

Kansas attorney general begins monthly column

Welcome to the Consumer Corner!

Each month, I intend to provide this column to give Kansans information about avoiding scams and other problems affecting consumers in our state. In each column, I will address consumer topics of timely concern and discuss frequently asked questions our office is receiving.

Protecting Kansans from scam artists and educating consumers about their rights under law are core functions of the attorney general's office. As a young lawyer more than a decade ago, I was fortunate to work as an assistant attorney general in the Consumer Protection Division. Consumer protection is one of my priorities.

If you fall victim to consumer fraud, you can file a complaint with our office for free online at www.ksag.org or by calling (800) 432-2310. All complaints are reviewed within 10 business days.

While our office is committed to investigating consumer complaints and bringing those individuals to justice, the best protector of your assets is you. Just a few common-sense steps can help you



Derek Schmidt

• Attorney General

avoid becoming a victim:

- Protect your personal information. Use caution when giving out identifying information or account numbers, especially over the phone or online.
- Shred documents before discarding them. Identity thieves often search through garbage looking for personal information.
- If an offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Beware of "free" offers, contests and "get-rich-quick" schemes.

Educating consumers on how to avoid becoming a victim is an important mission of our office. Our website offers a wide range of consumer tips to help you protect yourself from becoming a victim. We are also available to present workshops on consumer topics to civic clubs, senior centers and other gatherings across the state.

If you do become involved in a dispute, our free mediation program offers an option to help parties resolve disputes without the expense of going to court. Our professional mediators can often resolve disputes regarding such issues as home and vehicle repairs, car sales and debt collections.

You can learn about these services by visiting www.ksag.org, and clicking on "Assisting Consumers." Our site also contains links to popular consumer protection programs and organizations, like the Do-Not-Call List, Kansas Charity Check, the Federal Trade Commission and the Better Business Bureau.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your attorney general. Keep an eye on this Consumer Corner column in coming months for more tips to help you protect yourself – and your hard-earned dollars.

Derek Schmidt was sworn in as Kansas attorney general in January. He was previously a state senator.

Lawmakers shut down secretary on illegal immigration crack down

From "LAWMAKERS," Page 1

That law requires voters to show photo identification at the polls, starting next year, and says anyone registering for the first time must provide a birth certificate, passport or other proof of citizenship to election officials, starting in 2013, though a Kansas driver's license will be sufficient for many.

Kobach had hoped the proof-of-citizenship rule would take effect next year and that his office would gain the power to file and prosecute election cases in state courts – and didn't stop pushing even after Republican Gov. Sam Brownback signed a compromise version of Kobach's proposed Secure and Fair Elections Act.

The vote Wednesday in the Senate was 23-15 against a bill revising the election law enacted earlier this year. Some critics renewed longstanding arguments that election fraud is nowhere near as serious a problem as Kobach says it is, while others resented his efforts to revise a law that had strong bipartisan support.

"You don't unravel the deal after it's finished," said Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, a Topeka Democrat. "And he needs to learn that."

Kobach didn't return messages left on his cell phone and his office did not issue a statement.

Opponents of Kobach's proposals contend the photo ID and proof-of-citizenship requirements will suppress turnout and prevent some Kansans from registering to vote – arguments Kobach strongly disputes.

To deal with such concerns, senators insisted on the 2013 start on the proof-of-citizenship requirement. They argued the delay would give the state time to educate prospective voters. It also was designed to allow the state to put in place a new record scanning system, so it could comply with federal requirements to issue secure driver's licenses, then provide copies of citizenship documents electronically to election officials.

But Kobach's allies said that if the state wants to combat election fraud, it should put the proof-of-citizenship requirement in place for next year's

elections and give him the power to pursue cases often ignored by county prosecutors.

"It needs to be done, and it needs to be done now," said Sen. Steve Abrams, an Arkansas City Republican. "It's clear that the Kansas voters understand this threat and want the Kansas Legislature to act now."

To bolster arguments that election fraud is a serious problem, Kobach released a study in January that said his office had received 59 reports of alleged irregularities involving at least 221 ballots since 1997.

Only a handful of cases have been prosecuted. Some allegations listed by Kobach were based on vague reports of potential wrongdoing, and most hadn't been thoroughly investigated. Critics contend many perceived irregularities result from mistakes by prospective voters and even election officials themselves, not deliberate fraud.

"There is a not a problem in this state of voter fraud," said Sen. Jean Schodorf, a Wichita Republican.

Other Kobach critics worry about giving his office the power to file and prosecute election cases. That's partly because he's a visible conservative Republican and a former state GOP chairman.

He's also gained national attention for advising officials in other states about how to crack down on illegal immigration. Kobach helped write a law Arizona enacted last year, directing local law enforcement officers to check the status of people they stop if officers suspect they're in the U.S. illegally.

"What is it so important that the secretary of state wants prosecutorial powers?" said Sen. Kelly Kultala, a Kansas City Democrat. "It makes you wonder."

But supporters of expanding the secretary of state's power noted other agencies have limited prosecutorial authority. They noted lawmakers this year granted the Department of Labor the power to prosecute workers' compensation fraud cases.

"This is not a unique situation," Abrams said. "Who better to investigate whether there's voter fraud than the secretary of state?"

Physical activity key to easing pain

May is National Arthritis Awareness month and a great time to take action to manage the symptoms of arthritis. Although nearly 509,000 adults in Kansas have arthritis, many do not know there is something they can do about it.

"Being more physically active is probably the single best thing a person with arthritis can do to reduce and manage their pain," said Dr. Robert Moser, Secretary, Kansas Department of Health and Environment. "Even with small increments of increased physical activity, a person with arthritis can decrease their pain, increase their flexibility and get a better night's sleep."

As part of National Arthritis Awareness Month in May, Kansans who have pain and activity limitations due to arthritis are encouraged to work with their physician to become more physically active. Research has shown that pain and activity limitations can be reduced with 30 minutes a day of physical activity most days of the week.

The Kansas Arthritis Program, in collaboration

with the Arthritis Foundation, is launching a new program designed to help people with arthritis and other chronic conditions manage joint pain and improve their health. The Arthritis Foundation Walk with Ease Program is designed to encourage people with and without arthritis to get started walking and stay motivated to keep active anytime of the year.

Two different formats of the program are available; a group format led by a trained leader that meets three times per week or an on-line version, geared to individual participants.

Research continues to support the benefits for people to be more physically active, including those persons with arthritis. Scientific studies have shown that participation in moderate-intensity, low-impact physical activity improves pain, function, mood and quality of life without worsening symptoms or disease severity.

For information on physical activity programs go to: www.kdheks.gov/arthritis.

Man teaches pot-growing techniques

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) – A Maine man is teaching people how to grow medical marijuana at what's being called "Marijuana State University."

Fifty-six-year-old Ray Logan has been growing marijuana for 30 years, but when he started it was a recreational and illegal hobby. Now he's taking advantage of Maine's medical marijuana law to share his expertise legally.

He taught his first class ear-

lier this month in Portland. More classes are scheduled.

The *Portland Press Herald* says Logan is offering three-hour workshops for people who want to learn how to grow high-quality marijuana in their homes.

Maine's medical marijuana law

allows registered patients, caregivers and dispensaries to grow marijuana to treat certain medical conditions.

To avoid conflicts with police, Logan uses basil rather than marijuana in his classes to demonstrate the growing techniques.

Re-check information labels on frequently-bought food

Consumers are urged to read Nutrition Facts labels before buying, but periodically re-reading the labels on frequently purchased products also is recommended, said Sandy Procter, Kansas State University Research and Extension nutrition specialist.

"Product formulas and processes can change," said Procter, "and while such changes may bring improvements, it's possible that nutrition information has changed and also possible for a potential allergen to have been introduced."

"Packaging typically changes periodically, and that may mean that the number of servings per package also has changed," she said.

Product names also can change, said Procter, who reported seeing

fruit formerly identified as "ugly fruit" now being marketed as "uniq fruit."

Information about evaluating Nutrition Facts labels and health-promoting foods is available at Extension offices and at www.ksre.ksu.edu and www.ksre.ksu.edu/humannutrition/. Checking the new U.S. Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines also recommend: www.dietaryguidelines.gov/.



Why Some People Think

Duke Ellington

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