

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Some things need to be said

By John Van Nostrand

What the Brewster school board recently did was appreciated but, unfortunately, a tough reality of rural, Northwest Kansas.

The school district, like many others around here, have seen a decline in enrollment. After school starts every year, our school districts expect to see a decline from the previous year. Brewster administration knows of families considering going elsewhere.

The trend has bothered Brewster enough to reach out to the families it serves and find out all they can to see what families think about Brewster school. At the same time, the school board and administration are watching the budget and the number of enrolled students.

They fear both numbers will get to a point where it's not worth doing anymore. But they want to know why parents think Brewster is not worth it anymore.

"People choose not to send their kids to our school for a variety of reasons (or excuses). Some of these reasons are not known because the parents have neglected to talk to the school. If there are curriculum issues, talk to the teachers. If there are discipline issues, talk to Mrs. Edmundson. We can not fix the problem if we do not know the problem exists. There are very few problems that can not be resolved. Until parents have taken this route, they are excuses, not reasons," the letter states.

Brewster school board knows the limited economy and job availability is another factor — one they cannot control.

The Brewster school board is doing what all elected officials should do — build genuine relationships with their constituents. The letter was bold implying some parents refuse to tell the school what happened. But the letter was also honest, since the board wants the parents' input.

Brewster is in a prime location — about equal distance to Goodland and to Colby, which offers a variety of education from K-12. There's also Winona to the south. Should one day, Brewster close its doors, those kids will still get an education somewhere, but the vitality of Northwest Kansas will take a serious hit.

It's not good to lose a school.

Of the 40 employees Brewster schools have, there's no guarantee all of those people will find equivalent work, or pay, next door, should Brewster close. The pay those 40 people receive goes toward groceries, cars, houses, hobbies and recreation. Businesses those employees used will feel the hurt too.

If Brewster closes, it may be another big, vacant building, depicting the lack of vitality and life in our part of the state to potential business representatives looking for a place to open shop.

If Brewster closes, other similar school districts, like Golden Plains, Winona, Cheylin, should be interested to hear what Brewster parents and families had to say to maybe correct the same problems.

We hope those families say something so we can all learn more.

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

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About those letters . . .

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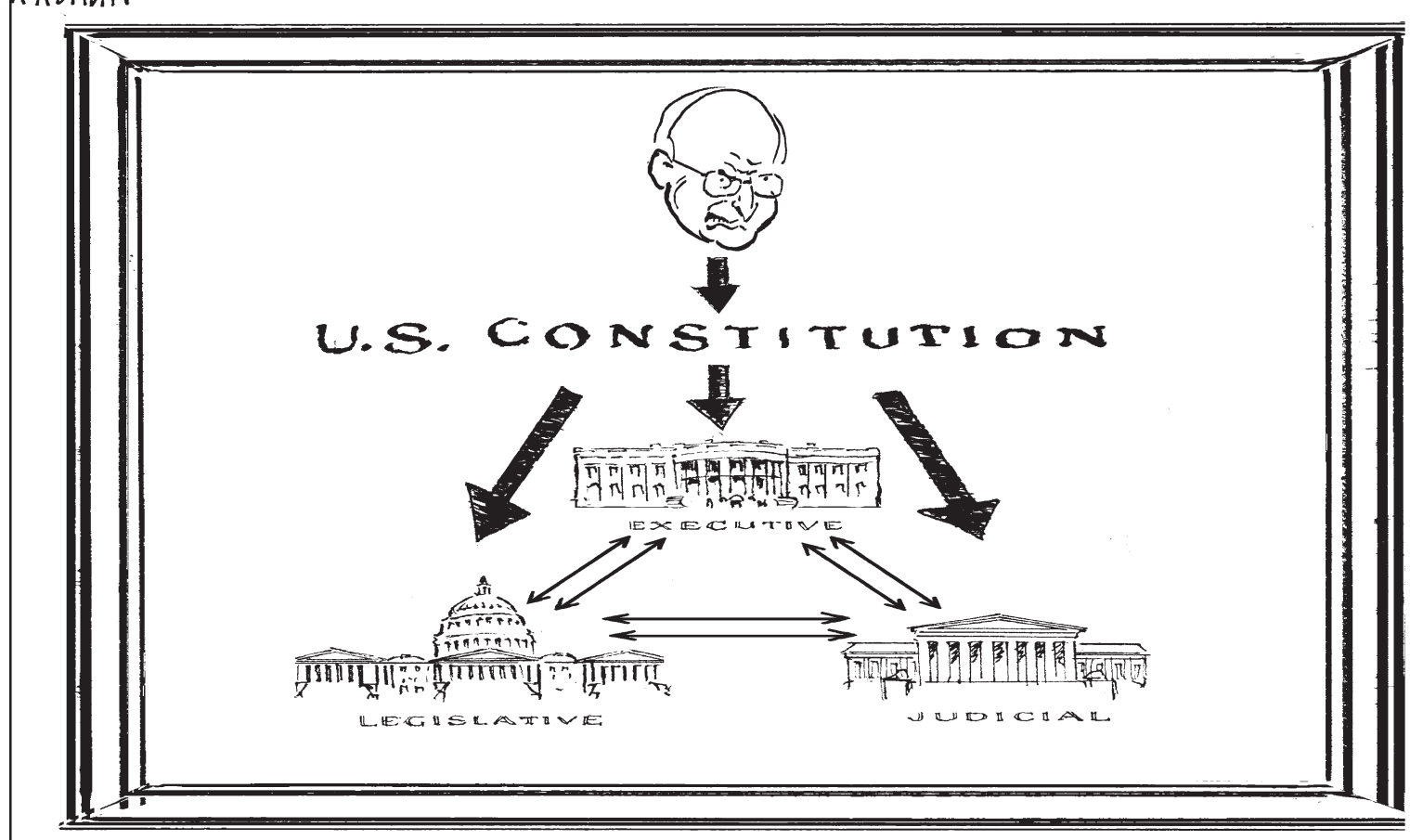
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REX BACIN THE SACRAMENTO BEE



How well do you know Kansas?

A few years ago, I was given a book titled, *Kansas Trivia*, compiled by Barbara Brackman, and it's filled with lots of questions and answers about common and not-so-common facts on our state.

Brackman said her book was designed for use in the home, office, school, parties, and can even be adapted to trivia format games.

Just for fun, I decided to rehash a few of her questions and answers in hopes that other readers would enjoy it.

One of my favorite questions deals with Interstate 70 and a sinkhole near Russell. Here it is.

By the way, to make it more challenging, all the answers are at the end of the column.

1) One can view this natural wonder along I-70 in Russell County as it drops seven inches a year. What is it?

2) There is a Western Kansas and an Eastern Kansas, but for all practical purposes there is no Central Kansas. Which "half" of the state has more area?

3) Here's an easy one. Where is the "Oasis on the Plains"?

4) At 4,039 feet, what's the highest spot in Kansas?

5) When Mr. Keeney and Mr. Warren founded a town, what did they call it?

6) Speaking of spelling towns, try this one for remembering Beloit. In her book she said residents in Beloit have a different story about the source of the town's name. They point up to heaven and say the town is what?

7) What town is known as the "Pinto Bean Capital"?

8) In 1939 Dr. Karl A. Menninger psychoanalyzed Kansas in an article called, "Bleeding Kansas," and diagnosed the state as suffering from what?

9) What is the oldest city in Kansas?

10) The Kansas flag hasn't been changed since its adoption in 1927, with one exception. During the state's centennial, what was added to the flag?

11) Hutchinson-born Mike Love grew up to be a member of what rock group?

12) Dennis Hopper, an actor whose movie career has spanned four decades, from Rebel Without a Cause in 1955 to Speed in 1996, was born



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

in 1936 in what Kansas town?

13) When hundreds of bicyclers join the annual Bike Across Kansas, in what direction do they ride? Also, why do the cyclists choose that direction?

14) Kansas artist John Steuart Curry (1897-1946) was commissioned to do a series of paintings in his home state, but the works proved so controversial the commission was canceled and the painter allegedly died of a broken heart. Where are Curry's unfinished paintings located?

15) What Colby native, born in 1942, was for a time the *primo basso* with the New York City Opera and has also performed with the Metropolitan Opera?

16) Here's another one we all should know — The biggest barn in Kansas measures 114 x 66 x 48 feet and has been moved to what town?

17) Where can one find a 2,000-piece antique fishing lure collection open for public viewing?

18) When was the last time Kansas University beat the University of Nebraska in football?

19) In what year did Kansas University lose all of its football games?

20) When driving on a Kansas backroad and encountering a truck coming from the opposite direction, what is a driver expected to do?

21) What part of the basement is the safest in a tornado?

22) The worst of the Dust Bowl years was 1935. In one month that year, 16 days had visibility restricted to less than a quarter-mile by clouds of dust. What month?

23) Kansas ranks high among the states in air quality but low in water quality. In *some* surveys where does Kansas rank in terms of water quality?

24) At the Cincinnati Centennial Exposition in 1888, Kansas had an impressive building of

exhibits that was guarded by a giant figure of what creature?

25) What happened on "Black Friday," 1935?

Answers

1) A sinkhole where the underlying salt structures are collapsing. The **Crawford Sinkhole** is at mile marker 179.

2) The answer: **Western Kansas**, of course!

3) I sure hope everybody knows this one.

Colby and, yes, this was a question under the geography portion of the book.

4) **Mount Sunflower**.

5) **WaKeeney**. Personally, that is a good thing to know since many times I want to spell WaKeeney with a lower-case "k." At least now I know better.

6) **Be-lo-it**.

7) **Leoti**

8) **An inferiority complex**.

9) **Leavenworth**.

10) The word **Kansas**.

11) **The Beach Boys**.

12) **Dodge City**.

13) They ride **east** and they pick that direction so they can ride **downhill** and **with the wind**.

14) On the second floor of the state capitol building in **Topeka**.

15) We should all know this one — **Sam Ramey**.

16) **Colby**.

17) **The Milford Lake Nature Center**.

18) **1968**.

19) **1954**.

20) **Waving** is okay, but it is more acceptable to raise an index finger without taking the hand off the wheel.

21) **The southwest corner**.

22) **April**.

23) **Fiftieth**

24) **The grasshopper**.

25) The worst dust storm to hit Kansas blew across the state.

I hope you enjoyed this small look into Kansas trivia as much as I did.

Decker is editor of the *Free Press*. Her column appears on Fridays.

Who's to blame for high gas prices?

By Jonathan Williams

Now that the summer driving season is in full swing and the Fourth of July is quickly approaching, millions of American motorists will be taking to the road. Unfortunately for us, gasoline prices are still hovering in the neighborhood of \$3 per gallon — and some analysts even suggest that prices could climb to \$4 per gallon this summer. Those prices quickly hit home after I paid \$47 to fill up my own tank this week.

Besides being a drag on the pocketbook, high gas prices unfortunately bring out all sorts of political demagoguery and open a new battle in the never-ending war against corporate profits. Whenever high gasoline prices are in the headlines, various commentators and politicians immediately jump on the "price gouging" bandwagon, while others renew calls for a "windfall profits tax" on energy companies.

Gasoline prices will always be determined by the supply and demand for oil in the world market. While talking about supply and demand will earn you an "A" in economics class, it usually gets you an "F" in the political arena. The truth is that the oil industry often serves as a convenient whipping boy for politicians eager to deflect blame for high gasoline prices.

How else can you explain the renewed interest in a windfall profits tax to punish oil compa-

nies for their success?

This nation's experiment with windfall profits taxes in the 1980s proved to be economically devastating. When we last tried a windfall profits tax, it failed to raise a fraction of the revenue forecasted and crippled the production of the domestic oil industry. As they say, those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.

In all the crusading against oil profits, one very important fact is being neglected. The biggest winner from high gasoline prices is none other than Uncle Sam. For starters, Kansas motorists pay 43.4 cents per gallon in state and federal gasoline taxes. If your vehicle uses diesel fuel, you pay 51.4 cents per gallon on average.

Taxes on gasoline don't end there. The government collects billions from energy companies in corporate income taxes, off-shore royalties, severance taxes, property taxes, payroll taxes and the list goes on like the Yellow Pages.

According to Department of Energy data, from 1977 to 2004, federal and state governments extracted \$397 billion by taxing the profits of the largest oil companies and an additional \$1.1 trillion in taxes at the pump — that's nearly three times what the oil industry made in profits over that period.

While Hillary Clinton and others in Congress

are calling for the resurrection of a 1980's style windfall profits tax, it's important to point out that America's energy companies are already providing a "windfall" of taxes.

Various proposals aimed at the oil industry have nothing to do with "fairness" or righting a so-called wrong. They are attempts to abscond with additional revenue — plain and simple. Taking aim at profits also sets an extremely dangerous example by targeting a certain industry based on their level of success. It is a shame to think profit has become a dirty word in a nation that built its industrial might through the free enterprise system.

The relentless war against "big oil" and their profits will assuredly continue as long as gas prices are elevated. However, when you feel the pain at the pump during your travels this summer, remember who is really cashing in — your good friend, Uncle Sam.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce
Tinsley

