



Drunken drivers need stiffer limits

We’ve all heard the stories of Kansans being convicted again and again of drunken driving. Seven times. Nine. Eleven. The door keeps revolving, and the wheels keep spinning. Sen. Tim Owens, an Overland Park Republican who chairs the Kansas DUI Commission, summed up perfectly the impression created by those stories. “There is broad consensus the system doesn’t work,” Owens said.

Here’s hoping Owens and the members of the recently formed DUI commission can help fix it. The panel was created to conduct a thorough analysis of the DUI system, from enforcement to treatment to prevention, to give lawmakers the information needed to enact reforms and better protect motorists from drunken drivers.

Clearly, more uniformity is needed.... The DUI Commission is one of two ways lawmakers addressed the growing problem of drunken driving. They also passed more severe sanctions for DUI, including requiring alcohol treatment after a third conviction as opposed to a fourth.

Under the legislation establishing the commission, the panel’s objective is to produce a preliminary report for the 2010 session followed by a full examination of the system for 2011.

Members will include representatives from the Legislature, the court system, law enforcement and state government administration.

Among the questions to consider is whether to place ignition locks on the vehicles of DUI offenders, which would prevent the vehicles from being operated if the driver fails an automated breath test.

Reducing the risk from drunken drivers won’t be easy, especially amid an economic downturn that leaves less money available to combat the problem. But it’s well worth addressing.

— Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press

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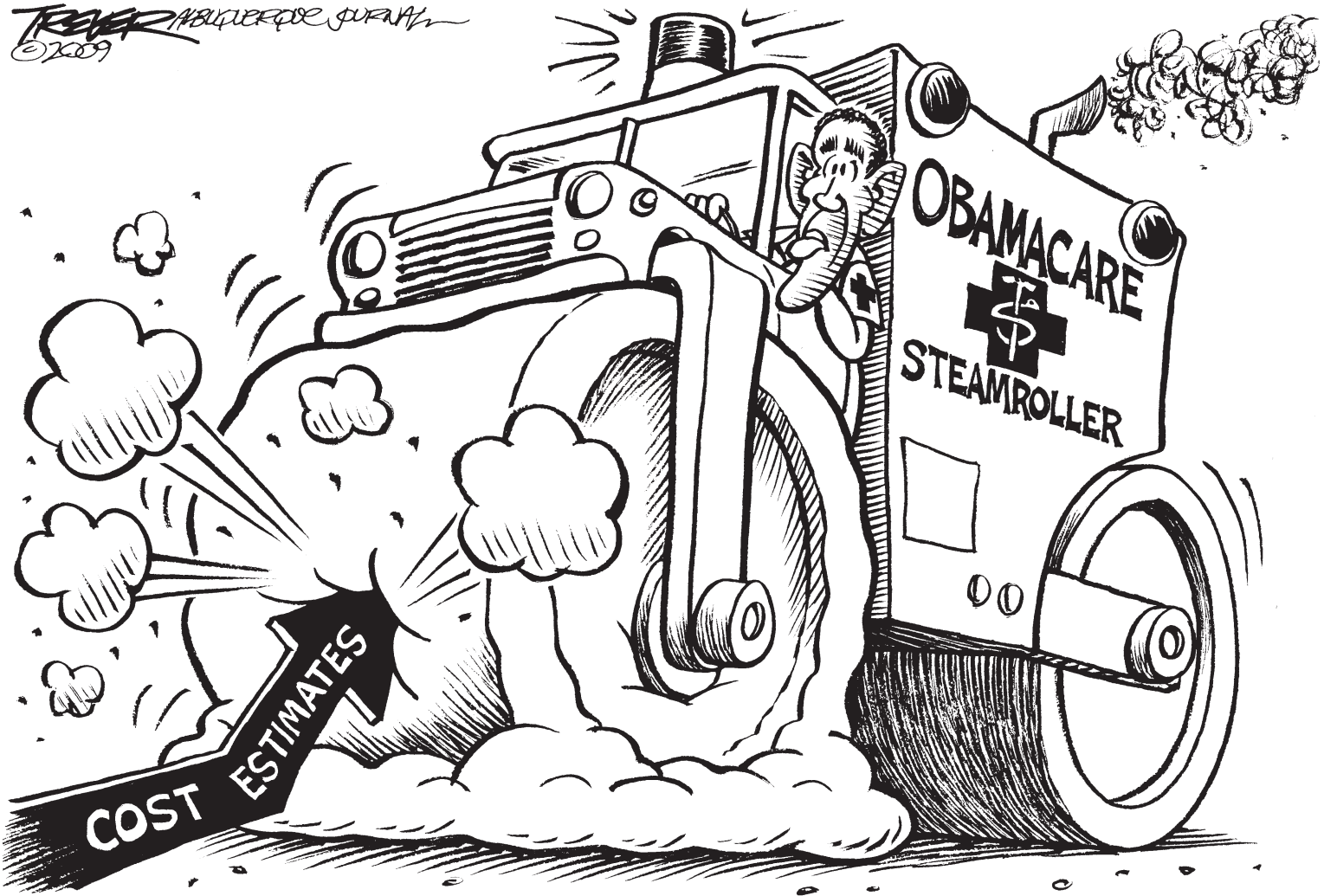
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Vultures hang-out for happy hour?

They gather every evening, or nearly every evening, on the city water tower at the north end of our street, flocks of big, black birds.

Some nights there are two dozen, some nights there are three dozen or more. They roost on the railings, on the cross members and trusses, on the uprights and the water column.

These are not, as some people claim, hawks. These are zopolate, buzzards, vultures. Turkey vultures, to be exact.

Most towns have them. In Goodland, they used to roost in an old, dead tree. Someone cut it down, so they moved to the elevator. They go south in the winter and return each spring, just like swallows to San Juan Capistrano, though not nearly as cute.

Where the Oberlin flock roosted before, I know not. I never noticed them until this spring. But they are big and black and kinda scary looking, and hard to miss if you look up.

At first, they stayed all night on the water tower, but lately they seem to drift off in pairs as the evening wanes. Maybe they treat the tower as some kind of bird pickup bar, and go off to do whatever birds do. Maybe not.

The Fourth of July was tough on them. The vultures made themselves scarce for a few days after that, but eventually they showed back up.

To me, they look like a bunch of old-fash-



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

ioned gangsters hanging around, loitering, leaning up against the tank of the tower. Like tough hoods, smoking cigarettes and looking for trouble.

Cynthia says she thinks of them not as a mixed colony, but as good ol’ boys. She says it’s like a men’s club, where they get together and smoke and drink and tell jokes, then go home to the missus.

Maybe that’s it.

Whatever you think, though, you’ve got to admit they’re kinda creepy hanging out up there.

Vultures consider it their duty to cruise the wind currents, soaring aloft for hours, looking for something that just died. It’s said their eyesight is keener than an eagle’s.

And when they spot something, they clean up.

It’s not a pretty job, but in nature, somebody’s got to do it.

So the tower is free of birds most of the day.

‘Clean coal’ is useful, not perfect

Hopefully, the sarcastic commercials delivering the message that there is no such thing as “clean coal” have run their course.

Issued from the environmental left, they make the same mistake as an earlier campaign from the conservative right assailing “safe sex.” Both are cases of shallow science and black-and-white reasoning.

It is true that condom use is not 100 percent “safe,” mainly due to operator error, so to speak. Yet condom use does cut down transmission of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly AIDS, by a significant extent. The position that since “safe sex” is not 100 percent safe, the safe sex campaign is therefore wrong, is a simple-minded argument that, if it did shut down condom use, would result in much death and suffering. It should, however, probably be called a “safer sex” campaign.

And “clean coal” should probably be called “cleaner coal” technology. The environmental left is asserting in the commercials that there is no such thing. That is not correct. While scrubber technology reduces some emissions, burning coal still generates some carbon dioxide.

But China has built 30 large scale coal-to-liquid plants — production plants, not research trials. They use a “Fischer-Tropsch process” that produces methanol from coal. China has committed to using a large amount of this alcohol by 2011-2013, mainly added to gasoline to produce a cleaner-burning fuel. As long as oil prices stay above US\$35 per barrel, this coal-derived methanol is cost-effective.

These plants will produce the methanol equivalent to 20 percent of China’s current oil consumption. With cars and therefore gas consumption doubling, this amounts to about 10 percent of their future needs. China is the only country in the world developing methanol from coal as an alternative fuel. They will use oxygenated gasification to isolate the carbon



John Richard Schrock

- Education Frontlines

dioxide produced, either directly sequestered or for pumping carbon dioxide into older wells to increase oil production.

This is “cleaner coal” technology in action. China is moving ahead because they have the chemical engineers to make it happen, and a population that understands more science. They are also moving forward with both solar panels and wind turbines, but they realize these are specialty sources that are only cost-effective in remote areas.

Unlike the U.S. commercials that suggest that solar and wind energy are absolutely carbon free, the Chinese know that these are expensive technologies that consume energy and resources to produce, and in operation would raise citizens’ electric bills by four times — something that their population cannot afford.

China is dismantling small but inefficient coal plants. In addition to building larger, more-efficient coal plants, they are building 100 more nuclear plants by 2020. China can move ahead with such a complex formula of old and new technologies because the general public understands that the alternatives are not black-and-white choices.

China will not leave its poor citizens to shiver in the cold next winter. In the U.S., those who condemn coal power in any form, would.

One hallmark of being educated is realizing that issues are not black-and-white. The world is complicated, and mostly painted in shades of gray.

It’s only along about sunset when the buzzards flock back to the railing and gather for their little chat, or whatever it is they do up there.

And other than watching and observing them, there’s not a lot I know about buzzard behavior. A friend says he has a pair nesting in an old shed on his farm. One of them laid an egg on the floor.

When he goes back there, they employ the classic buzzard defense on him — they throw up. And considering what vultures eat, you can imagine what that’s like.

Maybe when they scatter for the night, they all go someplace like that barn to watch their eggs or feed their little buzzards. I don’t know.

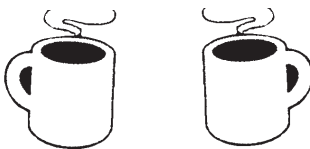
One thing I do know, though. With all those birds up there, there’s got to be droppings. There could be defensive vomit. And these guys are always on the lookout for a meal — anything that’s not moving..

All things considered, I’m not going to be taking any naps on the grass under the water tower, inviting as it might be. Not this year, anyway.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of The Colby Free Press and president of Nor’West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

With a little better science education, perhaps our next generation will have a better grasp of “safer sex” and “cleaner coal.” John Richard Schrock

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.



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Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

