



Free Press Viewpoint

Address ethics, not whistleblowers

Kansas Department of Corrections officials have embarrassed themselves and damaged their agency’s credibility by filing an ethics complaint against Topeka area lawyer Keen Umbehr.

They should drop this trivial action and move on to addressing the alarming problems that Umbehr helped expose in their system.

Umbehr ran afoul of the department for inviting *Capital-Journal* investigative reporter Tim Carpenter to accompany him to the Topeka Correctional Facility for interviews with two inmates last August.

As Kansans from border to border know, the interviews helped lead to stories revealing illegal sexual relationships and traffic of contraband in the prison. Carpenter’s reporting compelled Gov. Mark Parkinson to order an independent review of the prison system, and the Legislative Division of Post Audit also launched an investigation.

At that point, you might have thought the Department of Corrections would have bigger fish to fry than Umbehr — maybe turning its full attention to improving prison security and increasing supervision of corrections workers.

But no. Corrections officials managed to find the time and resources to launch a smear attack against the whistle-blowing lawyer and, by extension, Carpenter...

The department claims Umbehr gained access for Carpenter by misrepresenting the reporter’s occupation, an allegation he vehemently denies. He says the department got its facts wrong and that the department is acting unethically by trying to squelch the inmates’ rights to free speech through its action against him...

The complaint may have created an impression that Carpenter got into the facility through unethical means.

The fact the department included Carpenter in the complaint, knowing such a conclusion could be drawn, is unfair and out of line. He complied fully with the directions of staff members and was never asked to state his occupation or sign the logbook. Carpenter didn’t break the rules. That much is indisputable...

The bottom line in the Topeka Correctional Facility case is Umbehr and Carpenter together gave a voice to inmates who wouldn’t have had one otherwise and exposed problems that desperately needed to be brought to the public’s attention...

Prison reform should be the department’s focus right now, not pursuing a trumped-up ethics case.

— *Topeka Capital-Journal, via The Associated Press*

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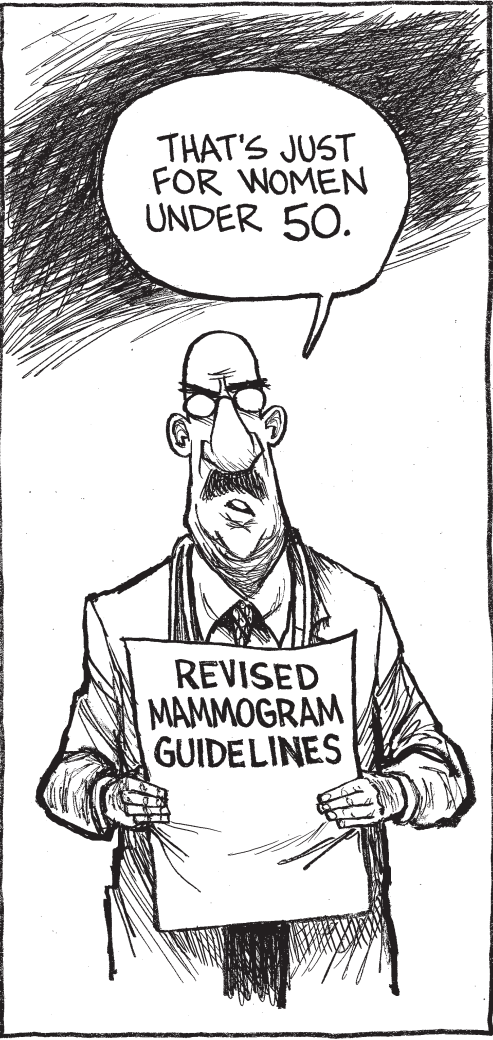
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Over-promising leads to disappointment

It’s amusing, really, to see the administration squirm as President Obama’s numbers plunge.

His “approval rating” has dropped from 67 percent to 54 percent just since February. The only branch of government that’s less popular is the Democrat-controlled Congress, down from 31 percent to 30 percent.

Oh, his backers thought it was just G.W. Bush the people didn’t like. Turns out, it’s Congress and whoever sits in the White House. So much for the Nobel Prize.

What happened?

The president, like most candidates, over promised. He told us he’d end the wars, close the lockup at Guantanamo Bay, make health care affordable and cure the economy.

He hasn’t been able to do all that in nine months because — guess what — it couldn’t be done.

While he’s continued the Bush-Gates policy of winding down in Iraq, Mr. Obama has copied the “surge” philosophy in Afghanistan with mixed reviews. His generals want yet more troops in the mountainous nation and his backers just want out.

The economy? No president can control it. Candidates who say they will may even believe it’s possible — though a cynic would question that — but the economy moves to its own beat. It’s cyclical. Good times come and go, and so do down times.

The government, using the law and the Federal Reserve, may have some influence on these things, but mostly it can shave the peaks



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

and fill the valleys, nothing more.

The government can’t stop a recession and can’t start one, though it’d be more likely to start one than end it.

Once the recession starts, it’s going to go where it will go. Federal spending might cushion the fall, but that’s about it. And once a recovery begins, only the worst sort of bungling will stop it.

And when times are good and markets are on the rise, then we should know we’re headed for what the experts so nicely call “a correction.” Which means, the bottom has to fall out of every bubble.

Candidates, for president or for Congress, would do well to remind themselves that these things happen and stay away from promises they can’t keep.

It’s hard to avoid promising something, however, when “everyone else is doing it,” even for those who know how hollow those promises are.

In fact, some candidates get elected because they do make promises they cannot keep.

You might say the current president did something like that. Rather than bring change,

however, he followed the policies as they were set out by the last guys. He added window dressing, declaring an end to torture and a move for peace.

And sent more troops to Afghanistan. The peace crowd should be outraged. Maybe they are. Foreign policy is never simple, however, and promises made can be hard to deliver on.

The administration must realize that a precipitous pullout would only invite disaster and turn the country we occupied over to a government worse than the one we pushed aside.

Candidates promise. Presidents have to perform.

Most, like Mr. Bush, end up a prisoner of not only their own mistakes, but of the forces that beset them. I’m sure “W” never dreamed he’d be known as the president who led us in “War on Terror.”

He thought his legacy would be in education, but that is a different story, as they say.

Mr. Obama? The office ages a man.

History will write his legacy. He only thought it would be about health care.

The economy will recover. There will be other crises.

His numbers? They’ll change.

If he’s lucky, the way he’s going, he’ll be able to keep them above Congress.

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.

Don’t change Social Security too easily

To the Editor:

I have been a member and a participant with the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare since April 1987. Our latest concerns are epitomized in a letter written to the Senate on March 31 by President Barbara B. Kennelly.

Kennelly’s letter has valuable information for me and for every person remotely interested in Social Security, Medicare and health care in general.

“As the Senate considers the Budget Resolution for Fiscal Year 2010,” she wrote, “the National Committee ... would like to reaffirm the strong opposition of its millions of members and supporters to any form of entitlement commission or task force which may be offered as an amendment to this budget legislation. In recent months, we have received over 420,000 letters and petitions from our members opposing any commission or other process that would force changes to Social Security through Congress in a fast-track process.

“We appreciate the efforts that Sen. Conrad, Sen. Gregg and others have invested in their entitlement commission proposals. However, we believe that these proposals contain fundamental flaws in both content and timing.

Social Security and Medicare are critical lifelines for America’s seniors. Seniors deserve to have changes to these programs receive substantive consideration that focuses on the circumstances of old age and not on the need for reductions in the budget.

“Major changes to these programs should be considered by Congress in an open legislative process. We should not bypass the important protections of widespread public engagement



Free Press Letter Drop

- Our readers sound off

and transparency.”

Kennelly went on to say that a survey of the Baby Boom generation showed more of them (36 percent) favor of raising the wage base for Social Security taxes, now \$106,000 per year, with the least number (6 percent) favoring a reduction in benefits.

You won’t get any of this information from Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck or anyone else like them, or on Fox News. Fox News places tops in misinformation, so I stay away from it. And I hope that the public option is here to stay. Most of us feel that health care is a right, not just a privilege for a few.

Edna Hatcher, Colby

Sales tax regressive

To the Editor:

The sales tax is the most regressive tax we have! Why do I say that?

The higher you stand in the disposable income category, the less you spend, percentage wise, on commodities or services that are subject to sales tax. A family of four making anything less than \$35,000 per year will spend most of that on food, clothing, shelter, and

transportation. All of those items are subject to sales tax. Those families rarely go outside the community for entertainment or shopping.

As incomes go above that figure, families tend to go out of the local community for more and more of their shopping needs.

The higher the income, the more likely they are to take longer and more costly vacations. Those spending the winter in the south or taking extended vacations and tours, sometimes outside the United States, and while gone are spending no money here for groceries, eating out or entertainment.

Investments are not subject to sales tax. Many of those have special exemptions or are eligible for deferred income tax liabilities. They add to the spendable income for the investor, but that income rarely is reflected in local spending for necessities. If you are only meeting your everyday needs, you are not likely able to take advantage of those kinds of investments.

If you are in the median or lower income group, you should possibly think twice about voting for a sales tax increase, for whatever the intended use. You are already paying more than your share of the cost of local, state or national taxes.

Yes, you benefit greatly from the modernized fire department. And, if you have any spendable cash after meeting the bare necessities, you would be able to enjoy the \$5 million pool and water park. But should you pay a disproportionate share of the costs associated with those two services?

Ken Poland, Gem

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

