

# commentary

from our viewpoint...

## Sad day when officer has to appear in court

It's a sad day when a police officer has to appear in court, and sadder still when the whole thing could have been avoided.

Offt-decorated Topeka officer Michael Cruse stood before Judge Eric Rosen last week and pleaded guilty to speeding, failing to stop at a stop sign — and vehicular homicide.

Officer Cruse's crime: hurrying to answer a call, ignoring the law that says that even emergency vehicles have to follow the traffic code.

There's a very good reason that's the law in Kansas; just ask the family of Leonard "Butch" Porter, 61, who died that night when Cruse's police car skidded through the stop sign into his vehicle.

Judge Rosen lectured Cruse that he could have prevented the death by exercising ordinary care.

Drivers of emergency vehicles need to balance the urgency of their response with a concern for safety, theirs and the public's.

A police officer who crashes his car on the way to a shooting won't be any good to the victim. A fireman who rolls his truck on the way to a fire can't help put it out. And the ambulance driver who runs into a car at an intersection, killing or maiming a driver, isn't helping things much.

Thankfully, these incidents are rare. That they happen is a reminder to emergency crews to watch their driving.

In the Cruse case, other officers testified that it's common on the overnight shift to drive faster than the speed limit when answering calls. Neither Cruse nor the officer following him on the same call was using red lights and sirens, so Mr. Porter had little or no chance to avoid them.

Good emergency drivers, and that is most of them, slow down when they bust an intersection. They use emergency lights and the siren as needed, and they make sure they know what they are doing.

All too often, the victim in an emergency-vehicle accident is the officer, fireman or ambulance crew. That's a senseless waste. Safety is important in public safety work.

Either way, though, someone pays the price. Officer Cruse is paying his.

He got a year in jail on the misdemeanor charges, which were busted down from a felony when he copped a plea. He has to serve 60 days in the county pokie and 60 days on house arrest, then a year on probation.

He doesn't work for the Topeka police anymore; he was fired in June. In August, the city agreed to a \$425,000 wrongful death settlement with the Porter family. That was small compensation indeed, but the taxpayers wound up paying thrice, by losing a good cop, losing a citizen, and losing the money.

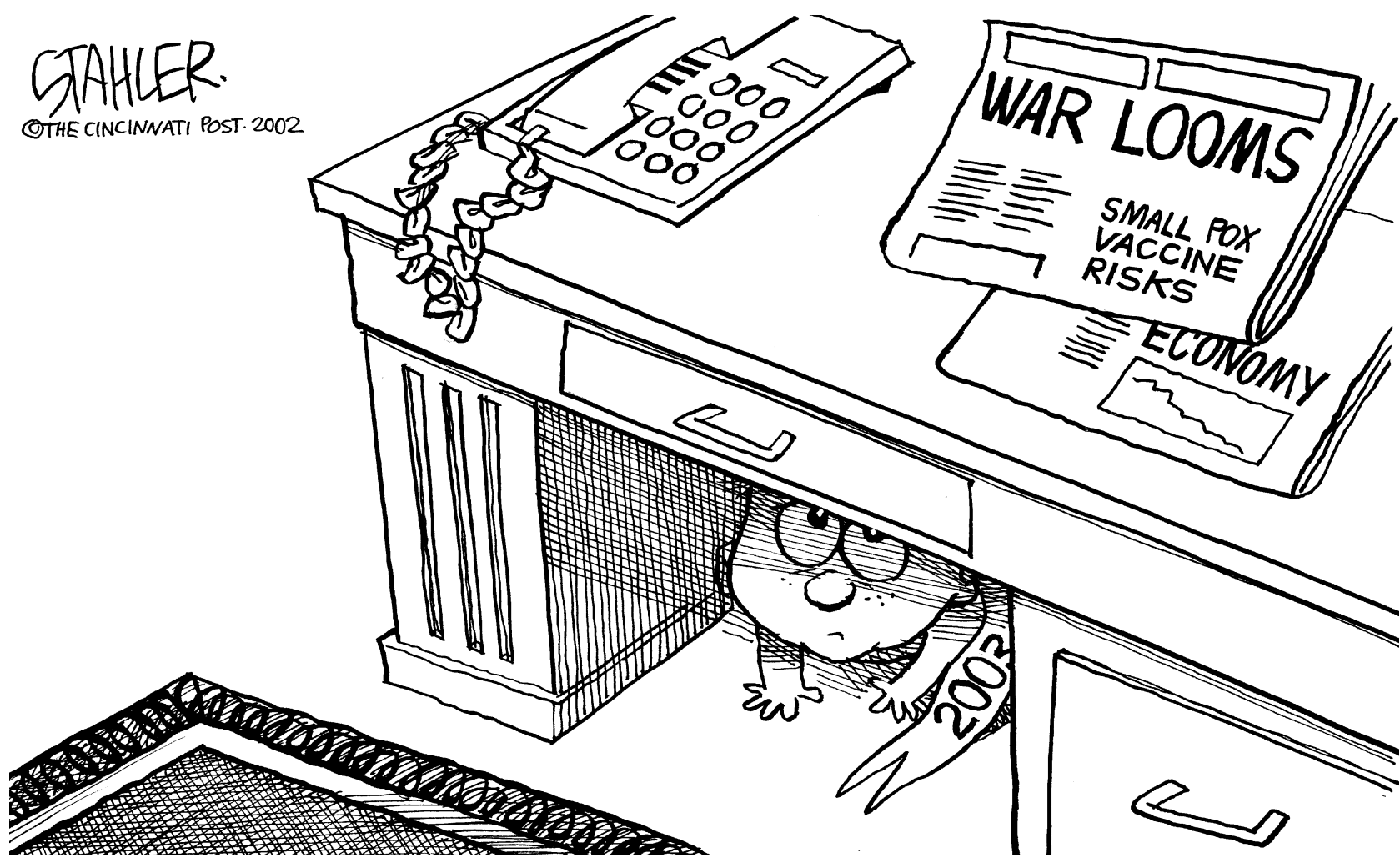
It's sad, but as the judge said, it could have been prevented by ordinary caution and common sense.

It was the same risk-taking spirit that made him a good, hard-charging officer, Judge Rosen said, that made him dangerous. — Steve Haynes

### where to write

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 302 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774
- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 225-2715
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676
- State Sen. Stan Clark**, State Capitol Building Rm. 449-N, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7399
- Kansas Attorney General Carla J. Stovall**, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

STAHLER  
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## New Years is different around the world

Well, it is once again the end of another year. As I was thinking about what to write this year, my boyfriend, who is British, told me I should do some research on different New Year traditions. He is spending the New Year in London at Trafalgar Square with friends, much more excitement than most of us will have out here in northwest Kansas.

His suggestion sounded kind of funny to me at first since surely we all celebrate the coming of another year in the same way. Of course I was wrong and found it out very quickly after doing a little bit of research.

Here in the good ol' U.S. of A, we are quick to have parties with "adult beverages", watch parades and football, and make New Year's resolutions. Of course, what would the strike of midnight be without a kiss from the one you love or hearing Auld Lang Syne.

So began the research. Hope you find it as interesting as I did.

One thing which I didn't think of before is that many cultures celebrate New Year's at different times due to different calendar systems. For instance, the Jewish New Year, or Rosh Hoshannah, is celebrated in September, not on Jan. 1. It is a holy time when people think of the things they have done wrong in the past, and they promise to do better in the future. Special services are held in synagogues, and an instrument called a Shofar, which is made from a ram's horn is played. Children are given new clothes, and New Year loaves are baked and fruit is eaten to remind people of harvest time.

In China, the Chinese New Year, Yuan Tin, is celebrated between Jan. 17 and Feb. 19. They have fireworks, parades, and a Festival of Lanterns, where thousands of lanterns light the way to the



**michelle hawkins**

• pursuit of a richer life

New Year.

In ancient Egypt, New Year was celebrated at the time the River Nile flooded, which was near the end of September. The flooding of the Nile was very important because without it, the people would not have been able to grow crops in the dry desert.

The Muslim calendar is based on the movements of the moon, so the date of New Year is eleven days earlier each year. Iran is a Muslim country which used to be called Persia. The people celebrate New Year on March 21, and a few weeks before this date, people put grains of wheat or barley in a little dish to grow.

Most Hindus live in India, but they don't all celebrate New Year in the same way or at the same time. The people of West Bengal, in northern India, like to wear flowers at New Year, and they use flowers in the colors of pink, red, purple, or white. Women like to wear yellow, which is the color of Spring. In Kerala, in southern India, mothers put food, flowers, and little gifts on a special tray. On New Year's morning, the children have to keep their eyes closed until they have been led to the tray. In central India, orange flags are flown from buildings on New Year's Day. In Gujarat, in western India, New Year is celebrated at the end of October, and it is celebrated at the same time as the Indian festival of Diwali. At the time of Diwali, small oil lights are lit all along the roofs of buildings. At New Year, Hindus think particularly of the goddess

of wealth, Lakshmi.

Some other fun facts I found about the celebration of New Year's in other countries are as follows:

**Argentina** - People go out onto the streets and make toasts and celebrate with neighbors. At midnight, kids shoot off fireworks.

**British Columbia, Canada** - Traditionally, the polar bear swim takes place on New Year's Day, where people of all ages dive into the icy water.

**Denmark** - Young people bang on friends' doors to "smash" in the New Year.

**France** - The French eat pancakes for breakfast on New Year's Day.

**Germany** - The last night of December is called St. Sylvester's Eve. Germans celebrate with friends, drink and "sit in" for the New Year. They also have parties which include dancing and formal dress.

**Greece** - Children receive gifts on New Year's Day, also known as St. Basil's Day, instead of at Christmas.

**Ireland** - At midnight everyone goes in the front door and out the back door for good luck.

**Italy** - Children sometimes get money as gifts, and people give oranges on New Year's Day.

**Japan** - A gong sounds 108 times for the 108 sins a person can commit. By listening to the gongs you can cleanse your heart and get rid of sins.

**Puerto Rico** - Kids throw water out their windows at midnight to get rid of evil spirits.

**Scotland** - A Scottish tradition is First Footing, where the first person to enter your home after midnight is the first footer, a symbol for the New Year. A tall dark haired visitor is considered good luck.

**Spain** - People pop a grape into their mouth at midnight each time the clock strikes. Twelve grapes symbolize good luck for each month of the year.

**Switzerland** - It is good luck to let a drop of cream fall to the floor on New Year's Day.

## Kansans against cuts must apply pressure

TOPEKA — Some education officials and advocates for the needy fear big cuts will hurt services and believe the state should increase taxes to prevent any damage.

But they'll have to depend upon themselves next year to head off significant cuts.

Republican legislative leaders plan to wait for Democratic Gov.-elect Kathleen Sebelius to push for tax increases, rather than advancing proposals of their own. Sebelius isn't yet planning to push.

Their stances could produce a one-sided debate when legislators attempt to balance their constituents' opposition to increasing taxes against antipathy to cutting aid to public schools, spending on higher education, social services or highway projects.

"There is very little, if any, momentum for additional taxes this year," Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, said recently.

Without advocates jumping into the debate to change legislators' attitudes, the state appears headed for budget cuts.

The problem starts with the current budget. Outgoing Republican Gov. Bill Graves faced a deficit projected at \$312 million on June 30. The budget shortfall over the next 18 months could top \$1 billion.

Graves ordered \$119 million in reductions in general fund spending and withheld \$48 million in aid to cities and counties to avoid a deficit.

His actions angered advocates for the needy and local government officials. Meanwhile, education officials still fear that the state won't be able to spare aid to public schools, as Graves did in a round of cuts he imposed last month. Advocates for the disabled are drafting a proposal to increase taxes to prevent cuts in services.

Republican leaders have reasons to approach tax increases cautiously.

Many lawmakers are wary of increasing taxes when the economy is slumping. They argue that workers who have been laid off from aviation or telecommunications jobs can't afford higher taxes.

Increasing taxes \$252 million earlier this year proved difficult. The debate over the budget forced the Legislature to spend a record 107 days in session.

Kerr also remembers the Republican gubernatorial primary. He and Wichita Mayor Bob Knight said this year's tax increases prevented damage to



**john hanna**

• ap news analysis

public schools but lost to conservative Tim Shallenburger, who promised not to increase taxes.

Finally, Republicans may find an opportunity for revenge too hard to pass up.

During Graves' two terms as governor, Democrats criticized him repeatedly for what they said was his lack of initiative and said it was his job to lead the Legislature into resolving difficult problems. Now Democrats have a governor to defend, and majority Republicans are starting to echo the arguments the minority party used against Graves.

For example, Kerr, surveying a list of ideas from government review teams appointed by Sebelius, said to get any she favors approved, "She will have to do more than put them on a piece of paper."

Sebelius' gubernatorial campaign also made the governor-elect a bigger target for GOP leaders.

In the face of the state's financial problems, Sebelius made promises that seem unrealistic. For example, she said she wouldn't cut aid to public schools and would make sure that all projects under the state's transportation plan were completed.

She also made comments interpreted as a pledge not to cut higher education, though she now says she didn't make such a promise.

Yet there's no serious talk about tax increases from Sebelius or her aides.

"Nothing has changed on that," spokeswoman Nicole Corcoran-Basso said recently.

Sebelius said repeatedly during the campaign that she wasn't planning to propose tax increases and that the state needs provide better services with less money.

Republicans, particularly Shallenburger, remained skeptical and suggested Sebelius would seek higher taxes, despite her campaign rhetoric. Some are waiting for Sebelius to fulfill their prophecies.

Sebelius suggested during her campaign that she would attempt to make state government more efficient, then shift resources into public schools and other areas. Initiating a "top-to-bottom" review a

week after the general election was the first step.

Five review teams forwarded more than 100 ideas to her, but many didn't have an estimate for savings attached to them. The ones that did amounted to about \$41 million, not counting \$6 million worth of proposed fee increases.

The ideas aren't enough to prevent significant budget cuts if Sebelius remains determined not to push for tax increases.

That's how the budget debate usually shapes up: balancing a desire to have services against a desire not to pay much in taxes.

Some Kansans view tax increases as the better alternative, but they don't yet have a strong patron for the 2003 legislative session.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Correspondent John Hanna has covered state government and politics since 1987.

### berry's world



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