

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Smoking bans will be a battle

From The (Junction City) Daily Union

Last week, the Senate Judiciary Committee took up a bill calling for a statewide ban on indoor smoking. Sen. David Wysong, Mission Hills, brought up the legislation because he has felt the personal pain of losing loved ones to tobacco-related cancer, most recently his sister-in-law who died of lung cancer last fall.

We support Sen. Wysong and his bill calling for a smoking ban in indoor places such as bars, restaurants, medical facilities and child care facilities. Private homes, tobacco-related businesses and private clubs would be exempted.

This legislation will face an uphill fight from bar owners and liquor lobbyists. There may even be some lawmakers who oppose the bill because they believe the issue is one that local governments should decide.

According to Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, more than half of Americans live in a city or state with laws mandating that workplaces, restaurants and bars be smoke-free.

Twenty-two states, including Nevada, California and Arkansas, and 577 municipalities are now smoke free. Think about this, Nevada in a ballot measure banned smoking at restaurants, bars and around slot machines at supermarkets, gas stations and convenience stores.

Seventeen cities in Kansas, including Lawrence, Olathe, Overland Park, Salina and Hutchinson, have some form of smoking ban. Lawrence is smoke free in restaurants and bars, and anyone who has visited that city will not notice a decrease in traffic, particularly into the wee hours of morning, because people aren't allowed to smoke.

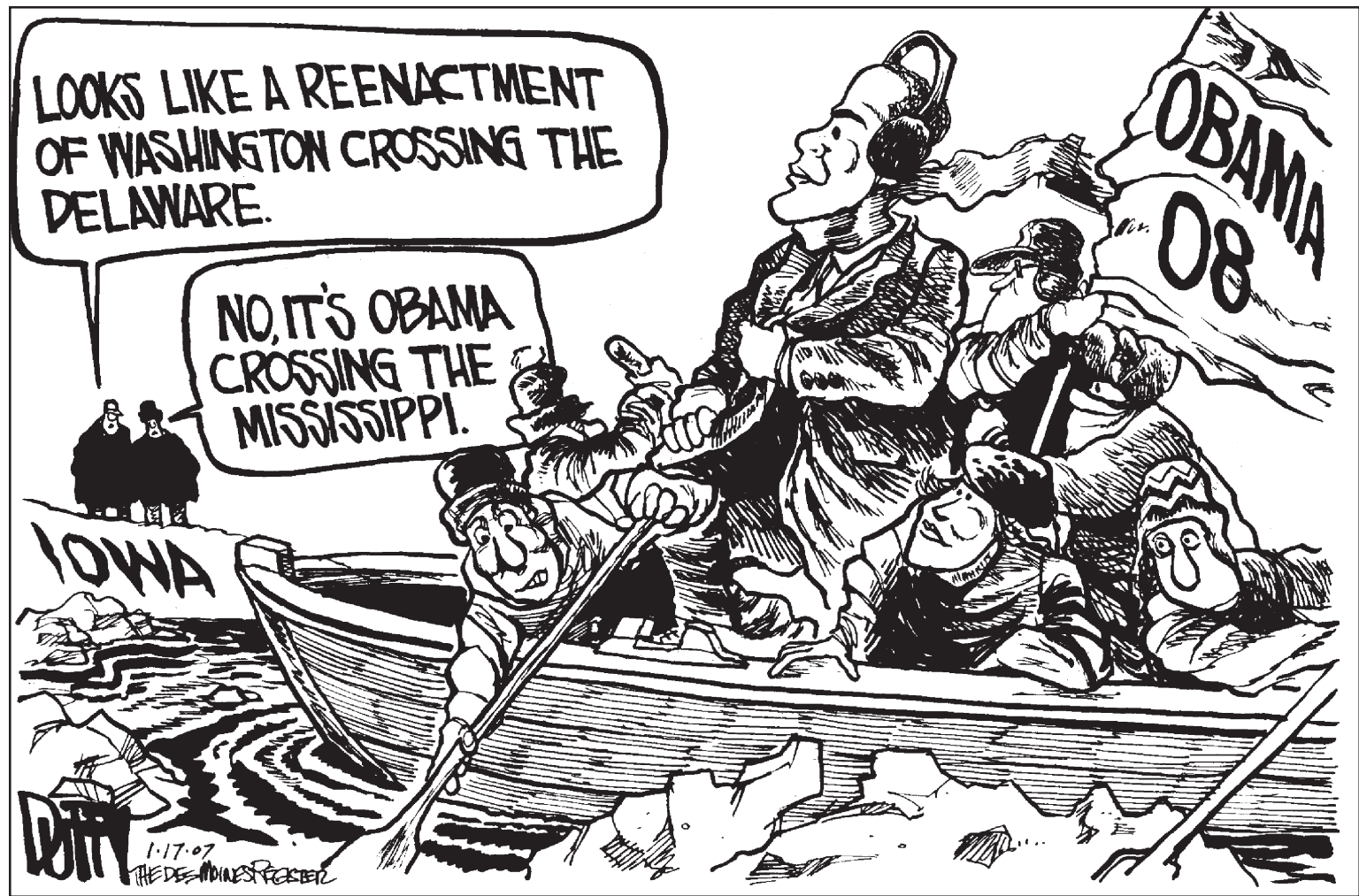
... The health care community, including the U.S. Surgeon General, have been outspoken advocates of a smoking ban.

However, this will be an uphill battle unless we call our lawmakers and ask them to support a statewide ban on indoor smoking. Call them today for our health's sake.

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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676
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Working for or just working taxpayers?

Sheridan County taxpayers are in the middle of a winter storm. But it's not caused by Mother Nature.

You would have thought snow and ice covered the table as Commissioners David Zimmerman, Keith Kennedy and Ron Schamberger spent tax dollars for raises Monday. The range of raises slid from 5 cents an hour for emergency medical services technicians and drivers to more than \$2,000 for the public health nurse.

Not all of Sheridan County's public servants received raises. And it appears one elected official received the blunt of nothing more than a vendetta.

In my opinion, there's something very slippery with this whole salary issue.

County Health Nurse Melanie Cooper received a raise of \$2,275 and Road and Bridge Director Bob Schwarz received one of \$900. Topping that, the county furnishes Schwarz a pickup to drive back and forth to work from his rural home near Angelus. That's a perk none of the other county employees receive.

But County Clerk Paula Bielser's salary was cut by \$400.

The commissioners and Bielser have been at odds since the last election, and it looks like the war is far from over.

At first glance, the commissioners didn't give themselves a raise and left their salary at \$10,400. However, if you figure in Kennedy is getting another \$14,097 a year in health insurance benefits his salary package is worth \$24,497. And since Schamberger and Zimmerman opted not to go on the county's health insurance plan, they have taxpayers give them an extra \$7,050 in cash each year. That means taxpayers pay each of them



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

\$17,450.

But taking it one step further, given the fact the commissioners meet four hours per week, 52 weeks a year means Kennedy is being paid \$118 per hour and the other two rake in \$84 an hour. That does not include tax money put into the Kansas Public Employee Retirement System or mileage to and from the courthouse each week. Not bad for a part-time job.

Unfortunately, all this is legal. Commissioners can do as they darn well please when it comes to paying themselves and the only thing taxpayers can do about it is vote them out of office.

Taxpayers need to be asking themselves if Zimmerman, Kennedy and Schamberger are leading them forward or taking them to the poorhouse. In my opinion, the commissioners better clean up their act or voters need to do it for them. While the practice of being more than generous to one's self was in place before these three took office, they need to see the writing on the wall that Sheridan County's future is calling for them to lead and live frugally.

Zimmerman, Kennedy and Schamberger need to realize they are leading a county with a population of barely more than 2,000 residents; 20.3 percent who are over the age of 65, and 15.7

percent who live below national three-person household poverty level of \$16,090 a year.

And taxpayers need to watch more closely how their money is being spent. One person doing just that is Bill Patman.

On Monday, Patman, chairman of the county's public transportation tried to show the commissioners how a local project could be accomplished for very little money.

Patman submitted a proposal for a new garage for vans, of which the transportation board has already raised \$15,000 of the \$31,000 needed. Wes Bainter has offered to contribute more than \$2,500 and Patman said he would personally contribute \$1,000 for wiring. Zimmerman told him the commissioners would look at the plan and if they moved forward with it bids would need to be taken.

Yes, county policy dictates that bids are to be taken and I agree with complying with that policy, but Zimmerman's comment was contradictory to last year's board purchases of more than \$174,000 in equipment for Schwarz's department without using the bid process.

Two other people closely watching commissioner actions are rural Hoxie residents Doren and Irene Follis. The couple, since late last year, have attended weekly commission meetings in order to watch where taxpayers, money is going.

I applaud the Follises actions, because instead of the commissioners working for the taxpayers; from where I stand, it looks like they are just working the taxpayers.

Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press.

How easy is it to get an earmark?

By Steve Haynes

If the new Congress is serious about balancing the federal budget, the first thing it would do is give the president a line-item veto over spending bills.

Of course, Congress is not serious about balancing the budget, and the last thing it would do it give the president more power. Especially over Congress.

If the president had a line-item veto, he could pencil out the hundreds, make that thousands, of "earmarks" members slip into spending bills.

The number mushroomed while the Republicans were in power, but there's no sign the Democrats will do anything about the earmarks. Heck, Democrats like earmarks as much as Republicans.

What's an earmark, you ask?

It's a provision slipped into an appropriation bill, often unrelated to the earmark, which directs federal money to a specific project, usually in a member's state or district.

While these are easy for a congressman to get, lobbying firms offer to cinch them — for a price. The system corrupts the entire federal budget, but there's not much a president can do.

Under the Constitution, he can sign a bill or veto it, but if he signs it, he must take the whole



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

thing. Earmarks just slide through because, usually, the bill is vital to running the government and the president can't risk a shutdown.

How easy is it to get an earmark?

A couple of years ago, Rep. Jerry Moran was talking to people in Oberlin about restoration of the old Works Progress Administration facilities at Sappa Park, just outside the town.

"What can I do to help," he asked.

Someone replied that he could get money to buy shingles to restore the old shelter house. He got an \$8,000 earmark for the shingles and remarked later that someone told him it'd have been just as easy to get \$8 million.

How bad is the problem?

In 1994, when the Republicans came to power in Congress, *National Review* reported 4,126 earmarks in 13 appropriation bills worth maybe

\$10 billion. In 2004, 14,000 for nearly \$28 billion. This year's highway bill had a record 6,371.

The most famous may be the \$220 million "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska, which serves an island populated by about 50 people. We hope they appreciated it.

Earmarks pay for roads, community centers, parks, you name it. Most, doubtless, are worthy projects, but the government can't afford them. It can't afford its regular expenses, let alone all these extras.

Usually, earmarks are inserted with no debate and without anyone really knowing what happened. They're so small compared to a single appropriation bill that no one notices 99 percent of them.

Now everyone says we have to balance the budget and learn once again to live within our means. Except for the earmarks, of course.

You really think Congress is going to give up this sweet little pork barrel? They corrupt the system and drive up the deficit, but everyone who benefits loves them.

This is small change in the federal budget, but it's wrong. Let's demand that someone put a stop to it. — *Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press*

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce
Tinsley

