



Free Press  
Viewpoint

Weak bridges  
disrupt economy

Having two bridges east of Oberlin on U.S. 36 posted for lower maximum weight limits is just a sign of bad news for Kansas, for the economy, for truckers, for farmers and elevator operators and consumers in general.

Around the state, more than 30 bridges have been posted with restrictions, depending on the condition of each bridge. Some, as the two near Oberlin, allow all trucks other than “superloads” operating with an overweight permit. Others restrict fully loaded semitrailer rigs hauling ordinary commodities.

Thirty weak bridges might not seem like much, but it’s more than the state usually has. Bridge inspections have been tightened since the collapse of a Mississippi River bridge in Minnesota a couple of years ago. Engineers are paying more attention to weak spans that might give way.

That’s good for public safety, of course, but it can be bad for the economy. Grain haulers might be the first people affected, since grain rigs often need the overload permits. Between Norton and Oberlin, a detour through Jennings nearly doubles the time and mileage for a truck.

That would be bad enough if the grain just has to get to Oberlin, increasing expense and time for the hauler. Grain doesn’t have to go to any one place, though. If it makes sense, because of a detour, the same load might go to Colby or to Salina, once it gets rolling.

So bad bridges can disrupt the economy of a town, or the whole state, in ways that might be hard to predict. Certainly, the two on U.S. 36 could be bad news for towns west of Oberlin on the highway, because loads that get as far south as Selden might just keep on going to I-70, rather than double back toward Atwood and St. Francis.

This is not a local, or even a regional, problem, however. With bad bridges scattered across the state, it soon will affect nearly every Kansan. It could drive up prices for everything from food to fuel, and slow down an already ailing economy.

These bridges could be fixed, of course, but that’s not likely to happen until the state passes a new transportation plan, and that likely won’t happen while the recession has state revenues in the tank.

The state has no money for these bridges today, officials admit, and it probably won’t have any for the next few years. In the meantime, there’s not much that can be done to shore these bridges up. They were built as long as 70 years ago. Their expected 50-year lifespan is long gone, even though they were widened and modernized 30 to 40 years ago.

The state will have to find a ton of money to cure this problem, and that kind of money isn’t easy to come by in bad times. It’ll be hard enough to find in good times, which will come along in a few years.

The load limits meantime underscore the need for a new transportation program to replace the one that expires this year, and for a renewed commitment on the state’s part to maintaining its highway system. In the state’s priorities, only education could be more important. — *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 [colby.editor@nwkansas.com](mailto:colby.editor@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect those of the *Free Press*, its staff or the owners.

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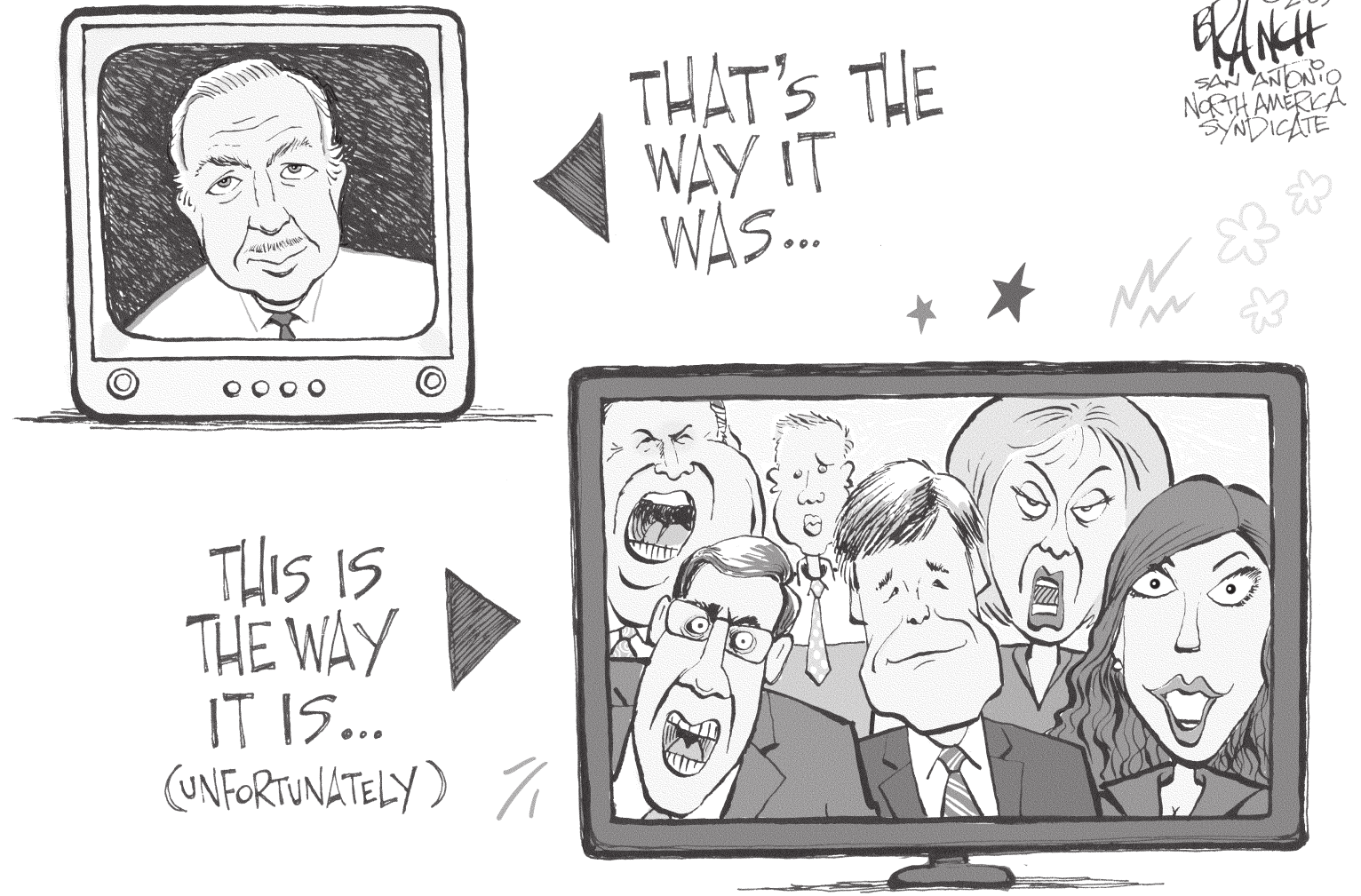
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Good garden means healthy weeds

The bugs are starting to nibble on my bean leaves and the nasturtiums, which I planted to protect against this, haven’t even thought about blooming yet.

It’s been a good year for the garden, with plenty of sun and rain. And that means it’s been a great year for the weeds, and they are taking full advantage of my spotty gardening efforts.

Last year, I was so good. I went out for a little while every morning and pulled weeds. This year, if I get a half hour in on Sunday afternoon, I feel accomplished.

As a result, the foxtails are taller than the corn and the bindweed is spreading faster than I can pull.

On Sunday, Steve took the clippers to the elm and mulberry trees, which seem to think that they need to grow in every flower bed and bush on the place. It’s bad enough trying to cut them out of the cracks in the sidewalk, but getting them in the middle of the rose bushes is really a pain — literally. He had to go put a bandage on his arm, which had a nasty



**Cynthia Haynes**

• Open Season

scratch.

I get the job of cleanup when he’s done. I drag all the clipped off treelets to the back yard and attempt to push them into a trash bag without getting too many holes in the bag from all the sharp stems.

Then it’s back to the garden to pull pigweed and whatever else is not supposed to be there. If I’d just spend a little more time covering that area up with grass clippings after Steve cut the lawn, I might not have to pull so many weeds.

I took the last of the pea plants out last week, and by Sunday the area they had occupied was covered with weeds. It still is, since I was more

worried about the corn than the empty areas.

I also pulled about half my carrot crop. I didn’t know if they were ready or not, but the zucchini was taking over and I figured it was pull the carrots or lose them forever.

The zucchini wasn’t even supposed to be there. That was supposed to be yellow squash. Some days you can’t believe a thing you read on those seed packages. Which reminds me, how did that cabbage get in amongst my spinach plants?

Steve picked his first ripe tomato, and I found two monster cucumbers hanging on their vines — oops.

Yes, it’s a good year for the garden and a good year for bugs, and it those nasturtiums don’t bloom pretty soon, its going to be a good year for insecticide makers.

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Will health care reform create problems?

Politicians and the public may be starting to wake up to the realities of health care reform.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Ca.) recently said that she wasn’t sure if there were enough votes in her own party to support the proposal. Recent polls showed that the public has less interest in the issue than when President Bill Clinton advanced the issue in 1993.

This is not good news for those who would like to create a universal health insurance system run by government. But neither is it a reason for those who oppose a centralized government-run health care program to relax.

Part of the concern among members of both political parties lies in the projected cost of reform, \$1.6 trillion over 10 years, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Add that to the tab already being run up by the Obama administration and the Congress, and you have to marvel how the American Republic would avoid the hyperinflationary spiral which ruined Argentina (once one of the dominant economies in the world) or Weimar Germany in the 1920s.

Another reason for concern was expressed well by columnist George Will: “The unifying constant of (Obama’s) domestic policies — their connecting thread — is that they advance the Democrats’ dependency agenda.”

Obama consistently claims that he doesn’t want a single-payer government-run health system. He wants to reform the current system and “start from scratch.” But is the system in need of starting from scratch?

Proponents of the reform proposal claim the path to fixing the health care system is to get government more involved, to create a govern-

Other  
Opinions

• Gregory Schneider  
Flint Hills Center

ment purchasing system which could compete with private insurance. But the expansion of the State Children’s Health Insurance Program reveals the flaws inherent in that argument.

Since the program was expanded (in some states incomes of \$75,000 or more qualify a family’s children for Medicaid), parents have dropped private insurance and have switched to government insurance.

This crowding-out factor would occur on a larger scale and diminish competitiveness in insurance should the Obama plan come to pass. This would lead to a single payer system and government control over all health care.

Supporters claim that the uninsured will be covered under such a plan. Currently there are 45 million uninsured, about 25 percent of who are eligible for Medicaid but have not applied. Another 25 percent of the uninsured have incomes over \$75,000 per year but choose not to buy health insurance. It’s estimated that about 20 percent of the total may be illegal immigrants and another 10 percent are the so-called indestructibles, people 21 to 35 who choose not to buy health insurance largely because they think they don’t need it. So that leaves only 20 percent of the uninsured who are with-

out coverage primarily because they can’t afford it.

What is the better solution? Make the uninsured part of the market system. Will argues for giving the truly uninsured — those without incomes to purchase insurance — tax credits or paying them to purchase health insurance. Also, provide them with a health savings account and allow them to control their own health-care spending.

Expanding health savings accounts for the general populace would go a long way toward reducing health care costs, most of which are not easily explained, as Atul Gawande explains in a must-read article “The Cost Conundrum” in the June 1 *New Yorker* magazine.

We need to keep up the pressure for a sensible reform of health care, one that doesn’t promote a single-payer option and one that will promote competition instead. Competition is better in an economy than a single dominant monopoly.

The free market for health insurance is not perfect; but we know from the experience of other nations that the single-payer solution is imperfect and leads to rationed care and worse health outcomes.

Let’s not take that road. The tide may be turning in Washington, but the battle is still being waged.

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