

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

## Quickly passed bill may hurt carnivals

Here's hoping area legislators can do something about a bill requiring new regulations on rides which might put many of northwest Kansas' home-owned carnivals out of business.

The bill passed late in the session without the usual notice or a chance for public hearings. Carnival operators had little or no warning, and no chance to tell legislators how these citizen-run operations would be affected.

In fact, the measure, pushed by Rep. Tom Sloan of Lawrence, has failed every time it's gone through the committee process.

Some of the bill's provisions included a rule that rides would have to be inspected 30 days before they could operate, employees would have to be trained and certified and operators would need to carry \$1 million in liability insurance.

Members of the Decatur County Amusement Authority in Oberlin were shocked that the Legislature would do such a thing without looking into the consequences. It's just another example of a government "mandate" that "sounds like a good idea" when presented but in practice causes all kinds of problems.

State officials like to complain when the federal government does this to them, but the state itself is capable of all sorts of mischief.

This bill apparently was buried early in the session, then at the last moment was slipped into a vaguely related measure and rushed through the process in the final days of the session. Area legislators say they had no idea what was happening or what kind of problems this "good idea" might cause. One apparently was assured the law wouldn't affect nonprofit, home-owned carnivals.

That makes it just another example of the kind of awful work the Legislature sometimes does in the closing days, when everything is rushed and now one has time to read the details.

It's possible no one intended to put the home-owned carnivals out of business. It's also possible some slick lobbyist for traveling carnivals had just that in mind. Or maybe the whole thing is just a misguided attempt to make us all safer.

The thing is, there no evidence at all that home-owned carnivals are dangerous. To the contrary, the ones out here have good safety records.

Because they operate only a few days out of the year, using volunteer labor, it would be next to impossible to have them inspect the rides, let alone get the hundreds of volunteer operators in each county out for training and testing beforehand.

And a million-dollar insurance policy could prove far too costly for the charitable groups that run these carnivals. The Decatur County group is paying \$9,000 per year now for only \$500,000 in insurance.

This is just a bad deal all the way around. We could wind up losing our fun-filled, family oriented carnivals, have no way to replace them, and all for nothing.

This law needs to be changed, and soon. Colby's Rep. Jim Morrison is preparing a fix.

But beyond that, the Kansas Legislature needs to put itself under rules that require real hearings for all bills and forbid late-night, last-minute passage of law no one has heard about, or worse yet, died in committee for good reason.

That's just government at its worst, and the legislators ought to put a stop to such practices. — *Steve Haynes*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail [s.haynes@nwkansas.com](mailto:s.haynes@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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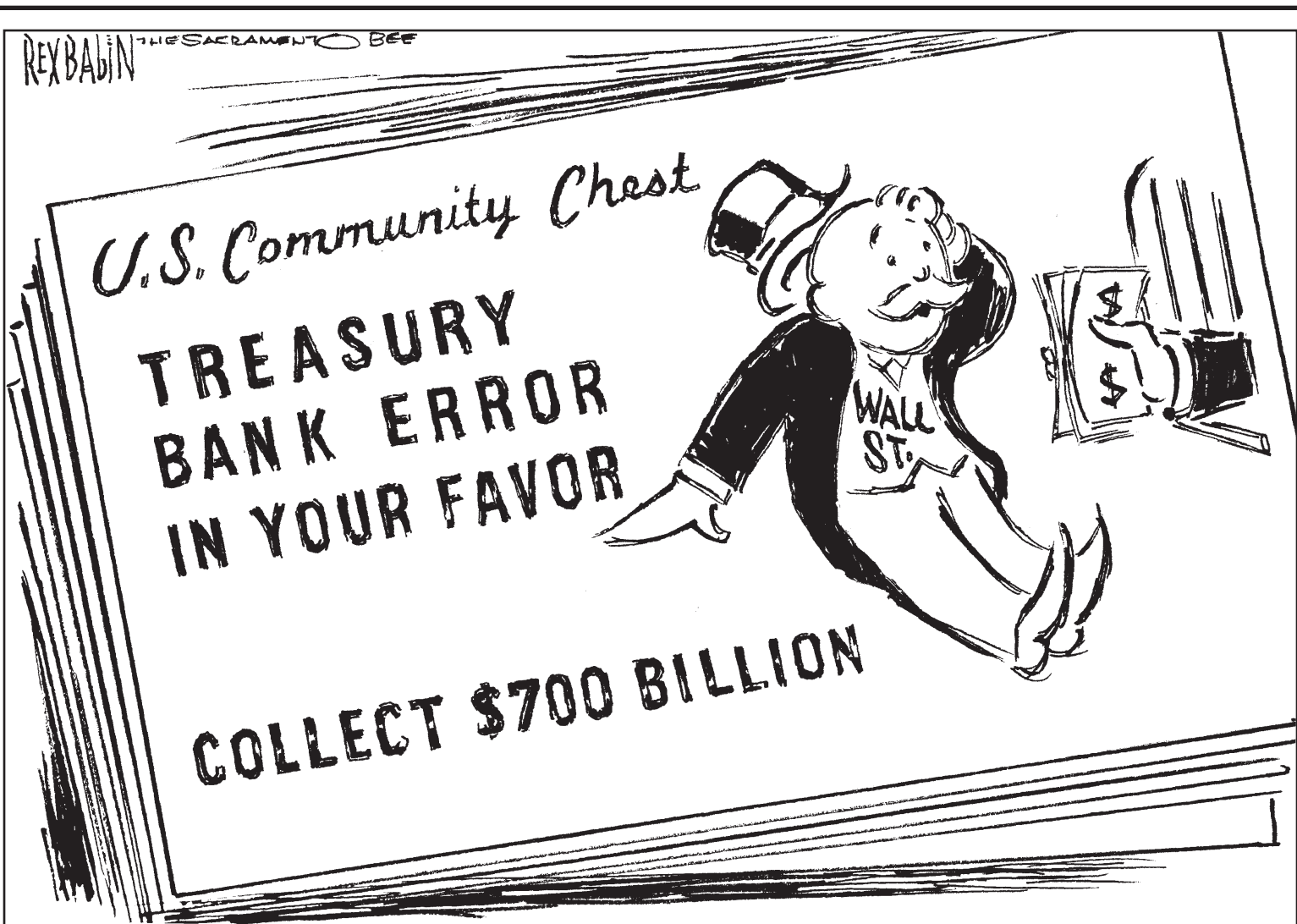
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## I love to hear the sounds of nature

Did you noticed how noisy it was last week?

Walking around town at midnight, it was almost impossible to hear what Steve was saying.

Yeah, I know, most people don't take their walks at midnight, but sometimes, that's the only time we have to get out, stretch our legs, take the dog for a walk and enjoy a summer evening.

Last week, the crickets were chirping; the cicadas were singing; a bunch of calves, recently separated from their mothers, were bawling; and an owl was screeching in the tree tops. There might have been a whole pond of frogs croaking their hearts out, but I couldn't hear them over the other noises.

It was deafening — and I loved it.

Even when I got home, with the window open in the bedroom, I could hear a persistent buzz. It was low and indistinct — more of a background noise — but constant and sort of soothing.

Summer is winding down, and the critters are in full voice, calling to mates and momma.



**Cynthia Haynes**

### • Open Season

I really love this time of the year. The days are warm and the nights are cool. The tomatoes are ripe. The zucchini is ready for locked cars. The green peppers are ready for stuffing. And the cats stay outside all day long, enjoying the sun.

The only real drawback to late summer — it's not really fall yet — is the imminent approach of cold weather.

Cold weather will mean the end of my summer symphony. During the cold months, the insects are gone, the frogs are hibernating and most of the birds have gone to warmer climes. Even the calves will have gotten over being lonely.

## Another piece of the puzzle

**By Earnie Lehman**

*President and general manager  
Midwest Energy Inc.*

Midwest Energy was created in 1981 by combining the Central Kansas Power Co. based in Hays with Central Kansas Electric Co-operative from Great Bend. Since then, we've grown to serve 48,000 electric and 42,000 gas customers in 41 Kansas counties.

As a co-operative, we're honored to be owned by those customers, something our surveys tell us most people don't recognize. It's understandable why many customers don't see it that way when they get their monthly utility bill.

Like other utilities, our first priority is keeping the lights and the furnaces on. The utility business requires a long-term focus. When we build a new electric transmission line, we expect it to be there for 40 years or more. Most power plants can serve customers for at least 30 years, and one of ours has been running for 60 years.

So when we make decisions, we must live with the results for generations. We strive to provide safe, reliable service at the lowest reasonable cost, and in an environmentally responsible manner. In recent years that job has gotten much harder.

Midwest relies on four sources of electricity, similar to a four-legged stool. We need a cer-

## Other Opinions

### • What people say in Kansas, elsewhere

tain amount of electricity 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We call this baseload energy, and the cheapest source by far, even today, is from coal-fired power plants like Sunflower's Holcomb plant.

Secondly, we need generation that we can schedule as needed to meet spikes in the demand for electricity on hot days or during storms, when key transmission lines may go down. The new Goodman Energy Center just northwest of Hays helps fill this need for peak energy; it's our newest piece of the puzzle.

The other two sources are considered novel and untested by some, but we have embraced them: Renewable energy, mostly from wind, is growing in importance for both economic and environmental reasons. Wind energy is a variable resource that must be backed up by other generation 60 percent to 70 percent of the time. By the end of this year, Midwest will lead all utilities in Kansas (followed closely by Sunflower Electric Power Corp. and its mem-

But for now, we sit on the back porch and listen to the Rockies on the radio, take in the summer music and keep an eye on our six- and eight-legged pets.

Grizelda, the orb-spinning spider, spins a beautiful web between the pillars of the porch while Mandy, the praying mantis, stalks the railing looking for prey.

Mandy's been with us all summer. He rode into the house on both Steve and I in early summer. We spotted him and carefully returned him to the wilds of the backyard. He was just an inch and a half long in those days. Now he's a good three inches of lean, mean, bug-eating machine, just the kind of pet a gardener needs.

The toads I captured around town earlier in the year and transported to my garden are gone now, off perhaps to find a nice puddle to lay their eggs in and a nice muddy spot to burrow into for a long winter's nap.

Wish I could do that, but it won't happen until after the end of tomato, zucchini and green pepper season.

bers) in the proportion of energy coming from wind.

And finally we rely increasingly on energy efficiency to serve customers. We work with customers on their side of the meter, making energy work for you. We have offered energy audits and construction advice since our creation. Now our How\$mart's program promotes energy efficiency by capturing some of the savings on utility bills to pay for home and commercial energy improvements.

In general, Midwest's electric customers can feel reassured that three of the four legs of our stool are in great shape: peak energy, renewable energy and energy efficiency. That's not true with respect to baseload energy, where the denial of a permit for expansion of the Holcomb generating station and a lack of new generation elsewhere may drive up our cost for power.

Customers all across the country who rely on natural gas for heating will see higher bills as electric utilities meet growing needs with not just renewable energy (a good thing) but also by burning more gas when the wind doesn't blow. This may be the direction Midwest Energy must take in the next several years.

For now, we are celebrating. All nine units at Goodman are up and running, providing flexible and reliable energy to central and western Kansas. We're pleased to put this critical piece of the power supply puzzle in place.

### 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 or considered offensive or libelous.

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## Mallard Fillmore

### • Bruce Tinsley

