

### New license plates are a waste of money

Kansas has somehow survived the state's failure to make everyone switch to the new, if dull, light blue license plates.

In fact, drivers with the 2002-issued "capital dome" tags are still getting along just fine. These tags, made of aluminum and covered with reflective sheeting, are nowhere near worn out. They could last another decade, maybe two.

The Department of Revenue had planned to replace all tags between 2007 and 2009, with the blue "Ad Astra" tags. The rationale was that people who get by without paying for new tags would have to do so once the white tags were outlawed.

Then came the budget crunch. The state just couldn't afford to issue new tags for everyone. So it didn't.

And the world has not come to an end.

Aside from the fact that the "capital dome" tag, with its hints of yellow wheat and blue sky above, is one of the most attractive our state has ever issued, these tags really should be good for 30-40 years.

It would be an environmental sin to replace them just because some bureaucrat figures that it would make it easier for the cops to spot scoff-laws.

If they wanted to do something to push enforcement, why not make those tiny expiration stickers just a tad bigger? Too easy, we guess.

Anyway, the "dome" tags soldier on. In fact, the last couple of tag designs before that could still be in service. They're pretty much indestructible unless you use them to stop a trailer hitch.

The real question is, why not just let people keep tags as long as they're legible? That might just save the state more money than it could make from improved enforcement.

California has left its tags in use for decades at a time. So have some other states. There's no magic in changing the design every couple of years, not at the cost of making all new plates.

The way the budget is today, Kansas has plenty of priorities beyond new license tags.

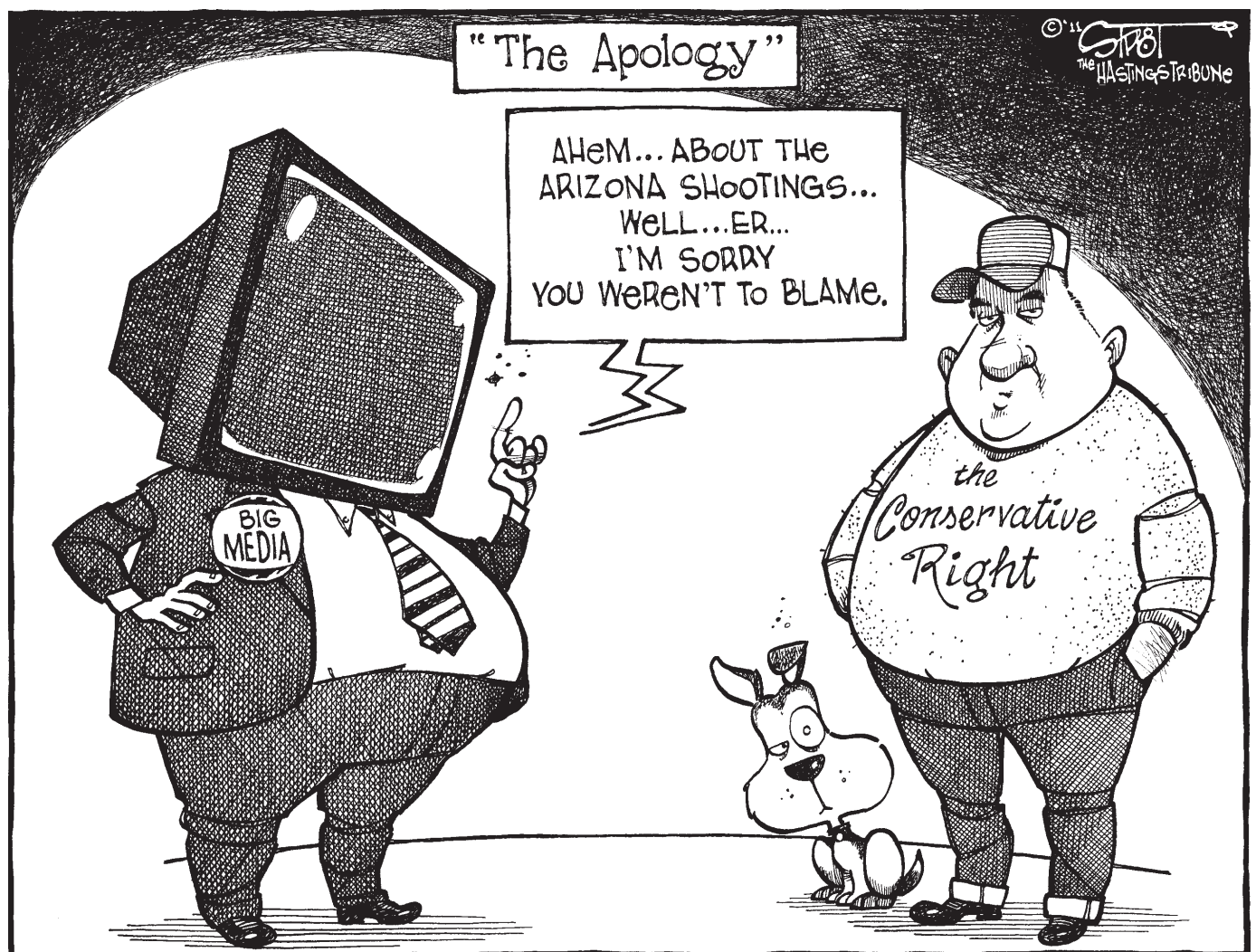
— Steve Haynes

PS: Let us add a prayer to the Revenue Department to do a slight edit on the new "In God We Trust" tags designed by a Colby couple.

While attractive, these tags are simply unreadable due to the use of outline type on the state and slogan. They look great on paper, but on a car, you can't read them.

The state should be able to fill in the type without creating a whole new master for this tag.

Then, you could read the message — and sales of these tags would take off. It probably won't happen until the lettering is changed, however. No use paying extra for a slogan no one can read.



### Kansas wheat in need of moisture

#### Insight

John Schlageck

There's a whole lot of wheat in the western third of Kansas that looks mighty tough. Some of the crop is barely out of the ground. Other fields have a bit of green but very little growth. More alarming are quarters and half sections with no wheat visible at all.

One thing is certain, this year's crop is low on moisture, has little if any root growth, is fragile and vulnerable to winter kill.

Travel west of Dodge to Ingalls in Gray County and most of the better wheat has received less than an inch of rain since the wheat was dusted in last September. Not nearly enough to send this year's crop into the traditionally dry months of January and February in a vigorous condition.

While some of the crop received approximately two inches of snow New Year's Eve and another dusting a week later, this precipitation was hardly enough.

"So far our wheat crop is not looking good," says long-time Gray County farmer Joe Jury. "This country always blows this time of the year and that also spells problems."

Most farmers chem-fallow, minimum till or no till in this region of Kansas which builds crop residue on their soil to prevent wind erosion and save moisture. Valuable lessons were learned during the five-year drought period between 2001 and 2005 when many producers didn't harvest a wheat crop.

"Today we try to save every bit of moisture," Jury says. "We attempt to manage our crop residue and moisture much better than we did 10, 15 or even 20 years ago. With the new biogenet-

ics we can raise so much more on less moisture."

In spite of the rough looking winter wheat crop, Jury still hopes to receive enough moisture to raise an average crop. The Gray County producer isn't ready to give up on the crop yet.

Further west in Stanton and Morton counties, a couple miles from the Colorado border, Jim Sipes rates the wheat crop below average. Sipes says much of this entire region of the state wasn't able to establish a good stand, with some of the wheat acreage yet to sprout.

As of the first week of January he rated his crop below average and the entire region, "poor." Being a certified wheat seed dealer, Sipes sells wheat to growers across this entire area of Kansas. He talks to many more.

To date the moisture pattern has been extremely dry. For the wheat crop to turn around, weather in southwestern Kansas is going to have to change.

The southwestern Kansas seed wheat producer believes the continued lack of moisture could be devastating for yields in this part of the state.

"While no one can predict what will happen to this year's crop, my fear is now that temperatures are dropping and nights have dipped below zero, this wheat crop is not protected. I'm afraid we're probably going to see a lot of winter kill this year."

Sipes foresees many acres being destroyed and producers will look to plant

summer crops on those failed acres. On the remaining acres, he believes many producers are looking at a winter wheat crop next summer of less than half of a normal yield for this region of Kansas.

If there is a bright side to this grim picture in western Kansas, it's this — if there's ever a good time to be dry it's this time of year. That's because the winter wheat crop is pretty much dormant and isn't using moisture.

That could change quickly if the dusting of snow vacates this part of the state and temperatures climb back into the 40s or above. That's when the crop will start growing again.

Should this occur, and the weather continues with a warming trend, insects begin to show up — especially in February. That will mean scouting fields and the possibility of spraying to control these pests that have the potential to lower yields even more.

"The problem then becomes, can I afford to drop more money into an already sinking ship," Sipes explains. "It's always a difficult decision."

Both producers are hoping and praying for additional moisture in the form of snow to insulate the fragile crop and moisture in the form of rain later in the year. And while winter wheat prospects look bleak today, they know this crop is resilient.

"There's an old saying that you have to kill wheat at least nine times before you really kill it," Jury says with a chuckle. "If we receive timely spring moisture and it doesn't kill out this winter, we may still grow some average wheat — and that's better than no wheat at all."



Editor:

I have been reading the Sheriff's Log in the paper. It can be interesting in a number of ways and gives a bit of insight on what goes on in and around Norton.

A good number of the vehicle accidents reported seem to involve a vehicle and deer. Of course at the time these accidents are happening (twilight) a deer can be almost invisible. Perhaps classes could be set up for the deer to teach them what a highway is and what to look for before crossing it. Snacks could be provided and little gifts or awards could be handed out for different achievement levels, such as protective head gear, reflective ankle bands and etc.

The deer hunters would probably do better if they just cruised the highway to get their quota, instead of destroying property (cutting fences) and endangering livestock (calves getting out and onto the highway.)

June Prout, Norton

Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:  
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ISSN 1063-701X  
215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.  
Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654  
Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers  
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd  
Publishers, 1970-2002



### Everyone needs a guilt free day of rest

I don't know what kids now-a-days call it but, "back in my time" we called having a totally lazy day, "vegging out". A week ago, that's exactly what Jim and I did - all day. We vegged out; chilled out; checked out. It had snowed all day the day before and during the night, too. There would be no outside working for Jim and, we knew it the night before.

We popped popcorn and stayed up way too late watching old movies. We slept in the next morning and spent the day doing absolutely nothing. I didn't cook, clean, do laundry or dress. Jim was more productive than I because at least he did some research on the internet for a Bible study he was preparing.

I read some magazines that had been piling up; worked a sudoku puzzle; and read a couple of chapters in a book I'm working on. It's the biography of Satchel Page, the black baseball player who, by some accounts, was the best pitcher who ever lived.

And you know what? I didn't feel even a glimmer of guilt. That's the benefit of having a few years under your belt. I don't think I'm going to hell because I

#### Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



wasted a day. I know, I know... "idle" hands are the devil's workshop". But, the Lord also wants us to rest our bodies and minds, every now and again.

Normally, Jim and I set a pretty fast pace. We have a lot of irons in the fire. We both know how to relax but, the opportunity to do it at the same time was what made the day memorable. The next day it was "business as usual". But, what a fun day our play day was. In fact I'm paying a little closer attention to the weather forecast in hopes we might have another snow day real soon.

-ob-

Two of our Texas granddaughters celebrated birthdays last week. Taylor turned 12 and Alexandria 16. They

both have friends out here. Taylor made friends with kids from our church when she stayed with us and Alex lived here for three years so she has old classmates she knows.

I pay attention to the activities of their local friends as a way of knowing what our grandchildren might be interested in. When I showed Alex's picture to one of her old friends he said, "Wow! She's changed." I'll say she's changed. She left western Kansas a gangly 12 year-old and is now a stunning young woman with her sights set on college and a career in forensic science.

Taylor's friend, John, used to be her height but, he has since shot up. I mentioned to him that Taylor was still on the short side and that I needed to put a brick on his head to slow his growth. He, of course, wants to get even taller. I think he has basketball in his future.

Taylor is 12 going on 21. She is a poised, confident girl who loves to read and is really getting into cooking. I'm sure she gets that from me.

Keeping you informed on all of the local events,  
news and sports in the Norton area.