

from our viewpoint...

Law bans drivers from texting

Some days, you have to wonder what those people in Topeka are thinking about when they write our laws.

Starting on Thursday, for instance, Kansas will have a law banning people from sending or reading text messages while driving. However, police can't write any tickets until Jan. 1. Only warnings.

If texting, or cell phone use in general, was really that much of a problem, how can we afford to wait half a year?

The truth is, only about 6,000 accidents a year are attributed to "distracted" drivers from all causes, including phones and texting, in the entire country. The number of injuries is minimal. But sending texts sure seems dangerous, so we have a law against it.

That's bad? Look at the list of exemptions: The law excludes police officers and other emergency services workers. You'd think that if texting was dangerous, the last people you'd want doing it are people driving emergency vehicles. Go figure.

Ordinary citizens can send and receive texts when stopped off the roadway, when receiving emergency or traffic and weather alerts, to report crimes, or to prevent "imminent injury" or property damage.

This is a "feel-good" law. Emotionally, everyone agrees that texting while driving must be bad, though there's no actual evidence. So, pass a law against it, but hey, it's no big deal.

In the same bill, at the last moment, the state Legislature stuck a provision banning anything from covering all or part of a license plate, either a clear cover that interferes with readability or something opaque.

All or part ... that must include those obnoxious dealer brackets that cover up the state and other information. We've always said, "there outta be a law...." But still, not exactly a public emergency.

The worst thing about that provision is, apparently, it was added at the last minute in a House-Senate conference committee. It was never given a committee hearing, never opened up for public comment, just rammed through both houses when everyone wanted to go home.

That's a poor way to make public policy. Surely some groups – the auto dealers who hand out those plate holders come to mind – would have objected at an open hearing.

Laws should be made out in full view, with plenty of time for comment and advice. Not late at night, at the end of a session, when the people who might care are not listening, maybe even not present.

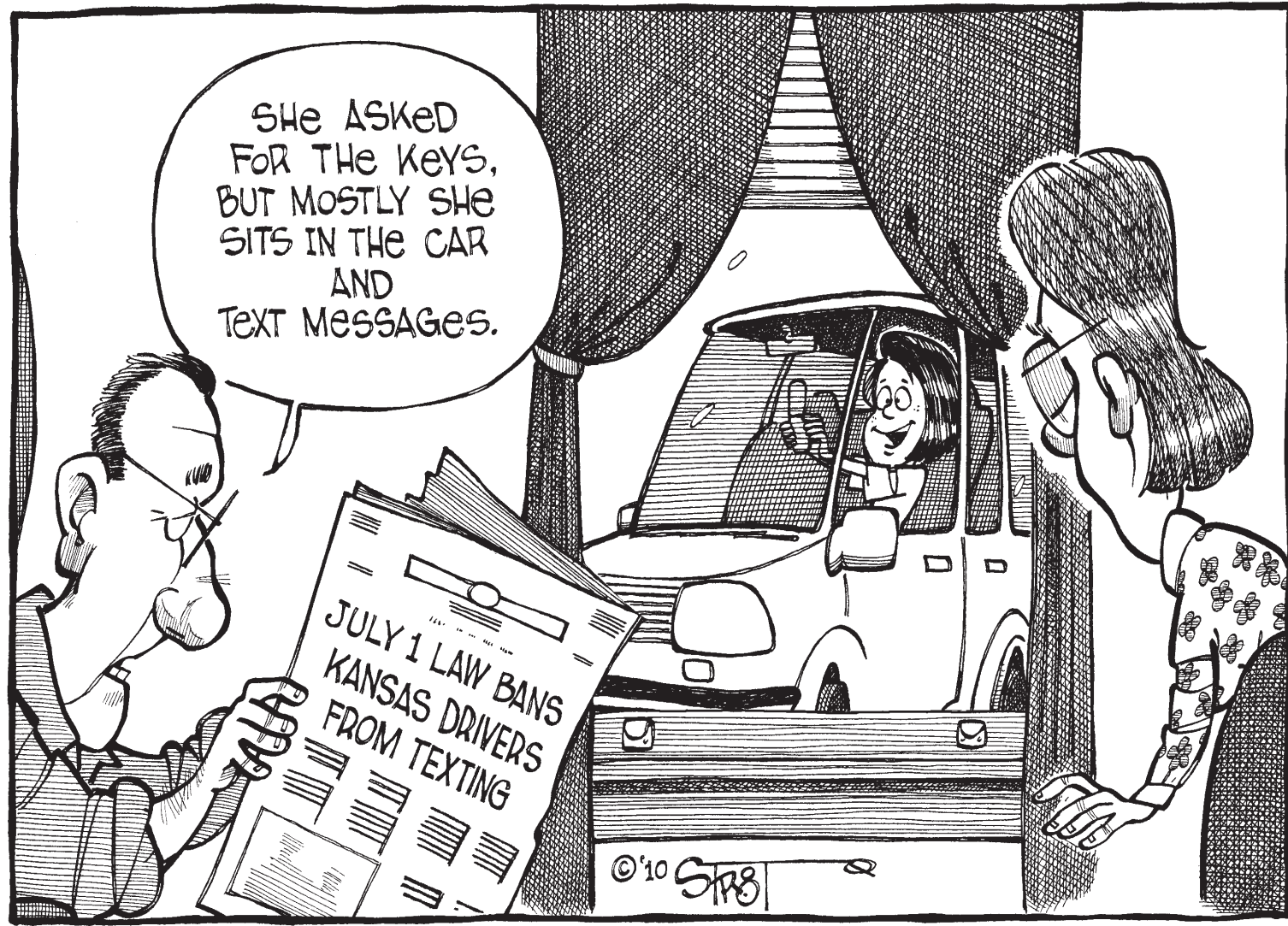
But that's what passes for good government in most states, even in the U.S. Congress.

But we digress. If you think some of the traffic laws are silly and riddled with exemptions, there's the "statewide smoking ban" that allows smoking in state-owned casinos.

Hey, if it's bad, it's bad.

That law will be tied up in court for some time, by the way, since owners of a handful of bars and bingo parlors think it's unfair to exempt the state and not them. They sued, and who could blame them?

But nobody said laws have to make sense. – Steve Haynes



Storm drops limbs on top of garden

The toner wasn't set on the page, much less the ink dry on the paper for last week's column, when the storm hit.

We were putting *The Oberlin Herald* together on Monday night when one of the staff said, "I think it's raining."

This turned out to be an understatement.

It was raining. It was hailing. The wind was blowing. The street was running bank full.

We went back to work and got the paper finished and sent off to the press.

Steve stayed behind to finish up some office details and I headed home through streets that looked more like cement-sided canals. I was a little afraid I would drown my engine if I hit a dip.

At home, I discovered a mess on the back porch.

A large houseplant, which had come from my father's funeral 15 years ago, and spends each summer on the porch, was overturned and the pot broken. A railroad marker lamp that normally shines from a post on the back porch was torn from its moorings and lay on its side. And the spa cover was pulled up and tossed to the far side of the porch.

The first order of business was to replace the



cynthia haynes

• open season

cover, take the marker light inside for Steve to check out in the morning and right the plant.

The pot was broken but not destroyed, so I used a pancake turner to scrape up the spilled soil and called Steve at the office so he wouldn't track the mud all over the floor when he came home.

It was midnight and still raining, so I called it a night and went to bed.

When he came to bed an hour later, Steve asked if I had noticed the limb in the front yard.

Nope. The morning brought sunshine and a good look at the devastation.

The limb in the front yard was the size of a medium tree, and it was laying upside down on the brushes and leaning against the house with its trunk inches from a window. But the house had only little holes and smashed gutters, no

big holes or broken windows.

Over in the gardens, it was a different story. Two or three medium-sized limbs had landed on the side garden, so that a mixture of bent tomato poles, pepper plants and cucumber tendrils were all that could be seen.

In the main garden, the corn was all leaning to the west. It looked like every stalk was bowing to the dog pen.

The first order of business was rescuing the tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers.

I removed the limbs, straightened the stakes and pulled most of the remaining spinach, since it was flatted anyway, and I'd have had to step on it to get to the tomatoes.

When all the junk was pulled away, it looks like I've only lost one tomato plant and several green tomatoes.

Over the past week, the corn has started to straighten up and the little white butterflies that beget little green worms have returned.

The tree man came on Friday and reduced the limb on the front to a small pile of firewood. So, we're almost back to where we were a week ago – less one tomato plant and some miscellaneous siding, gutters and decorative bushes.

Storms, vultures entertain eastern guests

So, how do you entertain visitors from the East Coast on a Sunday evening?

Well, it's summer, so we did summer things.

First, we had snacks and drinks on the deck and chatted for a while. They'd been on the road all the way from Columbia, Mo., barely taking time for lunch along the way. It took a while to get them to sit down, but the weather cooperated and the storms to the south cooled things down a little.

And in the nearly 18 years we've lived here, the trees in our yard and the neighbors' have grown. The deck can be a shady paradise in the evening.

Then, we grilled thick, juicy burgers. I told Cynthia we'd have to cheat on our diets a little to make them thick, but it was company. A surprise to me, Mark, who's a big guy, if trim, ate two while college-age young Mark stopped after one.

I'm not sure I could eat two big burgers anymore. And I'm not trim.

After supper, we had to walk up the street and see the vultures roosting on the water tower. Not every plains town has a unique wildlife show like that. Apparently, it's not too common in New Jersey, either.

Then we got to watching the thunderstorms



steve haynes

• along the sappa

to the south. A big one was growing just east of Selden, beautifully lighted by the setting sun. The business end, where tornadoes sometimes form, was clearly visible, so I offered to run them down to the junction for a closer view.

The storm started to peter out about the time we got down there, but it was still spectacular to watch. And hey, easterners don't get much storm chasing time – except with the weather shows on television.

We wound up touring Dresden, where they asked a lot of questions about grain elevators, some of which I could even answer. On a Sunday night, there was no one in the office to ask.

We drove home up the "old" gravel highway to Oberlin along the Bremer Road, stopping several times to avoid deer. We talked about the crops in the fields and some of the history of that area.

And got home in time to give a tour of our house. They were more than ready for bed,

but the storm chasing did seem to keep them awake.

Mark and Liz and young Mark planned 11 hours on the road Monday to Dubois, Wyo., where they planned to camp for a couple of days until they could get into their condo in Jackson Hole.

They left at midmorning, their huge canoe and two bikes weighing down their little van. (Our cats thought this was a pretty cool place to explore, and I was a little worried one of them might just join the road trip.)

Young Mark put on his headphones and crawled into his nest in the back seat. I think he likes books better than scenery.

They declared it to be the best visit ever, but I'm inclined to think no one else ever took them storm chasing.

They planned to stop and visit other newspaper friends in Imperial, Neb., on the way to Wyoming. I'm sure Imperial doesn't have vultures on its water tower, though it's a nice little town.

But you never know.

Anyway, it's always nice to show off the local landmarks and such, and we do have a lot of grain elevators and deer out here.

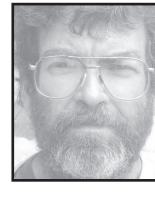
College football falling into valley of greed

Editor's note: Some of our readers will remember Greg Stover, writer of this column, who was a sports editor here several years ago. Stover is now in West Virginia where he volunteers on the Appalachian Trail. It was good to hear from him and to find he is as deeply interested in college sports as he was when he was working in Goodland.

Conference championship games in college football are unnecessary and, especially within the Bowl Championship Series, have a stronger emphasis on increasing revenue rather than crowning a champion.

Unfortunately there's going to be more of them in the seasons ahead. The Pacific-10 Conference will soon increase to 12 teams with the addition of the universities of Colorado and Utah. Plus the Big Ten Conference, which already has 11 teams, will add the Cornhuskers of the University of Nebraska.

The Atlantic Coast Conference went through the same process in 2005 increasing its mem-



greg stover

• greg's gripes

bership to 12, creating two divisions, and adding a championship game. The money must have been good enough because now two more conferences have made their moves.

The "official" decisions on splitting the conferences into divisions and in scheduling a separate championship game have not yet been reached, but I'd place my bets and give some great odds. After all there's more money to be made.

A championship game only makes sense when a conference's membership is too big for each team to play every other team. At the BCS level, almost all teams play a 12-game schedule which could allow them to face

each conference opponent during the regular season.

The biggest conference in the BCS is the Mid-American Conference with 13 teams meaning each one could play every other member within the regular season. For teams in the MAC it would mean not playing any non-conference opponents but in the end the conference champion will have faced every contender for its crown.

Conference championship games could be eliminated, however, BCS football is big business and anything that generates more revenue has priority regardless of the cost to the integrity of the game. So the extra games will not only continue but will multiply.

One question I have now is what happens to the Big 12 Conference. Will the Big 12 continue on with just 10 teams while the Big Ten and the Pac-10 each have 12?

Hold on while I consult my calculator.

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