



## Other Viewpoints

# Contracts support safe teen driving

Parents who take the wheel as their teenagers are learning to drive can be a big help to their kids, traffic safety experts say. That’s not to be taken literally, since teens eventually have to go it alone, but experts say that parents can provide guidance even when they’re not in the car.

One increasingly popular method for doing so is a parent-teen contract that lays out responsibilities, rules and consequences for violations of terms.

It’s a free, low-tech method to protect teens as they learn to drive. A sample contract is available at the AAA website, [teendriving.aaa.com/ks/](http://teendriving.aaa.com/ks/).

A typical contract lays out expectations that teens will obey traffic laws, wear safety belts and otherwise drive responsibly. Parents can use the agreements to spell out times and situations when teens can have the car.

Parents generally agree to consider granting extra privileges when appropriate, relax the restrictions as drivers become more experienced and provide driver training classes and instructional materials, to name a few common clauses.

“It’s a way for parents and teens to engage with each other and agree on what the consequences are,” a safety expert with the Injury Center at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told *USA Today* in a front-page story about the issue this week. “Writing it down clarifies for everybody what the rules are.”

But for parents, gaining peace of mind isn’t as simple as signing on the line. Contracts must be enforced to be effective, which means regular communication between parents and teens to monitor the young drivers’ progress.

It’s unclear how effective contracts are as a safety measure, because there hasn’t been much research done on them. But a growing number of people in the insurance, travel and transportation safety fields believe in them. Some insurers offer discounts to families who have signed contracts, and some states require the agreements as part of their graduated driver’s licensing programs.

What’s abundantly clear about the subject is that teens need all the help they can get.

Car crashes are the No. 1 killer of youths 16 to 19, and annual injuries from crashes number 350,000 for kids 15 to 19.

There’s no guaranteed method of preventing further deaths and injuries – not a contract, not a law, not a manual, not an education course.

But it certainly can’t hurt for parents to stay directly involved in their teens’ driving.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

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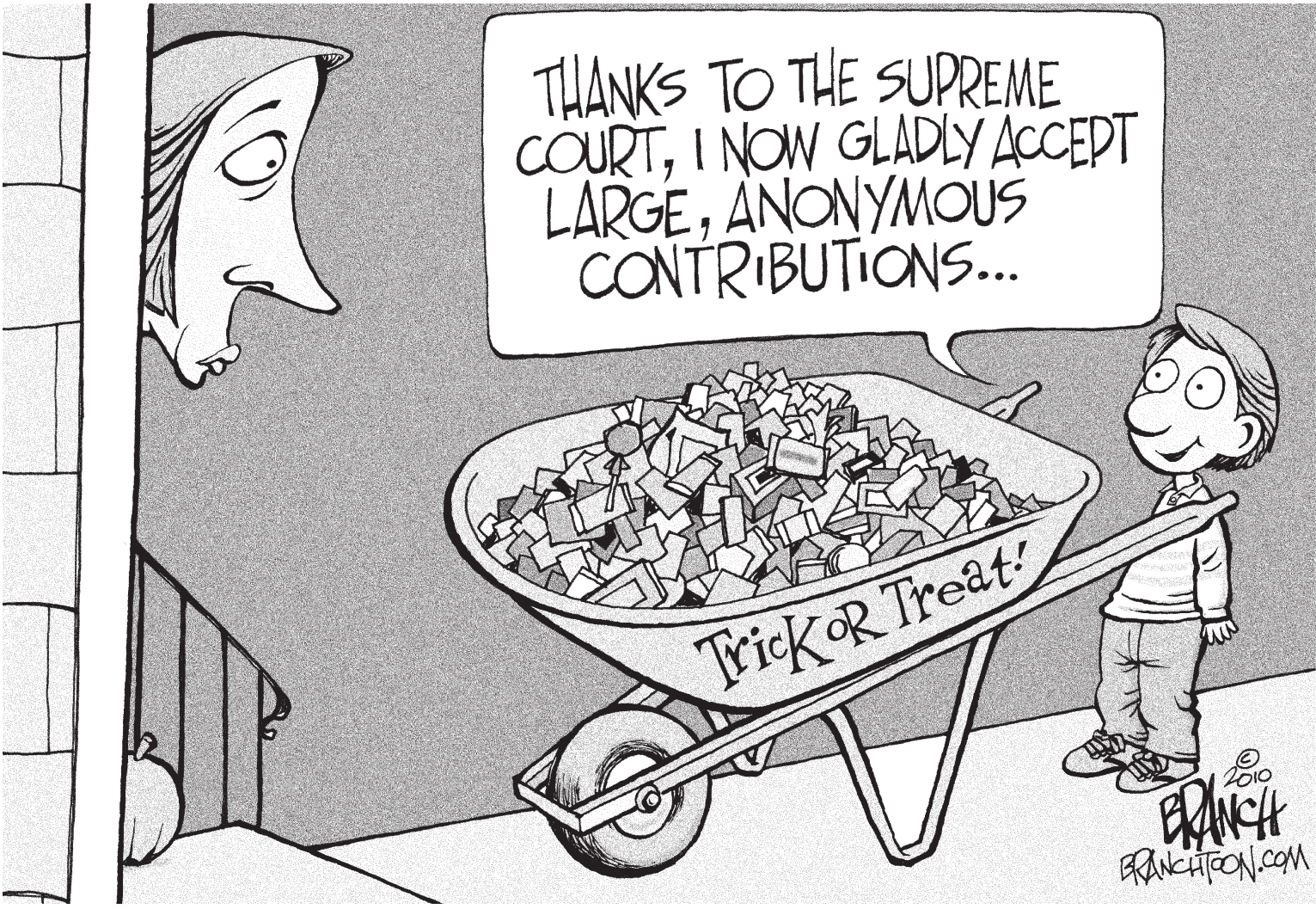
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# Misinformation skews ideas

The Republican’s success in painting Barack Obama’s presidency as a failure should dispel any notions that American politics has anything to do with facts.

Success in politics stems on having the ability to sell ideas to the public. It doesn’t matter how successful the president has been at passing needed legislation; he will continue to lose support as long as conservatives dominate the public-relations battle.

Obama is up against Fox News, billionaires David Koch and Steve Forbes, Karl Rove, and special interest groups determined to convince the public that the president is a threat to the American way of life. And they have done a magnificent job at portraying Obama as a fire-breathing socialist who is wrecking the economy.

Some Americans are even convinced that Obama is a Kenyan anti-colonialist, an illegal alien and, God forbid, a Muslim. If conservatives really wanted to scare people in Middle America, they should have started a rumor that Obama’s real father was a gay Mexican Muslim who illegally entered this country many years ago.

If the Republicans take back the House of Representatives and make gains in the Senate in Tuesday’s midterm elections, it will reflect a triumph of manufactured fear over fact. It’s true that some people will vote Republican on Tuesday because they are against any sort of federal intervention in the economy and they think all Americans, including the wealthiest people in the country, deserve a tax cut. These



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people are voting based on their principles, which is respectable. But polls show the majority of Americans hold views about Obama’s policies that are at odds with the facts.

An Article in *Bloomberg News* points out that the Obama administration has cut taxes – largely for the middle class – by \$240 billion since the president first took office on Jan. 20, 2009. The article shows that a program featured in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (also known as the stimulus bill) aimed at families earning less than \$150,000 lowered the tax burden for 95 percent of working families by \$116 billion. This comes out to a decrease of about \$400 a year for individuals and \$800 a year for working couples. But what percentage of the public knows this? The number is depressingly small.

According to *Bloomberg News*, by 52 to 19 percent, likely voters say federal income taxes have gone up for the middle class in the past two years.

“Anything that ever needs to be paid back, it’s ‘let’s go after the middle class,’” says poll respondent Judith Ann Micone, a 55-year-old cosmetologist and Republican from Kalispell,

# Good fences make safe highways

Sometimes common sense and fairness prevail.

Such was the case in Sherman County when the Kansas Department of Transportation decided to maintain the existing barbed-wire fence along both sides of the Interstate 70 corridor.

The department had been flirting with the idea of widening the right-of-way easements and replacing the existing fence with a cable fence. This proposal was designed to cut maintenance costs of the existing fence.

Landowners, farmers and stockmen along the corridor heard about the proposal, met as a group and in mid-October visited with the department to express their desire to keep and maintain the original five-strand, barbed-wire fence. They understood cattle, hogs, sheep or nearly any type of livestock are bound to escape on occasion.

The cattlemen also knew and understood that with a single cable, cattle and other livestock were bound to find their way onto the fast-moving Interstate highway, says Mike Irvin, director of the Kansas Farm Bureau Legal Foundation. Not only were they concerned about the safety of motorists, they were also worried about their valuable stock that could be hit or run over on the highway.



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“The Sherman County landowners and stockmen also realized that if this proposal moved forward, they would be liable for keeping the livestock off the highway rather than KDOT,” Irvin notes.

The stockmen were convinced a cable would not keep their stock off the heavily traveled freeway. If this idea succeeded, they would be forced to maintain the old fence or build new ones. Building and maintaining a five-strand barbed wire fence is costly, and this would have been a major departure from the precedent first established when I-70 was completed nearly 50 years ago.

“Looking at this fencing issue, we felt confident our court system and the state legislature intended for KDOT to maintain this fence line with a five-strand, barbed-wire fence from the very beginning,” Irvin says. “Our livestock producers wanted to keep something that had

worked in place. They believed in the existing system.”

Further precedent for continuation of the existing system was defined in the case of Reynolds v. KDOT that concluded landowners and livestock producers could rely on state fences rather than installing private fences alongside the state fences. And because the state built the fencing, the court said, it is responsible for maintaining it.

Fortunately, after the groundswell in Sherman County, the department decided the concerns of landowners, farmers and stockmen were valid. Engineers agreed to leave the original five-barbed wire fences in place.

This fencing question represents a classic case where working together and fairness won out. State government, individual landowners and livestock producers found common ground based on understanding, common sense and the best method of ensuring safety for everyone.

*John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.*

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