

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Alexa's Law is a different animal

From The Topeka Capital-Journal

It was terrific to see Kansas lawmakers approve long-needed legislation to beef up penalties for repeat property crime offenders. But it was disappointing to learn lawmakers had decided to package the measure with the political hot potato known as Alexa's Law. The overall bill, a crime and punishment omnibus that also pertains to drug paraphernalia and criminal use of explosives, contains a provision to establish presumptive prison sentences for third and subsequent convictions for burglary ...

But by hitching the measure to Alexa's Law, which allows prosecutors to charge a suspect with murder or other crimes related to harming a woman and her unborn child, lawmakers have placed it in jeopardy of being vetoed by Gov. Kathleen Sebelius...

The setup is unfortunate. Regardless of where they fall on the political spectrum — red, blue or purple — it seems few Kansans would argue against the proposed changes in sentencing guidelines and statutes regarding explosives.

Alexa's Law is a different animal. The measure is divisive along ethical and moral lines, with proponents saying it is needed to protect unborn victims and opponents saying it is an attempt to weaken abortion rights in Kansas ...

Although the Legislature routinely lumps various law enforcement and judicial proposals into one bill, this one smacks of lawmakers trying to put Sebelius between a rock and a hard place ...

In past sessions, lawmakers have discussed placing limits on the range of subjects that can be included in judicial omnibus bills. Perhaps it's time to renew that debate.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest.

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

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COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.



For every action, there is a reaction

Months after Sept. 11, 2001, a friend and I were talking about the security of our country.

My friend said she wouldn't be surprised if terrorists attacked the states again, but something more complex and devastating than what they did in New York City, the Pentagon and rural Pennsylvania.

My reply was, "Maybe the terrorists are done?"

Yes, that's a gutsy statement I can never prove.

My reasoning was Sept. 11 may have been the last chapter in a string of attacks from the previous 10 years or so. Remember, the first attack on the World Trade Center was in the early 1990s, followed by the string of attacks on U.S. Embassies around the world later on in the decade, the USS Cole in October 2000 and, eventually, Sept. 11.

In my casual research of Muslims, the extremist ones have been connected to terrorist activity. I've found Muslims are to defend their faith even if it means death. Because of comments from Iran's president, we should know by now that America and Western culture are the enemies of Muslims. Yes, some Muslims, want all Americans dead.

But that does not mean terrorists themselves have to do the dirty work.

Sure, there have been some terrorist-activity discovered in the states since Sept. 11, 2001. But some of our own actions may make terrorists think they don't have to do it all.

Imagine the laughs the terrorists belted out after they heard about the shootings and multiple deaths at Virginia Tech University.

John Van Nostrand

- Line in the Dust

Some of those terrorists were probably thinking of the millions of dollars we have invested in security at airports and other public places — and we can't contain people like the disturbed student who shot the 32 at Virginia Tech.

The other shootings over the years, that have one or two victims, don't have the attention like what happened at Virginia Tech, but I wonder if those incidents can still make the terrorists think they don't have to do what we fear they will do.

Remember the NASA astronaut accused of trying to kidnap a rival for a space shuttle pilot's affections and charged with attempted first-degree murder?

Even though no death was involved, who says the terrorists are not laughing at us for having one of our most highly trained and publicized citizens caught in an embarrassing and bizarre crime?

What would have terrorists done, and how would they have reacted, if Y2K would have actually happened like some people feared it would?

Then there are those incidents that Americans can't control — initially. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina wiped out New Orleans and killed more

than 1,000 people.

But the response to Katrina from the FEMA jokes, Congressional hearings and media fodder just gives more ammunition to the terrorists to think we are not as great as we think we are.

Smaller natural disasters, in terms of deaths, like the Greensburg tornado is another example of how important it is we respond to such incidents. Our own Gov. Kathleen Sebelius unnecessarily turned the moment into a political one quickly blaming the federal government for the lack of Kansas National Guard personnel and equipment to appropriately respond to Greensburg.

I did not hear Greensburg residents ask about the status of the National Guard. Those people have to find what it takes to get their lives back to normal — a new normal.

People want to know what you can do Sebelius — they don't want to hear who you want to blame.

Like with those incidents I have already mentioned, the right response is not completely lost in the shuffle of pointed fingers and accusations.

Collections for food and clothing are being taken for those who need it. Relatives of victims are being consoled. Prayers are being prayed.

Some terrorists probably can't comprehend that no matter what we do there will be Americans who still care for fellow Americans.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

Colleges need more than buildings

By William A. Collins

I need college,
That I know;
Wish I could,
Afford to go.

With colleges as with hospitals, the bricks and mortar are the easy part. What university does not have an Excel file stuffed with names of grads who made good in the outside world?

As these moguls retire and start to contemplate mortality, many see a college building, wing, or classroom as a way to extend their eminence beyond the grave. By dutifully tilling that soil, institutions of higher learning often end up looking pretty snazzy.

State universities particularly savor the added leverage of so many alums sitting in the legislature. Their presidents play the old-school-tie angle to the hilt. The Connecticut General Assembly, for example, looks like a meeting of the UConn Alumni Association.

Other state schools, notably the community colleges, lack that extra clout. So do students.

While a handsome campus may be appealing, a high tuition is appalling. Many kids drop out because of cost. Some return later — others don't. Even those who make it all the way through often carry a lasting burden of debt, enough to deter the faint of heart from even starting.

And if they do start, what's to study? Given America's new obsession with free trade and outsourcing, you never know when your whole industry might be uprooted and shipped abroad. Why study aircraft engine engineering, a Nutmeg favorite, when next year, production might be subcontracted to Poland?

The Connecticut Business and Industry Association lobbies steadily for more technically

trained graduates, but if producing their products overseas can save members a buck, those graduates will quickly get dumped. This profit-at-all-costs mentality pervades much of higher education as well.

The latest scandal concerns loans. Some schools simply fob off students to commercial lending companies, while letting the borrowers think that they're still actually dealing with the college. The lenders operate with virtually no oversight. Caveat emptor.

Professors, too, are frequently part of the problem. Many still require the latest edition of the class textbook, often, by chance, written by the professor himself. These are typically expensive beyond belief. Students can easily feel they're caught up in a scam.

Another part of the problem is that American society has been changing much faster than has higher education. That's not a surprise for such a hidebound institution. As the United States divides ever more sharply between rich and poor — with a shrinking middle class — the admonition to "go to college" rings steadily more hollow to those of lower incomes. Growing numbers of them simply can't afford it. That's why community colleges are capturing the lion's share of growth in Connecticut, even though we're the richest state.

Four-year schools are unfortunately on the road to being priced out of that part of the market. This is also why online degrees are becoming more popular, as are quasi-campuses like the University of Phoenix. Such unstructured education is booming because traditional schools recoil from filling that need. They respond to the growing costs of their fancy campuses by stifling unions, hiring immigrant sub-

contractors, and staffing classes with adjunct professors and overworked graduate students.

Yale is our poster child. In the end, this Edifice Complex means bigger classes, unavailable courses, economic stratification, and many talented youngsters simply unable to attend.

It would be more reassuring if one learned that all these ivory towers were leaning over to one another to consult on solutions to such disturbing trends. But if that's happening, it's a secret.

Competition, not cooperation, seems the tenor of the times, until Washington finally steps in.

— Columnist William A. Collins is a former state representative and a former mayor of Norwalk, Conn. Distributed by minute-manmedia.org

Your turn

Read this

Janice Linville Colby

To all readers of the Colby Free Press, I urge you to read Patty Decker's article titled Prescription for Frustration on page 2 of the Friday, April 27, 2007, issue.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

