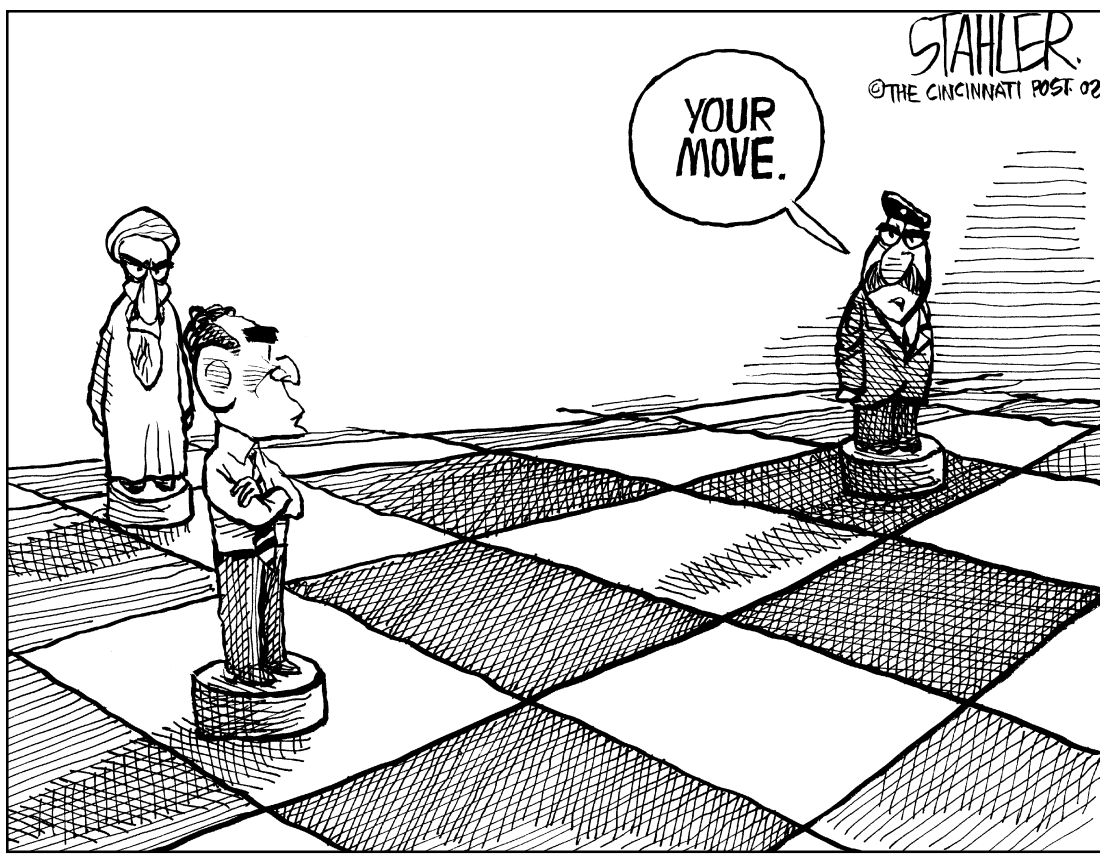
"To win his suit he has to convince a jury or a judge that people are too stupid to feed themselves or their children," said John Doyle, co-founder of Center for Consumer Freedom. "If people are so stupid, should they be allowed to vote or go to work in the morning?"

If McDonald's wants to change the way they cook food, that's fine. Heck, they might make more money out of the deal by drawing people in for their healthier fries. I hope, though, that they weren't bullied by this janitor and his smooth-talking lawyer. Or by all the nutritional groups in the world.

We have a free enterprise system in this country. If someone wants to buy fattening burgers, someone else ought to be able to sell it. Simple as that. If a company wants to sell healthier food, good for it, but it won't make money unless enough people want to buy.

I think it was a good decision by the behemoth. I just hope it wasn't made for the wrong reasons.

## berry's world



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