

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Helping children in need

By Gov. Kathleen Sebelius

There are few crimes more insidious than child abuse, which is why countless individuals have devoted their careers to protecting children and prosecuting abusers.

But sometimes, the children the system is supposed to protect end up becoming victims a second time as a result of bureaucratic red tape and disorganization.

Child abuse is a complex crime, and it requires the skill and resources of individuals from a range of areas: law enforcement officers and prosecutors; medical and mental health professionals; children's and victims' advocates, and others.

Often these professionals are housed in separate agencies and departments, meaning children are bounced from office to office for different services. That's hard on the children and their families, which is where Children's Advocacy Centers come in.

They provide a single location where children can receive the help they deserve, and also enable investigators and prosecutors to more effectively pursue child abusers. These centers bring professionals from different backgrounds together under one roof with a common mission of helping children in need.

Only 10 of these centers currently exist in Kansas. That means many children don't have access to the help Children's Advocacy Centers can provide. Fortunately, that's changing.

I was in Wichita earlier this month where children's advocates, health professionals and social services providers are working with law enforcement and the district attorney to create a center in Sedgwick County. Similar efforts are underway around the state, and this year the Legislature answered my call to provide state assistance to these initiatives.

Soon, existing Children's Advocacy Centers will receive help expanding their services to reach more children, and new centers will have the opportunity to open in communities that don't currently have one.

This will close the gaps through which too many children fall, and will ensure that victims of child abuse receive the help and support they deserve. In a perfect world, there would be no need for centers like these, but for now, for the children who need this help — it's here.

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*.

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Knowing where the answer is

Saturday afternoon I volunteered at the Colby Visitors Center, something I've done before and really enjoy.

This time, I didn't think I'd realize something about our part of the state you can't really hold or put on a shelf.

With about an hour left in my shift, a couple of men walked in wearing some serious motorcycle gear. I called them coveralls — from feet to neck — to provide protection from the wind, weather, insects and so on. An oversized straw stretched from a clever backpack filled with water hung over their shoulder like a stethoscope on a doctor's neck. Their helmets were perched on their bike's seats, complemented by their saddle bags full of items.

"Do you know where I can get a motorcycle tire?" one of the two men asked.

The two were from Santa Barbara, Calif., and on their way home from a cross country trip to New York City.

I've purchased tires in Colby, but was clueless about motorcycle tires and repair. I started calling the list of names and numbers for auto repairs. Even though I struck out on the first few calls, those people gave me more names and phone numbers. (The motorcycle was a luxury European model. Pretty cool. The owner was concerned about the specific tire size.)



John Van Nostrand

- Line in the Dust

Fortunately, one of those later phone calls was to Goodland. The man in Goodland didn't have the tire but knew of someone in Colorado Springs, Colo., who did. The bike owner thought he had enough left in his tire to make it that far. The motorcycle owner called the Colorado Springs shop and made arrangements.

Before the two men left, they both shook my hand and were genuine in thanking me for the help. I thought that moment was symbolic of what life is like in Northwest Kansas.

Those in motorcycle repair around here may review their operation to see if they can add another tire size to their inventory or add more repair services. If something happens enough times, it will force people to change their ways. But it went deeper than tire sizes.

If there's a need in town, we may have to rely on our neighbor for the solution. There's nothing

wrong with that. It's not the end of the world if a town does not have everything.

If you remember, during Colby Community College's campaign for the proposed wellness center earlier this year, administration said what's good for Atwood, Hoxie, Sharon Springs and so on, can be good for Colby. Specifically, having stable class sizes in those towns adds to the potential for more students at Colby college. Decrease in enrollments decreases the potential for Colby college.

The college is just one example of how we network and benefit from each other.

Colby, let alone western Kansas, needs towns like Atwood, Hoxie and Sharon Springs to survive. If those towns' services fade away, so will the towns and so will those residents who strategically use Colby. If those people don't use Colby, or interact with other places, they are going somewhere else.

Those people in the area who think Colby has a certain level of arrogance and greed and refuse to patronize Colby because of those quirks are missing the big picture.

We need to know who our neighbors are and what they are capable of doing because we shouldn't do this by ourselves.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Kansas does its part for the world

I joined my parents for the Father's Day service at my hometown church, Plainville United Methodist Church.

As part of the service, prayers were said for a successful and safe harvest and for a bountiful supply of food to meet the needs of a hungry world. Even if your family's livelihood does not come from farming, we all benefit from a bountiful Kansas wheat harvest. We have faced our share of challenges in recent months with a spring freeze and severe weather, all of which will inevitably lead to varied yields across the state. But as the combines started rolling this past week, Kansas farmers are once again doing their part in helping feed the world.

Legislation for America's Veterans
On Friday, the House passed legislation for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that provides a record funding increase for veterans in 2008. During consideration of the bill, I successfully offered an amendment to increase mileage reimbursement rates for service-connected disabled veterans traveling to VA medical facilities. The mileage reimbursement rate has not been changed since 1978.

Many Kansas veterans must travel hundreds of miles to reach a VA facility and at only 11 cents per mile, the reimbursement rate does little to defray the cost of the drive. As we work to boost VA health care, it is important to remember that the medical services offered at the VA can only be enjoyed by veterans if they can get to this care. My amendment doubles the reimbursement from its current rate of 11 cents per mile and will help more veterans afford their trip to the VA to receive the care they have earned.

My amendment was part of a spending bill to fund military construction projects and the VA. The legislation provides a 13 percent increase for veterans medical care, including funding to

Jerry Moran

- Kan. Rep. 1st District

care for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, expanded mental health treatment and money to address the repair and maintenance needs of VA facilities. This bill also adds more than 1,000 new claims processors to reduce the backlog of pending benefits claims.

I have long encouraged Congress to exercise control of federal spending, but with troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and with an aging veteran population, caring for our nation's veterans should be a priority. This legislation is now being considered by the U.S. Senate.

Disaster Response
This week, I visited with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Administrator David Paulison about the agency's continued response to disasters in Kansas.

I thanked Administrator Paulison for the efforts of FEMA in responding to the numerous disasters Kansas have experienced in the last six months. Several counties in Kansas have become eligible for Individual and Public Assistance through FEMA. The Public Assistance program normally requires a 75 percent federal and 25 percent state/local match for recovery funds.

Due to the unprecedented damage from tornadoes, severe storms and flooding that Kansas endured during the month of May, I have asked the federal government to waive the state/local match requirement. Administrator Paulison said

FEMA officials are nearing a decision on this issue.

Victory for Accountability in the Earmark Process

With the first federal funding bill of 2008 being considered this week, I joined a number of my colleagues in working to establish a process by which Members of Congress and the public could review earmark requests — spending projects for members. Rather than having what was planned by the Appropriations Committee Chairman to have no public review or debate in Congress about these individual spending requests, we successfully forced process so Members of Congress will have the opportunity to vote on specific spending items and the sponsors of the projects will be publicly disclosed.

The 2007 Farm Bill

On Thursday, I joined members of the Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry to draft the farm bill sections relating to these topics. Most Americans think of the farm bill as our way of protecting farmers when commodity prices drop below the cost of producing a crop.

The largest spending in the farm bill, however, is on food and nutrition programs that help meet the needs of those in our communities unable to put enough food on their family's table. Several provisions included in the bill approved by the subcommittee will increase benefit levels and remove some barriers to access that have excluded seniors from participating in the Food Stamp Program.

Recent meetings I had in Kansas helped prepare me for this hearing by educating me about how hunger is hurting children in our schools and what can be done to better deliver aid to the needy in Kansas.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce

Tinsley

