

'Danger' of cell phones overblown by U.S., press

Much ado is made about the supposed danger of cell-phone-crazed drivers, with horrible statistics thrown around to "prove" that we need to get these madmen and madwomen off our streets.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood held a press conference the other day to decry drivers texting and talking while zipping down the road. But then, Ray LaHood is against Everything Dangerous.

Then comes the statistical blast: Phone use while driving is so dangerous that nearly 6,000 people were killed last year in accidents in which "distracted driving" was "among" the causes.

Let's break that down. The "scare" headline and the lead of the Associated Press story are all about cell phones. People rant about drivers using cell phones. But apparently, no one keeps track of wrecks caused by cell phones — probably because the total is so small as to be statistically insignificant.

That 6,000 deaths includes those at least partly attributed to distracted drivers. They may have been texting, talking, eating, drinking, playing video games, reading, watching a movie on their iPod, turning to see someone in a passing car, checking on a crying child.

There are a lot of distractions on the road, to be sure. But many of those drivers may also have been drunk or otherwise impaired, ill, old, you name it. Distraction is only one of the causes a police officer may have listed.

So the truth of the matter, though hard to pin down, is that drivers using cell phones probably caused no more than a third to half of those wrecks. Say 2,000 deaths or less.

And while no one would say any one of those deaths was insignificant, it hardly amounts to an epidemic of cell-phone-related carnage. A few, maybe, but nothing compared to the 34,400 who died because of drunk driving.

But the statistics can be manipulated to make this appear to be a serious problem.

"To put it plainly," the distracted LaHood

says, "distracted driving is a menace to society. Distracted driving is an epidemic, and it seems to be getting worse every day."

He gave no statistics to back that up.

Senators are calling for states that don't crack down on texting and talking to lose a quarter of their federal highway money — though given the state of the highway trust fund, that might not be much of a threat.

Shouldn't someone first establish a need? Then propose a workable solution?

Banning cell phones from cars is a bad idea. The benefits of mobile communications are such that people won't give them up. They may be far greater, in fact, than the dangers, though no one has thought to quantify them.

Instead, let's ask for responsibility.

It makes sense that no driver ought to be carrying on a text conversation — which can involve a hand, the eyes, the brain and maybe some toes — but what about dialing a phone number? It may be hard to draw the line.

Some states have made both illegal, yet others are texting or sending Twitter messages to drivers advising of road conditions.

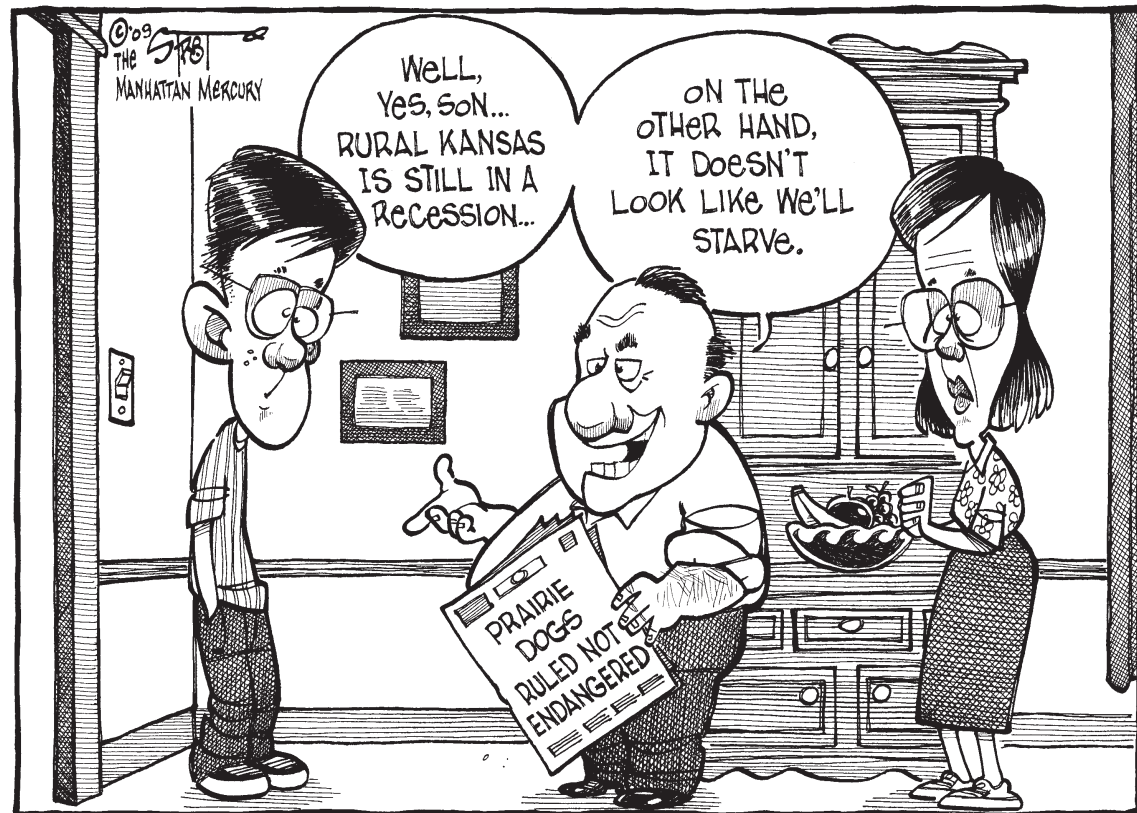
Holding a phone in one hand? Most people have done it, but requiring a hands-free device doesn't sound unreasonable. The image of a driver speeding down the street, phone to the ear, head cocked, just screams "dangerous."

But then a lot of this is emotional, not rational. With so little to go in the realm of facts, and so many overblown claims and scare stats, it's no wonder people get riled up.

Our view: Let's outlaw texting and hand-held conversations, and tell people that when they talk — or eat or drink or ogle a pretty girl or a breathtaking sunset — they'll be held accountable when they hit something.

Responsibility ought to be the key, not a regulation that would be hard to enforce and harder still to sell to the public. Responsibility, and a return to responsible use of statistics.

— Steve Haynes



Flu shot gets her lace in view

My grandmother always told me to wear lace on the bottom of my slip just in case it showed.

I thought about that as I did a partial striptease act in the middle of one of the busiest airport terminals in the country last week.

While I don't wear slips much anymore — because I seldom wear skirts — a nice lace bra would have been a lot more attractive than my plain old white cotton sports bra.

But there you go. Another one of my — and just about every other — grandmother's sayings was to always wear clean underwear because you never know when you might be in a wreck and have to go to the hospital.

(I actually had a nurse say that to my son as he was lying in a coma with a skull fracture once. As I remember, it was enormously comforting.)

Ah, but let's start at the beginning.

Steve and I are both 61. OK, OK. So he's 61 and I'm almost 62. Be that as it may. We are of the age where flu shots are yearly health-care regimen — especially since as a pharmacist, I see a lot of sick people.

We were really busy when the vaccine came in and there wasn't much anyway. It had to go to higher-risk people than us. Then there was none.

I called the health clinic twice and stopped by twice.

Nope. Nada. None. Sorry.

Well, with luck we figured, we'd



Open Season

By Cynthia Haynes
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be just fine. Flu shots don't always keep you from getting the flu, but they do help ward off some of the more common bugs. Just because we didn't get shots didn't mean we would get sick. Lots of people our age never had a flu shot in their lives.

Then we took off for a between-holidays visit with our daughters in Augusta, Ga. They've been wanting us to come for Thanksgiving for years, but travel during the holidays is horrible, expensive and just plain ridiculous. But between Thanksgiving and Christmas, it's not so bad.

Our best flight plan was to leave Kansas City and fly into Atlanta, where we were to catch a commuter jet to Augusta. This is usually the fastest, least expensive way get there, even if the short hop never really gets to cruising altitude.

Everything went as planned. We spent the night in Lawrence and visited our son, then took a morning flight out of KCI. We had a little over an hour to kill in Atlanta, but we figured that we would just walk from one terminal to the other and that would give us some exercise and kill a little time.

It worked perfectly, but as we neared our gate, we passed a makeshift stand offering flu shots.

"What's the catch?" we asked. No catch. Fill out a simple form saying that if it kills you, the health department isn't responsible, roll up your sleeve and fork over \$40 each.

Well that was more than we would pay at home but then at home that week, the price was \$0 and you got your money's worth.

I forked over and Steve rolled up his sleeve.

I tried but couldn't. The long-sleeved top I had worn wouldn't roll. I ended up pulling down the neck to expose my upper arm and giving the male nurse and assorted passing strangers an eyeful of my less-than-exciting underwear.

I'd like to say that's the end of the story, but while all I got was a little bandage out of the deal, Steve got a bruise twice the size of an old-fashioned silver dollar.

I'm sure the health department at home will have cheap vaccine, a private area and sharp needles now that we've got our shots. But isn't that just the way it goes?

Man, son duck 'chick flick'

There were no takers at my house when I extended an invitation to Jim and son James to watch the movie "Julie & Julia" with me. They both suddenly had something else to do.

It's the story of one woman's fascination with French chef and author Julia Child. Mrs. Child wrote a cookbook for American women on how to prepare French food and Julie Powell blogged about cooking her way through every recipe in the book.

That's OK. I knew it was a "chick flick," so I just watched it by myself. And thoroughly enjoyed it.

I've never been a fancy cook, but I've always wanted to try making a gourmet meal. I know the difference between a croissant and a crescent roll, between sauteing and frying and between a fine Bordeaux wine and Thunderbird. But just once, I would love to serve a beautiful beef Bourgoigne or a scrumptious soufflé.

So, until I get up the nerve to try, I'll keep making chicken-fried steaks, mashed potatoes and gravy. Besides, if Jim can't pronounce it,



Out Back

By Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts
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he may not eat it.

— ob —

Some things a girl never forgets. Like fragrances.

A dear friend of mine recently had to move into the long-term care facility where Jim's father lives. Fern had worked for many years at one of the drug stores. She knew the entire inventory but, I suspect, she especially liked working in the cosmetic department.

Her room is right next to Dad's. The first time I saw her there, I bent over her wheel chair and gave her a hug. She returned the embrace and without missing a beat said, "You're wearing Red Door."

Even at 93, there are some things a girl never forgets.

— ob —

Our daughter, Jennifer, is employed by a major software company and is fortunate to be able to work out of her home. That means Ani, her 3 1/2-year-old daughter, can be at home with her.

Jennifer has converted her dining room into her office and little Ani has her own desk in a corner. I was talking with Jennifer this morning when she interrupted our conversation and said to Ani, "Go wash your face right now, young lady."

When Jennifer came back on the line she said Ani gone the refrigerator, taken a bowl of whipped topping, sat behind her chair where Jennifer couldn't see her — and put it on her face like a beard.

Sounds like Ani has seen Santa Claus one too many times.

Lucky guess? She thinks so

It wasn't just me that thought it would be a girl.

Her sister Felicia thought it would be a girl, too.

Felicia said she had scientific grounds to say that, however.

Last year, she said, all her friends who were pregnant had boys. All of them.

And this year, all her friends who've had babies have had girls. ALL of them.

So there was no doubt in her mind that her sister's child would be a girl.

Then there was the checker at Kroger, which for Midwesterners, is like a southern fried Dillons. Right Store, Right Price, and all that.

She looked at Lindsay, smiled sweetly and told Brad he looked like the kind of guy who was just made to spoil little girls. She was just sure Lindsay's baby would be a girl.

Me? I had no particular reason. I just thought it would be a girl.

Not that I have a preference; I don't. All babies are fine with me. I always figured you got what you got, call it luck of the draw or the will of the Lord.

Whatever it was, it's yours, and you're stuck with it.

And that worked pretty well with our kids, two girls and then a boy.

So I figured our first grandchild could be whatever it would be.

Cynthia and I, we'd be thrilled. I think Lindsay and Brad look at it that way, too.

But between me and the checker at Kroger and Felicia, I think we pretty much had the skids greased on this one.

I kept referring to the baby as "my granddaughter" and Felicia threatened to buy only girls' clothing. I stayed out of that part.

But pretty soon, Lindsay was giving me reports on what "your granddaughter" was doing. I figured it would be pretty easy to switch directions if we were wrong.

We'd have five months to get used to the "boy" thing, and they could pick a boy's name. (For girls, it's supposed to be between Ella and Emma, but there's still time to change.)

Then came last Tuesday, the



Along the Sappa

By Steve Haynes
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big day for the sonogram. We all bundled up against a chilly southern morning and headed to the obstetrician's office. Once there, we'd barely been seated when they called us in to the ultrasound room.

The sonographer smiled a sweet southern smile, motioned for Lindsay to climb up onto the table and pull up her shirt, then gave her a good, cold squirt of goo.

"Oh," she squealed. "That's warm."

Sarcasm apparently is lost on sonographers, however, and she proceeded to slap the probe onto Lindsay's belly.

"Oh, do you want to know the sex?" she asked.

"Yes," we all replied.

And she proceeded to glide the sounder head across Lindsay's belly lickity split. She'd pause every so often to measure something or explain.

"That's the baby's thigh bone," she said. "We'll measure it."

"That's the baby's heart. And those are its kidneys."

She measured the little head, then turned the probe and snapped a picture of its cute little face.

"It's really working its mouth," she said, and we all agreed it must be related to Lindsay — and Cynthia. Or be some kind of alien; from the sonogram pictures, you can't be too sure.

Flash here, measure; dash there, snap. Soon she was done, and started to shut the machine down. We were all ready to jump and shout at once, I think, when she realized her omission.

"Oh, I forgot to show you the sex, didn't I? Well, I know, but I didn't have a clear picture."

She turned the machine back on. We waited.

She twisted and turned the probe,

finally stopping on something indecipherable.

"There," she pointed to two vague lines. "It's a girl."

Boys, I'm told, are easier to spot.

Then, of course, we had to call our respective offices and the whole family. Later, I compared notes with Felicia. We congratulated ourselves on a correct call.

"Well, dad," she pointed out, "there was only a 50 percent chance we'd be wrong."

So true. But then, Cynthia would have had to get rid of all those girl clothes. Felicia, too. It's better this way.

From the Bible

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.

Psalms 63:1

Write

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