

from our viewpoint...

Import drug plan hurts local drugists

Here's a really bad idea that's catching on across the country.

Illinois and several other states are backing the plan, which offers services in Kansas. Known as I-SaveRx, the program buys common drugs in Europe and Canada and ships them to people here. It claims to save them half the cost.

Great idea.
If you don't mind losing your friendly local drug store.
And all contact with the one health professional who can protect you from conflicts and problems caused by prescription drugs.

As more and more Americans turn to regular medication — more than 60 percent of us by some estimates — the danger of drug interactions, reactions and side effects grows exponentially.

We've all known someone, maybe a relative or friend, who suffered from drug reactions. It's as common as prescription drugs.

In a system where a doctor prescribes, and a patient fills the prescription by mail or phone order, even e-mail, who's looking out for the patient?

The doctor is too busy. He or she may not know what other doctors have prescribed. Often times, nursing staff may be too busy to notice. Patients befuddled by drug overdose don't usually know what's happening to them.

In the extreme case, like the arthritis drug Vioxx, people may be having heart attacks and never know the cause.

Taking the pharmacist out of the loop — or making him or her just a cog in an assembly line — is not the answer.

We do need to do something about the high price of medications. If the same drug, produced under the same patent by the same firm in another country, is half as expensive across the border, then something is wrong with the way we regulate the drug business.

The weak link is not your local pharmacy, which charges based on the cost of drugs it pays. The weak link is farther up the line.

If a drug company can afford to sell the same thing for half price in another country, then we've driven the cost of doing business here way too high.

Congress needs to take a look at U.S. laws with an eye to making drugs more competitive and more affordable. More regulation isn't the answer. The market is. Changing laws on liability and patents might be part of the solution.

Opening the border to cheaper drugs might help. But let's not do it by killing a local institution.

Our pharmacists are under pressure from mail-order and Internet houses, insurance companies and now state governments. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius got involved in the Canadian drug movement, then wrote a long letter explaining herself to pharmacists statewide.

The answer does not lie in bankrupting our local drug stores. Let's get that straight. We need contact with our pharmacists. — *Steve Haynes*

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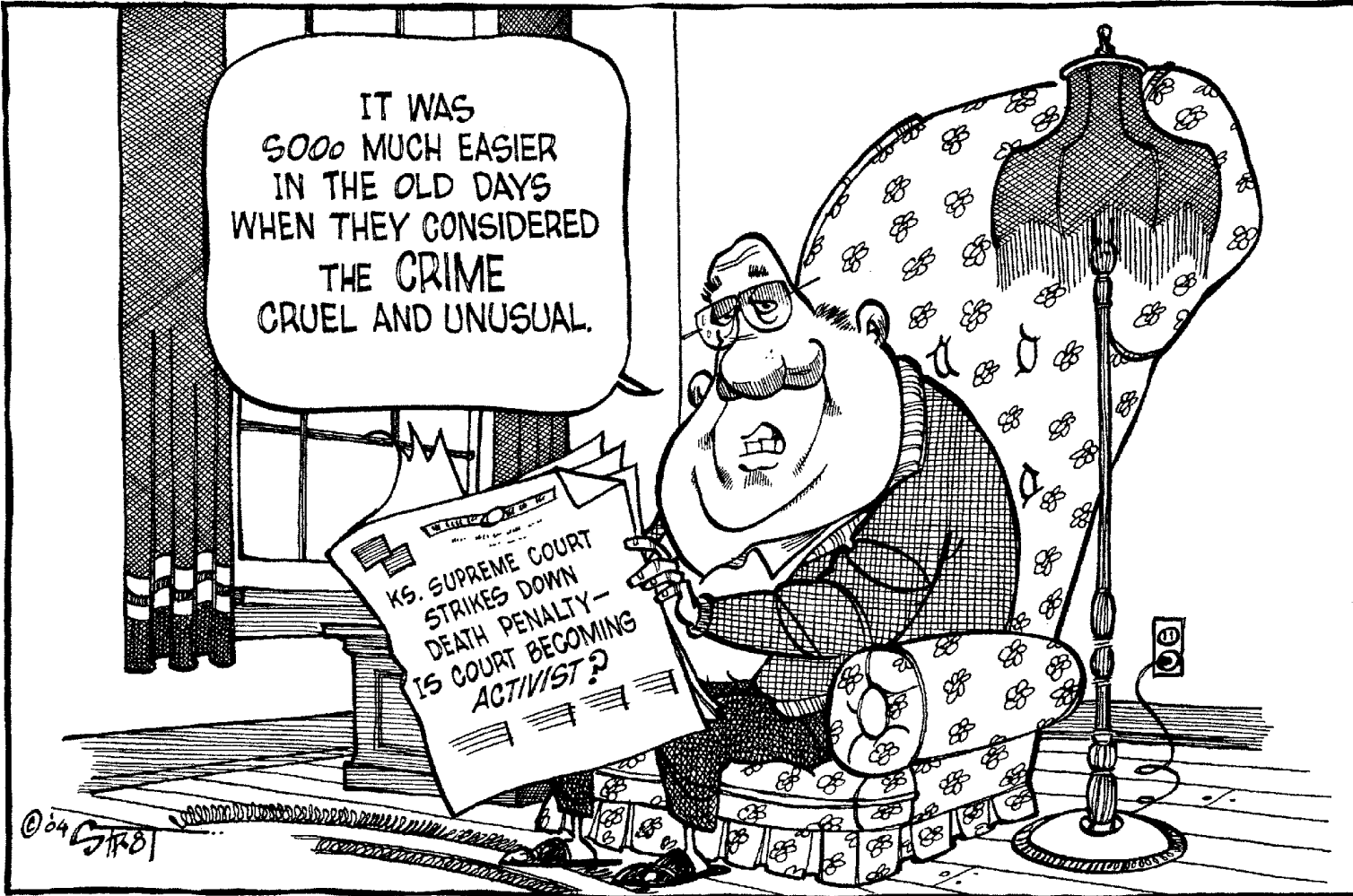
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Beware of changing cloture rules

By Dick Morris

If Senate Republicans change the filibuster rule to permit closure on judicial nominations by a simple majority vote, they will be undermining their own president and their electoral fortunes for years to come.

The simple truth is that the president needs the threat of a Democratic filibuster to save himself from his party's right wing. It is only by pointing to the threat of Democratic intransigence that Bush can justify appointing a moderate conservative, instead of a doctrinaire one, to the Supreme Court.

If the filibuster is made impotent by the rule change Republicans are considering, the president will have no political choice but to charge straight ahead into the kind of confrontation that could ruin his administration and give his party the kind of black eye from which it would not recover easily.

The last election was a mandate to be tough in the war on terror. It was not about moral issues. The president didn't mention the word "abortion" much during the campaign and focused largely on his plans to keep America safe. To the extent that the vote was a mandate for any social issue, it was a repudiation of gay marriage, not a vindication of restrictions on the right to choose.

Indeed, voters oppose courts' imposing gay marriage for the same reason that they oppose a reversal of Roe v. Wade — they do not support it when judges try to impose their own views on the social consensus. Just as most voters want marriage to remain strictly heterosexual, so most want abortion to continue to be legal, albeit with restrictions. While parental notification and consent, restrictions on late abortions and limitations on Medicaid funding



from other pens

- commentary

all meet with popular approval, the voters will treat very unkindly any effort to reverse the essential findings of Roe.

If President Bush nominates a Supreme Court justice who is a conservative in the mode of Sandra Day O'Connor or Anthony Kennedy, he will meet with a broad level of public support. But if he tries to add another knee-jerk reactionary to the court — and jams the nomination through by changing the rules to block a Democratic filibuster — he will shatter the moderate consensus that impelled his re-election. The nation will not tolerate seeing an electoral victory impelled by terrorism hijacked to put another William Rehnquist, Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas on the court. If Bush tries, he will not be able to govern effectively for the balance of his term.

Just as FDR lost his political momentum when he tried to pack the court after his landslide victory in 1936, so Bush would never live down what voters would see as an unfair revision of the rules to pack the court with conservatives.

The filibuster has become an accepted institution in our society. With our intense partisanship — with blue and red states glaring at one another — voters want the checks and balances a filibuster offers. No longer a device to block civil-rights legislation, it is now a needed tactic to moderate the agendas of both political parties.

Retailers reminded to check identifications

To the Editor:

On the 2004 Kansas Communities That Care Student Survey given to Sherman County sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th graders a year ago, kids said:

- 19.4 percent had smoked cigarettes in the last 30 days.
- 15.5 percent had used smokeless tobacco.
- 45.7 percent had consumed beer, wine or hard liquor.



Retailers and their employees need to be aware of recent changes in state law. Effective Dec. 1, all violations involving the sale of tobacco prod-

from our readers

- to the editor

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ucts to a minor will draw the maximum civil fine of \$1,000. The first offense had been \$250.

With students having a little extra time on their hands in the next couple of weeks, retailers should be on the lookout for fake IDs and underage youths trying to buy alcohol and tobacco.

For information on changes in the law or to schedule retailer training, call the Regional Prevention Center at (785) 462-8152.

Kim Chain
Regional Prevention Center
Colby

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