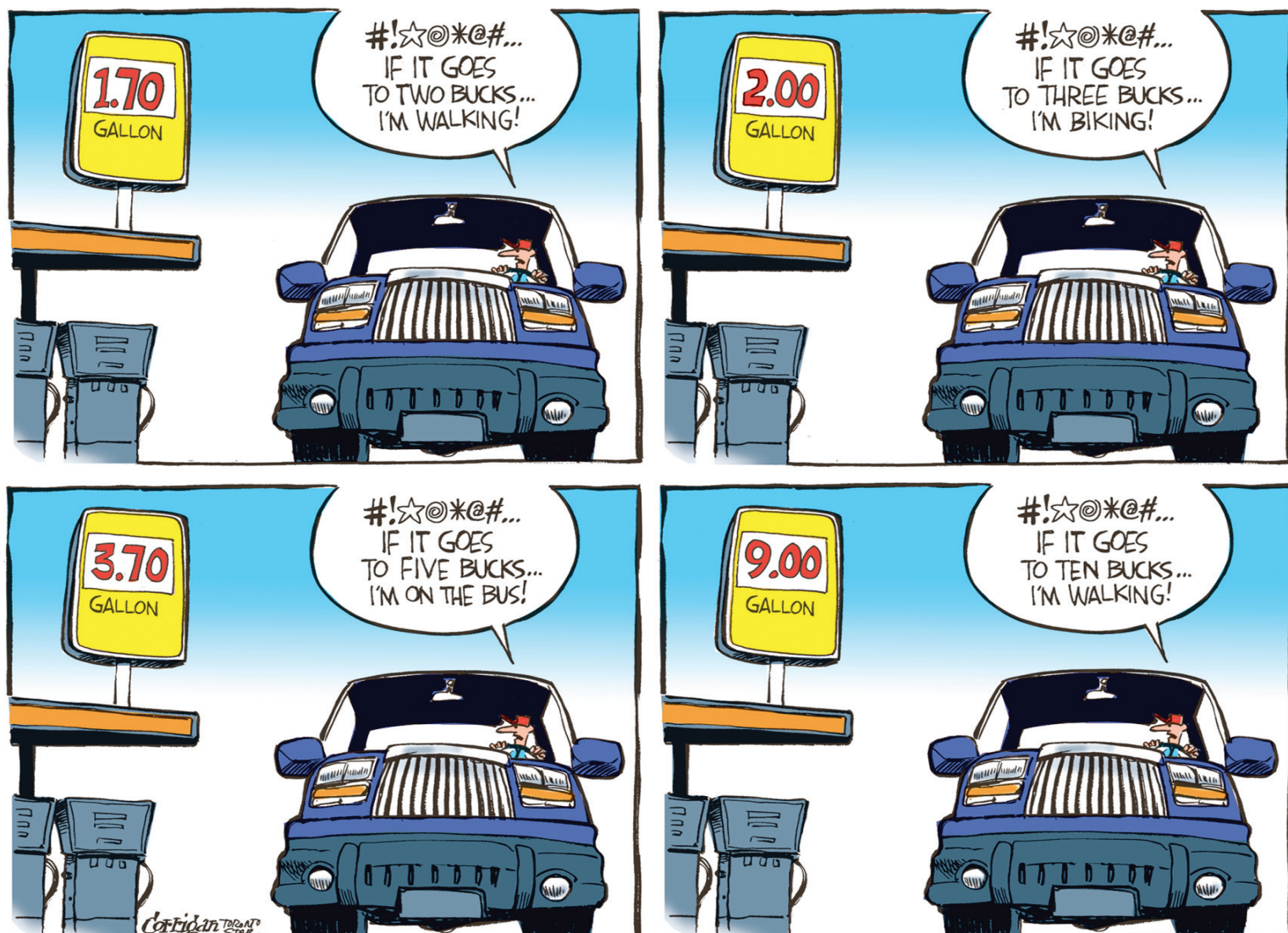


from our viewpoint...

Gas prices make some habits change

So finally, when gasoline approaches \$4 a gallon, Americans are starting to change their habits. About time, some might say. Way too late, others will chorus. The truth is, people will do what people need to do. Driving is an economic decision. Most Americans drive too much, but that's partly because fuel has been so cheap for so long. Cheap, you say? At \$3 per gallon? Well, yeah, gas might have been 21 cents a gallon in the 1960s, but by the mid-1970s it had jumped to \$1 or more. And still people kept on driving. Oh, there was a gas crisis or two, and we had to wait in line for fuel. People sought houses closer to town. People talked about saving energy. But life was good. Times were easy. And we began to think of \$2 gas as affordable. Then the world got smaller, China got bigger and gas hit \$3. Americans bought more big trucks, more huge "sports utility vehicles." But as oil topped \$125 per barrel and fuel shot past \$4, Americans began paying attention. Something happened that all the Al Gore harangues, all the government programs, all the talk could not force: people started to look for ways to drive less and spend less. The free market works like that. Guilt and knowledge will only drive us so far. But at some point, fuel becomes so expensive that people actually take note.

And we may be at that point, if the dealers' lots and manufacturers' yards full of big trucks are any sign, the time to size down and save has finally come upon us. There is only so much oil in the world, after all. The more we use, the less that will be left. It isn't American excess that's driving this market, though. It's a growing world at our doorstep that finally has the money and the economic muscle to use a lot more of the resources we've taken for granted: oil, coal, food, water, you name it. China, India, the rest of Asia, all clamoring for the things we in the West have. And finally having the cash to buy them. The price of oil isn't going down, not any time soon. It may dip and fluctuate, but the trend is going to be ever upward from here. The Third World has arrived, and it's hungry for what we have. What does that mean for Americans? We're going to have to think in terms of sustainable living. Smaller cars. New fuel sources. The government won't have to make us do that. The cost of fuel will drive us. Eventually, we'll have to stop burning oil. It'll be too valuable as a feed stock for chemicals, plastics and the like to just burn up, and like they say, they're not making any more. We'll have to find ways to use wind, sun, hydrogen from the ocean and, yes, even dirty old coal and dangerous nuclear to fuel our daily lives. The good news is whatever we turn to will be cleaner and safer than any energy source we know today. The bad news is all of it will cost more. We really do need to learn to live a simple life, with less excess and more purpose. Ah, but that's preaching. The reality of the market will enforce our decisions. Some days the choices won't be so pleasant, but life will go on. And who knows, we might just like the results, once we get used to them. — Steve Haynes



Grandpa shacks up



tom purcell

• commentary

"You're doing what, Grandpa?"
"I'm moving in with my better half, my hot mama, my main squeeze."
"You're shacking up with your girlfriend?"
"What's the big deal, Tommy? Nearly 10 million Americans cohabitate now. According to the 2000 Census, the number of older couples cohabitating is four times greater than it was in 1980! That number will surely soar in the 2010 Census now that Baby Boomers are getting on in years."
"But Grandpa, the social mores of the older generations were more clear and demanding. You had high ideals. You believed in marriage — that a man and woman should commit to each other publicly and become one."
"Look, Tommy, I'm retired now. Your grandma is in Heaven. It's party time."
"Party time?"
"Tommy, most folks in my generation did what we had to do. We stayed married to one woman our whole lives. We sacrificed everything for our children and our communities. That was a lot of work. Who wants to go through that again?"
"But Grandpa, your social mores are what we need more of. Your hard work, sacrifice and sense of duty produced stable communities and well-adjusted children. The mores you embraced are being lost. Today more than a third of American children are born to unwed mothers."
"Look, Tommy, my baby doll is a younger woman who looks at marriage differently than my generation did. Even if she would marry me, who's to say she won't ditch me for some-

body with a bigger Winnebago?"
"Huh?"
"And if she does run off, I don't want her dipping into the nest egg it took your grandma and me a lifetime to build. By staying single, I keep things simple."
"But Grandpa, various studies show that cohabitation is more stressful than marriage. Couples who cohabitate and later marry are 50 percent more likely to divorce than couples who don't cohabitate before marriage."
"Whatever, Tommy."
"Grandpa, after 30 years of experimentation, the evidence keeps pointing back to a simple fact: Where men, women and family are concerned, the more rigid values of your generation ultimately work better than today's loosey-goosey values."
"If you say so."
"What's got into you, Grandpa? Your generation was always so hopeful. Your expectations were so high. Now you sound so cynical."
"Look, Tommy, I spent a lifetime worrying about other people's needs. I spent a lifetime giving. Now I'm finally free to live in the moment — to do what makes Grandpa feel good. You dig?"
"Do I dig!"

"I got the hots for my baby — had the hots from the moment I met her at the tattoo parlor. What are the odds that both of us would be getting an image of Bono seared onto our buttocks at the exact same moment?"
"A tattoo on your what?"
"I dig her, Tommy. We have such fun. Just the other day we were at her pad consuming illegal narcotics when I said, 'Moon Unit, lets go for a roll in the hay under the stars.'"
"Narcotics! Moon Unit! Premarital relations!"
"And then I said, 'Moon Unit, why don't you and I jump in the Winnebago and head across the country. We can hang out in Berkeley. See if Timothy Leary really is dead.'"
"But I thought Timothy Leary IS dead."
"Tommy, Tommy, Tommy, you need to loosen up. The times, they are a-changing."
"You're quoting Bob Dylan now? You used to quote Dwight Eisenhower!"
"Tommy, why can't you just let my generation live and let live?"
"But Grandpa, older generations are supposed to attain wisdom and knowledge and share them with the generations that follow. We need to look up to you. We need you to help set us straight, not embrace the things we're doing wrong."
"Sorry, Tommy, but I have to run. Moon Unit and I are throwing a party and it's my turn to fire up the bong."
Tom Purcell is a nationally syndicated humor columnist. Visit Tom on the web at www.TomPurcell.com or e-mail him at Purcell@caglecartoons.com.

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e-mail: star-news@nwkanssas.com

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nwkanssas.com

N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services

(ntbetz@nwkanssas.com)

Evan Barnum, Systems Admin. (support@nwkanssas.com)

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Disruptive changes will invigorate education

Will the online world change the business of education? It better, says a Harvard professor. Clayton M. Christensen, author of "Disrupting Class," says that schools will face "disruptive changes" as half of all high school classes will be taught online by 2020.

Online education offers many educational benefits, including individualized, self-paced lessons and access to world-class instructors. Students who don't have access to advanced classes now will then, and students will become active participants rather than passive listeners.

But these benefits will bring disruptive changes to schools. That's because when a technology is widely adopted and improves our lives, it changes some organizations and creates others. Fred Smith practically created the idea of overnight delivery when he started FedEx. Wal-Mart grew from Sam Walton's single store because it used technology to track customer preferences. Bill Gates changed offices everywhere when he started Microsoft.

Note that these changes came to our lives through new organizations, not old ones. Most existing organizations find it very difficult to take advantage of technological innovations — even if they are in plain sight.

The blinders of organizational culture are partly to blame. Then there's the "not invented here" syndrome. Finally, managers, line workers and even customers have vested interests in doing things they way they've always been done.

When organizations do try to adopt new technology, they often fail to change their daily routines to make the best use of it. Many of today's schools do the same. They install computers and wire classrooms to the Internet, but they recruit teachers and select books the way they have done for decades.

Christensen says that when a disruptive change comes to an industry, you can first see it in "nonconsumers" and the companies that rise up to serve them. In education, nonconsumers include students who attend schools that don't offer Advanced Placement classes, those who



john r. laplante

• flint hills center

are homeschooled, and failing students.

The organizations that will best reach these nonconsumers will likely include a new breed of charter schools as well as virtual schools.

With few exceptions, the Kansas education sector has bolted the latest technologies onto old organizations. In Arizona, charter schools that strip away old bureaucracies and red tape are making a difference. In Kansas, they're minuscule.

Why the difference? Here's one reason: Arizona created a new agency specifically to approve and oversee charter schools. Kansas, by contrast, foisted charter schools onto its existing public schools.

Some states, such as Florida, have set up entirely new organizations to offer virtual schools. Once again, Kansas depends on old

organizations to deploy a new technology. A few districts have carried it out fairly well. But as the Division of Post Audit revealed, many districts fail to properly manage this new way of educating students.

How can Kansas education cultivate its own versions of Fred Smith, Sam Walton, Bill Gates and other agents of life-improving disruptive change? It should accommodate new models of schooling. Treat online schools fairly, and don't tie them exclusively to school districts. Invigorate charter schools by giving them an independent organization that provides oversight and guidance. Most importantly, focus not on schools as ends in themselves, but on education.

Technological and organizational change give us temporary pain, but much greater gain. Disruptive education is coming to the nation. Kansas should make the most of it.

John R. LaPlante is an Education Policy fellow with the Kansas-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy. He can be reached at john.laplante@flinthills.org. To learn more about the Flint Hills Center, please visit www.flinthills.org.

