

Senator reports on tour of northwest district

I spent the last three weekends touring the 40th District with State Reps. Jim Morrison, Virginia Beamer, John Faber, Larry Powell, Dan Johnson and Gary Hayzlett. We heard many concerns and opinions on issues facing western Kansas.

The Sunflower Electric plant expansion project was by far the most popular topic on the minds of my constituents. An overwhelming majority support construction of the plant and encourage lawmakers to override the governor's veto (if that happens).

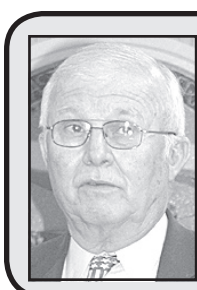
My constituents have done their homework, and they are very informed about both sides of this issue. People agree that natural gas is far too expensive to rely on to

generate our electricity in the long run, and they also agree that we need to continue to pursue renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power to supplement our energy supply.

In addition to the jobs and property development tied directly to the power plant, there are other opportunities that will fall into place once the plant is up and going.

Our electric rates are quite a bit higher in western Kansas than the rates paid in eastern Kansas. All we can hope for is to keep rates from rising even more out of control.

The Holcomb power plant expansion project is the right thing to do. Even as we wait, improvements are being made to ensure that this



Letter from Topeka By Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

project will be state of the art, efficient, and safe.

There was also a lot of debate on the Kansas Corporation Commission regulations on farm trucks. The first tier of regulations is designed to exempt most farmers if all they are doing with their trucks is hauling their own grain and livestock. One thing that commission is wanting

to enforce is the placarding requirements for hauling fuel and fertilizer. We can only hope that commission will find compromise with farmers over this.

Another issue that is a problem for many western Kansas farmers is crossing state borders with livestock and grain.

I wholeheartedly support laws

that will regulate the safety of farm trucks and pickups on our state roads, but I do believe as farmers, we realize our responsibility.

Another issue that caused a lot of good debate was SB-458, known as the Illegal Immigration Act.

I realize we must move cautiously on this issue, but if nothing can be solved on the Federal level, then all states will be forced to set standards. This bill has had convincing testimony on both sides of the issue.

The Federal and State Affairs Committee worked this bill, but unfortunately it was totally destroyed and came out of committee as a substitute bill removing the term "illegal" from the heading. It will be interesting to see if we get the origi-

nal language back in the bill when we work it on the Senate floor.

Nobody has any issues with immigrants who enter this country using the correct procedures. Most concerns are with those who are in this country illegally.

I traveled somewhere around 720 miles while touring my 40th District these past three weekends. The remarks were good and I appreciate the good debate and questions.

I can be reached by writing to Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th Street, Room 128-S, Topeka, Kansas, 66612 or call (785) 296-7399. My e-mail address is ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us. Let me know if you would like to be on my mailing list.

Sunshine Week celebrates good of open government

By DOUG ANSTAETT

Executive director, the Kansas Press Association

After a long winter, it seems everyone is in the mood for some sunshine.

It couldn't be a better time to be celebrating National Sunshine Week, a time for the citizens — and public officials — of Kansas to recommit themselves to the ideals of open government.

National Sunshine Week is March 16 through 22.

Why should Kansans care?

Because, unfortunately, there are dozens of incidents each year where public officials fall far short of what state law — and our democracy — require.

The Kansas Press Association's 240 member newspapers try to do their part to make sure public officials follow the law, but they need your help. Citizens who take democracy seriously can have a big impact when they attend meetings, seek records or simply observe their government officials in action.

Do your public officials give proper notice of their meetings? When they do meet, do they discuss policy issues in public, or do they seem to have their minds made up when the meeting begins? Do they resort to closed-door (executive) sessions and discuss issues that aren't allowed under the Kansas Open Meetings Act? Do they ever vote outside the meeting room?

The Kansas Open Meetings Act and the Kansas Open Records Act say meetings and records of public

bodies should be open to the public. And, in the vast majority of cases, elected and appointed officials carry out their duties conscientiously.

Yet there are some who don't believe they owe the public anything, that they can meet when they want, where they want, without telling their constituents about it at all.

They are wrong.

While newspaper staffs would love to have the resources to cover every meeting, they cannot.

That's where you come in.

When you attend meetings, seek public records and question those in authority about how they are conducting themselves, you help keep government open, accessible and accountable.

"Sunshine" is a perfect description

of how government should operate. It means the public's business is discussed thoroughly in public, with the public's participation, and it means decisions are never made behind closed doors without the public's knowledge or input.

"Sunshine Week" is an annual reminder that smoke-filled rooms and secret meetings are simply anti-American. They betray our heritage of self-government.

Please do what you can to make sure your government is playing by the rules.



Border solution cannot include amnesty for all

By HELEN KRIEBLE and GIL CISNEROS

The emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius wrote 2000 years ago, "how much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it."

That could well be said of today of anger about illegal immigration, felt by people on both sides of our borders.

Americans are angry about changes in our culture, what many say is the use of tax dollars to subsidize illegal activity and a general breakdown in the rule of law.

Many people in Latin America are irate about what they see as the hypocrisy of Americans, who criticize foreign workers while continuing to hire them. They see the "demonization" of a class of people who provide badly needed services Americans are clearly willing to pay for.

Latin America also fears losing its most risk-taking entrepreneurial people, who might otherwise form the middle-class small-business society needed to transform their own countries' economies. Clearly they have a problem, too.

It seems ironic that people on two sides of an international border can be so angry about a situation that seems fairly uncomplicated. Yet the emotion continues to build, bringing historic allies and trading partners ever closer to separation by a modern-day Berlin Wall.

Most Americans understand the futility of such a dramatic rise in tensions, having watched the same issue divide our own people. Our leaders are bitterly divided: law and order advocates who want the border sealed; unions worried about illegals depressing wages; and a small-business economy that depends on this workforce.

Objective observers know all sides have to be satisfied for any solution to work, because to some extent all of them are right. The border must be controlled; needed workers must be provided by a legal

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and safe system; and the program must be administered in a way that protects local workers.

Unfortunately, the anger has grown to the point where objective observers are scarce.

The same is unfortunately true of our deteriorating relationships with our friends in Latin America.

These are disagreements that can be worked out, because there are solutions that would solve both sides' problems. But any such solution has to begin with a conversation, not a colossal hemisphere-wide shouting match. Just as politicians in the U.S. must stop the partisan political rhetoric before any solution can pass, so Mexican and American business and government leaders must begin a serious dialogue on the issues.

We are working to build this dialogue, and it represents an important part of solving the problem for people on both sides of the border. Mexican officials tell us they badly want to work with U.S. officials on border control and law enforcement, while also providing a legal means for legitimate workers to be matched with jobs. Yet the conventional wisdom in the U.S. is that Mexico is part of the problem, that it actually wants its people to break down the border and come in mass to the U.S. That's because others have defined the issue while Mexican government and business leaders have not been adequately involved in the debate. That must change.

Our proposal is fairly simple: Separate immigrants from temporary guest workers — they are not the same and should not be. Nonimmigrants who want work in U.S. should undergo background checks and be issued "smart cards" that make tracking easy for both employers and law enforcement.

Amnesty cannot be part of the

deal. Illegals already in the U.S. should leave and obtain legal status outside the U.S. The program can be practical and reverse the current incentives only if it works quickly and efficiently, so implementation should be contracted to companies that know how to link specific workers to specific jobs (employment agencies) and how to make smart cards with embedded tracking information that can't be copied (credit card companies).

No government bureaucracy can handle millions of cases in a reasonable time. Most illegals know the system doesn't work, because it didn't work for them. But if they knew they could get legal quickly and efficiently, employers and employees alike would not only jump at the chance, they would gladly pay for it. Taxpayers wouldn't have to.

Controlling the border would be easier and cheaper because 90 percent of the problem would be gone. The economy could get the workers it needs without subjecting our country to the threats posed by a porous border. Workers could come out of the shadows, pay taxes and be treated like all other workers. We could have both border control and a strong economy.

The devil, as always, is in the details. Like any other good idea, though, people can only figure it out through a calm and rational discussion. That requires both sides to talk to each other, and keep talking. Otherwise, the consequences of our anger and bitterness may be even worse than the cause.

Helen Kriebel is president of the Vernon K. Kriebel Foundation and Gil Cisneros is president of the Chamber of the Americas, a Denver group which promotes business ties to Latin America.

Diabetics need to watch their health

To the Editor:

Diabetics, be assured you are the primary one responsible for care of your diabetes.

As time goes, you continue to learn more and more about diabetes, in what you can and should not do. This is to keep you in better control and prevent you from having more complications.

Diabetics know better than anyone, as you are living with this condition 24 hours each day.

It is good to have your blood sugar meter close by and have it checked with the sugar solutions to make sure your meter is working correctly. Your doctor should advise you on how often to check your blood sugar.

You know how you feel and many need to check it more than two times a day. Sometimes you may need to check it as often as three or four times a day to be able to keep this

condition in better control.

If you are on Medicare, you can get free testing supplies, including testing strips, along with lancets and devices to check your blood sugar, providing your doctor tells your pharmacy.

The Centers for Disease Control are showing that diabetes is increasing. It is hard to believe this serious disease is affecting some 20.8 million Americans, with nearly a third not being diagnosed.

Can you believe that some 58,000 people in Kansas are diabetics and do not know it? I can hardly believe almost 50 percent of the Kansas population is at an increased risk, depending on the risk factor of age, overweight and a sedentary life style. The disease continues to rise

even though we are more educated in the field of diabetes.

Some diabetics do not take this condition serious enough, as they continue to eat an unbalanced diet and do not exercise enough. It sometimes is harder for older people to exercise because of other conditions, like arthritis.

Diabetes is a killer with many complications. Keep it in tighter control and keep informed. Knowing the facts can help to motivate you and keep you in better control.

As people with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease, they are also two to four times likely to have a stroke.

You can be healthier than others if you take good care of yourself.

Elsie Wolter, Oberlin

Letter to the Editor

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