

Other Viewpoints

Rush to voter ID ignores glitches

Secretary of State Kris Kobach will see Wichita's election as evidence that the state's voter identification law is a success and the system can be ready by June 15 to require proof of citizenship to register.

Before they join the House in voting to move up the date from January, though, state senators should take seriously the glitches in Wichita's vote and some other confusion and concerns.

Sedgwick County's new ID scanners and electronic signature pads slowed down the process for some voters, at least compared with the old sign-in books. (It was a little disconcerting to learn that voting in the county doesn't just involve flashing an ID but rather electronic scanning of its bar code, as if voters are loaves of bread or cans of soup.)

Two Wichita voters told *The Eagle* that the identification they provided – a military ID and a government employee ID – didn't prove acceptable at the polls Tuesday, though both are among the accepted identifications listed on the websites of the Secretary of State's Office and Sedgwick County election commissioner.

One man without government-issued identification told *The Eagle* that poll workers were "pointing in three other directions and not knowing what to do." He became one of 22 voters who had to file provisional ballots because they didn't have a photo ID.

The number may seem low to Kobach, but think about that: It means 22 voters saw their votes fail to count in Tuesday's results just because of the voter-ID law. Yes, their votes can be added to the totals if they take their photo ID to the election office between now and Monday. But how many will bother, especially given the landslide outcome?

And what was visible at the polls on Election Day doesn't account for eligible voters who felt discouraged from voting by the identification requirement.

The voter-ID law still may be challenged in court, perhaps over whether the cost of securing underlying documents to get a free photo ID or out-of-state birth certificate constitutes a poll tax.

True, voter identification is now the law in Kansas. But the least the Legislature can do is not rush to give Kobach the go-ahead to begin requiring proof of citizenship to register to vote in Kansas as of June 15 rather than next January, the date in the year-old voter-ID law.

There already has been confusion over how someone goes about obtaining a free copy of his Kansas birth certificate, one of the acceptable items to prove U.S. citizenship to get the identification.

Wichita activist Louis Goseland recently told a House committee that he and others had tested agencies and found them uninformed and unprepared to help would-be voters. There are questions about whether a massive upgrade of the Division of Vehicles computer system will be finished by June, or when election officials around the state will get the final maps from the once-a-decade redistricting.

That's a lot of uncertainty the Senate would have to set aside in following the House's lead and moving up the proof-of-citizenship deadline. Judging from Tuesday's election in Wichita, Kobach should have enough to do between now and January just ensuring the smooth implementation statewide of the voter-ID requirement.

— *The Wichita Eagle*, via the Associated Press

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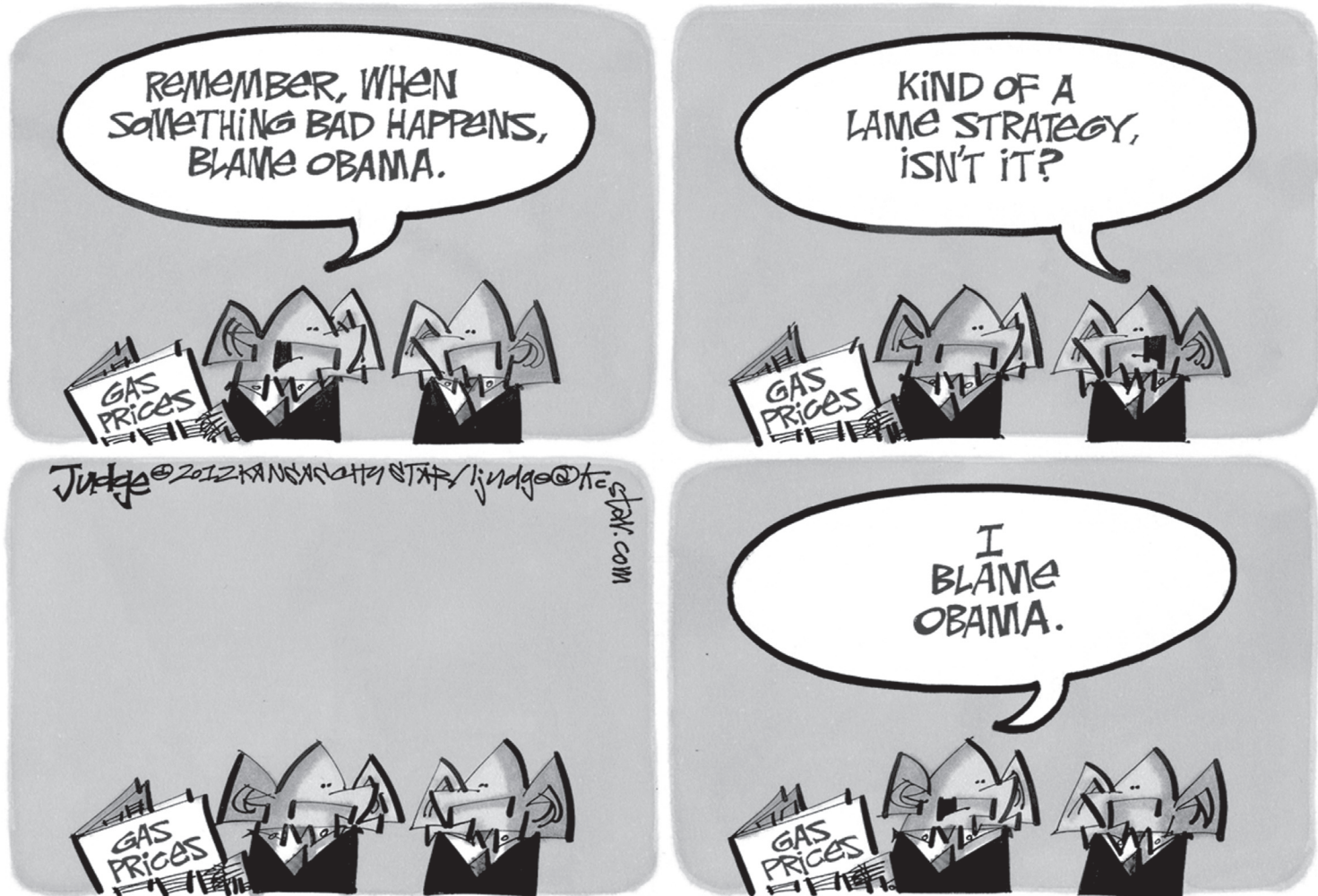
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Illegals' voting an irrational fear

Politicians on the left and the right are driving our country closer to the reality of a high-tech police state.

No one thinks that's the goal, of course. It's just that few stop to think about the consequences of a lot of the "good ideas" that come popping out of places like Topeka and Washington.

Many so-called conservatives here and across the nation worry incessantly about the scourge of illegal immigration. An irrational fear that these immigrants will control our elections has led to state after state requiring voters to show identification at the polls.

While some worry that this requirement will keep the poor from voting, that's not the issue. Americans have always prided themselves on being a free country, a place where people could travel without "papers," as many tightly controlled countries in Europe and Asia require.

Now, in the name of "homeland security," we've spent billions on producing hard-to-tamper-with identification cards so people can "prove" they're Americans. Remember, though, that in this country, you are not legally required to carry identification, except for a



Steve Haynes

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driver's license while you are driving.

A police officer supposedly cannot demand that a citizen produce an ID while walking down the street, although we suspect it's done every day.

Now, though, you'll need a photo ID to vote, the most basic of American rights.

Do we want to be more like a communist state?

The odd thing is, no one can prove tighter voting laws are needed. There's no documented problem with vote fraud in this country, especially in Kansas. But politicians such as Secretary of State Kris Kobach make their living by scaring people.

Illegal immigration?

Yesterday's problem. It all but disappeared in the recession two years ago.

Terrorists infiltrating our borders? They seem to get in when they want to. The best can afford fake IDs, good ones that will get them where they need to go.

Start with the so-called Patriot Act. Most laws supposedly aimed at stopping terrorists really just create more ways for the security police to keep tabs on everyone: our bank accounts, our spending habits, our comings and goings. The tax and security agencies have wanted this for years.

And the final irony: our electronic toys, our phones, our GPS systems, our computers and other devices track our days so the government need not even lift a finger. We do the job ourselves, and willingly, trading a free and anonymous existence for constant surveillance.

Did I mention the cameras? Cameras everywhere.

Some day, we'll realize where all this leads. Some day, it may be too late to change anything, however.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Compulsory education has drawbacks

"I see no purpose in going to class." This was the bland outlook on life of one of my high school freshmen students when I taught in Hong Kong International School. He barely endured all of his courses, despite the fact that they were taught by the best teachers selected from across the United States. And all of his classmates were excited about their school-work.

We were sitting in the principal's office. His father understood that his son was adrift.

"How about taking the spring semester off?" I suggested.

The student lit up.

He was not yet 16. But Hong Kong did not have truancy laws. There was a tourist boat in the harbor that offered sheltered employment to young adults and my student had expressed an interest in doing something "meaningful." That sounded like a great idea to him. So parent, principal, teacher-advisor and most importantly the student all agreed. We had a 15-year-old dropout.

The daily routine of a dead-end job worked its magic. By the end of the semester, my student was ready to come back to school. The prospect of a lifetime of mindless work had become real. He now saw many reasons to study English and math and science.

In pioneer days, our students had a childhood full of real experiences; school helped them make sense of that world. They were experience-rich and knowledge-poor. Today's children are so sheltered from the real world that they are experience-poor, and the knowledge they could gain in the classroom is no



John Richard Schrock

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longer "meaningful."

But what we did in Hong Kong we cannot do in any of the 50 states because the student was not yet 16. Yet that is precisely what some students need. A survey released three years ago found that only one in three dropouts were actually flunking classes; the other two were bored and felt school lacked meaning. Taking a semester or year off to live real life would be a good prescription for many of our potential dropouts.

So from one side, we have the Department of Labor wanting to prevent our farm kids from working on the farm – one of the best real-world experiences a youngster can have. On the other, we have President Obama wanting states to force all students to stay in school until they are 18 or graduate.

One thing that American schools – and the good students who want to learn – do not need is more classmates who do not want to be there.

Kansas actually moved the minimal age for dropping out up to 18 in 1995.

The results were not good, and the Kansas legislature backed off by 1997 to again let students drop out at 16, but following a parent-

student-counselor meeting to stress the disparity of income, etc.

The President's theory for requiring students to stay in school until they are 18 is "When students are not allowed to drop out, they do better." Unfortunately, his assertion lacks evidence.

In "An Examination of Compulsory School Attendance Ages and High School Dropout and Completion," by Rebecca N. Landis and Amy L. Reschly, these researchers found "...no discernible pattern of reductions in dropout rates was evident for states that raised their attendance ages."

Another study focusing on Texas and the brief Kansas requirement found that when Kansas temporarily raised our dropout age, graduation rates remained the same because truancy rates went up about 33 percent.

And in another study of the 18 states that recently increased dropout age to 18, six of those states had fewer, not more, students graduate than before the mandate.

Turning schools into prisons for unmotivated students does not work. A better policy would be to lower the compulsory school age and give those students who need life experiences an opportunity to see how boring life can be without a fuller education.

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