

# Opinion



## A Kansas Viewpoint

### State need not be in casino industry

From The Kansas City Star

As expected, this week Kansas legislative leaders rolled out their proposal to expand gambling, even though they're not sure they have the votes to push the plan through the Senate.

Other lawmakers are entitled to be skeptical. From the beginning, this has been a classic exercise in how not to continue.

Start with the fact that the Kansas Constitution bans privately owned casinos. That leaves two options: casinos owned by tribes under the Indian Gaming Act, or outright state ownership.

Gambling supporters quickly went for the latter choice, even though no other state in the nation has taken such a momentous step — and for good reasons.

The risk of corruption is considerable, and not merely the classic sort of corruption in which money finds its way into the wrong hands. Another risk is corruption of purpose stemming from the conflicting positions in which the state would find itself.

Would it be a government or a business?

Compare the complicated regulatory scheme proposed for Kansas with Missouri's relatively simple setup.

In Missouri, all the important regulatory functions for supervising gambling are performed by the state Gaming Commission. The Kansas Senate bill, however, would erect a multi-jurisdictional contraption that casino operators could manipulate.

Gambling facilities would be owned by the Lottery Commission, which would screen companies to manage the casinos. But the final decision on choosing the operating companies would lie with a new Destination Casino Review Board.

Meanwhile, regulatory oversight would be vested in the Kansas Racing and Gaming Commission.

If Kansas legislators are determined to emulate Missouri, they should continue in a more serious and responsible way: Why not propose a constitutional amendment and let voters decide if they want more gambling?

In any event, they should drop this feckless talk of state-owned casinos.

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail [jvannostrand@nwkansan.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansan.com) or [pdecker@nwkansan.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansan.com).

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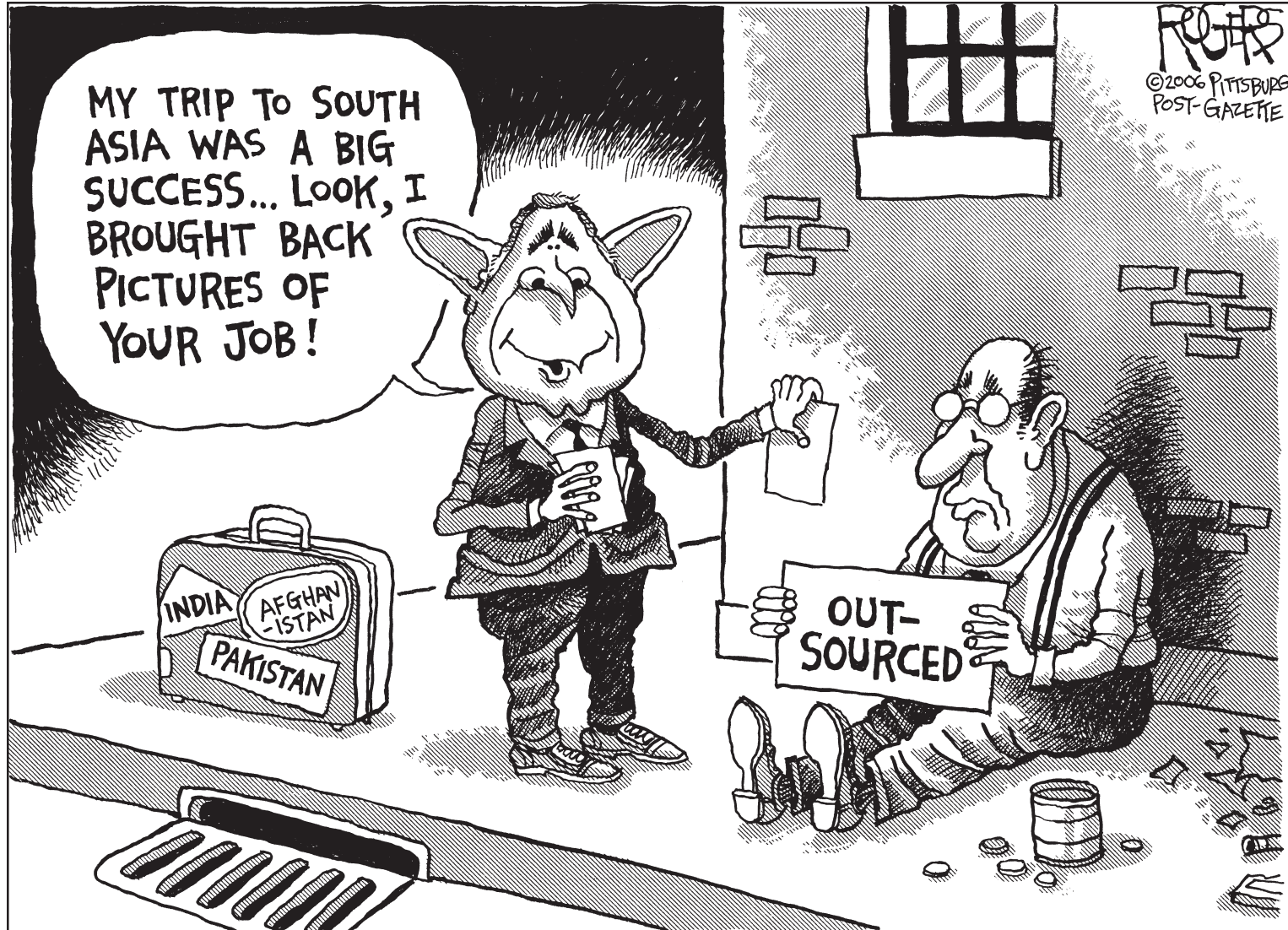
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## A different kind of disaster and response

*"Don't call for love. Don't ask for gold, our daily bread or no more pain. Pray for rain."*  
from the 1986 Guadalcanal Diary song "Pray for Rain."

A group of northwest Kansas people are doing just that - praying for rain.

A Prayer for Rain event will be held Saturday in St. Francis at Sawhill Park at the Bandshell. Music and praise will start at 6:30 p.m. and prayer begins at 7 p.m. This is an interdenominational event with all area churches invited to join together to pray for rain for our part of the state.

The irony is as deep as the water in New Orleans last August after Hurricane Katrina. People there were probably praying for the hurricanes and rain to stop.

I appreciate the efforts of those people in St. Francis, because they know the help won't come from anyplace else.

Last summer, I went out to dinner one night with a friend and the restaurant we chose had TVs for the customers to watch. I couldn't help but watch the hurricane-powered waves crash against the Gulf Coast properties.

At the same time, I had a feeling the talking heads wanted the viewers to have sympathy for the extravagant properties along the coast as they were being dismantled by nature. We were also supposed to feel sorry for the fancy places where thousands of our college youth go for spring break to dismantle their self-esteem.

Sure, hurricanes are news. Powerful winds,



**John Van Nostrand**

- Line in the Dust

rain measured by the feet and loose debris bouncing around like a pinball threatens lives. But the people who chose to live along the Gulf Coast chose to live with those risks, just like those of us who live in northwest Kansas, the heart of the Great Plains, where weather is just as volatile.

I do sympathize with the people who have been forced out of their homes because of the hurricanes. My empathy is because there are people who are using the hurricane and its aftermath for political positioning.

I don't think the Democrats sent the hurricanes to make the president and the GOP look bad. Democrats and Republicans should stop acting like that was the case.

At the same time, people forced out of their homes are still moving from hotel room to hotel room still out of a job and their bills are stacking up.

Are we supposed to feel good for New Orleans since the city was cleaned up enough to have Mardi Gras? That reminded me of people want-

ing the New York Yankees to win the 2001 World Series, weeks after Sept. 11, to make the city feel better.

Giving people direction and a sense of hope to recover is what people need to feel better after disasters - not baseballs or beads.

Droughts don't have the same immediate impact as hurricanes. Droughts don't take roofs off of domed football stadiums. Droughts are silent and take their time to do the damage. Droughts don't look good on national television.

The grass fires in Texas and New Mexico are getting some attention. That is how drought can cause faster destruction. Lives have been lost because of those fires too. It's disturbing to think, but maybe all of that will be enough to let the entire country know the situations others face.

But again, without flashing lights, palm trees bent in two because of wind and boarded up storefront windows, do others understand drought? I'm curious to know if people naive of the Great Plains think grass fires are overexaggerated because all you have to do is call the fire department.

The people who attend the prayer meeting in St. Francis are not doing it for CNN cameras or to prove how ineffective FEMA may be.

The people in St. Francis are trying to get the attention of somebody else.

For more information about the prayer meeting, call (785) 332-8905 or 332-3150.

## Arguments abound over eminent domain

Several issues that will define the 2006 legislative session are coming closer to having their day before the Kansas House of Representatives.

While the House has already approved Jessica's Law, cut taxes on machinery and equipment and raised the age of marital consent, there are other major issues set for debate. Among them are the phasing out of the franchise tax, eminent domain, workman's compensation and concealed carry, all of which are likely to face floor action in the coming week.

#### Eminent Domain

House Bill (HB) 5025 proposing a constitutional amendment limiting the government's power of eminent domain was referred out of the Federal and State Affairs committee last week.

Proponents of the bill included several landowners, or previous landowners, who were negatively effected by the government's use of eminent domain. In opposition to the bill were governmental entities who insisted that there is a need for this governmental power and that a reduction or elimination of it would result in businesses going outside of Kansas due to the burdensome regulations that may slow or halt the process of land acquisition.

The arguments appeared to hinge the interpretation of a "necessary" governmental use of eminent domain. Those who sought to limit the power feel that use of eminent domain should be restricted to construction and maintenance of utilities, roadways and similar infrastructure needs. Opponents of the bill would prefer that the power not be limited and allow acquisition for economic development and for removal of blighted areas.



**Jim Morrison**

- Capitol Review

#### Workman's Compensation

Thursday, the House Commerce and Labor committee finished hearings on Senate Bill (SB) 461 that made changes to rules regarding pre-existing conditions, permanent partial disability and supplemental functional disability compensation sections of the workman's compensation statutes. The bill is expected to be debated on the House floor this week.

#### Concealed Carry

Senate Bill 418 allowing licensed Kansas residents to carry a concealed firearm was passed favorably out of the House Federal and State Affairs committee Wednesday. Committee amendments to the bill added libraries, churches and temples to the list of prohibited places a licensee may carry a concealed weapon. The Senate list included courthouses, jails, prisons, schools, state office buildings and mental health centers. The House is expected to hear the bill this week.

#### Franchise Tax

A bill to phase out the Kansas franchise tax is out of committee and should be heard by the House soon. HB 2548 would eliminate the tax over a three-year period.

The figure used to compute the tax varies depending on how the business is incorporated under Kansas law, but for those meeting the threshold, tax would be paid at 0.125 percent for the tax year commencing after Dec. 31, 2005, 0.083 percent after Dec. 31, 2006, 0.041 percent after Dec. 31, 2007, and eliminated in the next year and beyond.

The reduction and eventual elimination of the franchise tax in Kansas should encourage more businesses to establish franchises in Kansas and provide a further incentive to retain those currently located within the State.

#### Medicare Consumer Alert

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is warning seniors and people with disabilities to be aware of a scheme asking Medicare beneficiaries to money and checking account information to help them enroll in a Medicare Prescription Drug Plan.

Complaints have been filed in several states and the caller attempts to convince the beneficiary to allow them to withdraw \$299 to pay for a non-existent prescription drug program.

If you have been solicited for this or a similar offer you are encouraged to call local law enforcement or 1-877-7SAFERX (1-877-772-3379) to report the incident.

No Medicare drug plan can ask a person with Medicare for bank account or other personal information over the telephone and no beneficiary should ever provide that information to a caller. Whenever you have questions or concerns about any activity regarding Medicare please call 1-800-MEDICARE.

## Doonesbury

- Gary Trudeau

