

Other Viewpoints

Election oversight should apply to all

As the Kansas secretary of state, Kris Kobach's most important job is to oversee elections in the state.

Although secretaries of state are chosen in partisan elections, Kansans expect that, once they are in office, they will rise above partisan leanings and commit themselves — both by their actions and in the public's perception — to an election process that is fair and without partisan bias. To a greater extent than any other elected state official, that requires secretaries of state to distance themselves from partisan involvements that could raise questions about their impartiality in performing their duties as the state's chief election officer.

Establishing that distance apparently is difficult for Kobach, who has continued to be involved in issues and dealings that raise questions about his political impartiality. He continues his work — in his "spare time," he claims — on illegal immigration issues around the country. He also raised some eyebrows when he agreed to be the honorary chairman of a Republican candidate's campaign for the Kansas Senate. Now, Kobach has formed his own political action committee, called the Prairie Fire PAC.

Kobach has declined to say how he plans to use funds collected by the PAC, and said the only reason others are criticizing its formation is because he is a conservative. He pointed out that no one has commented on the political activities of past secretaries of state, but it's questionable whether any other secretary of state in Kansas has ever attempted to remain as active in partisan politics as Kobach has.

Perhaps Kobach is planning to direct Prairie Fire PAC money at immigration questions or candidates in other states. Maybe all of the money will go outside of Kansas, but, because of the lag time in campaign finance reporting, it will be difficult for Kansans to properly monitor how that money is used.

The fact remains that the most common use of PAC money is to influence elections, perhaps the very same elections that it is Kobach's job to oversee. As an attorney and former law professor, Kobach knows the law, but even if his PAC is entirely legal, it creates a perception that our secretary of state is less than impartial when it comes to political and election matters.

In the name of fighting voter fraud, Kobach has successfully pushed measures to require Kansans to show photo identification at the polls and prove they are citizens when they register to vote. His efforts to protect the integrity of elections in Kansas also should extend to his own professional behavior.

— Lawrence Journal-World, via the Associated Press

Write us

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We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

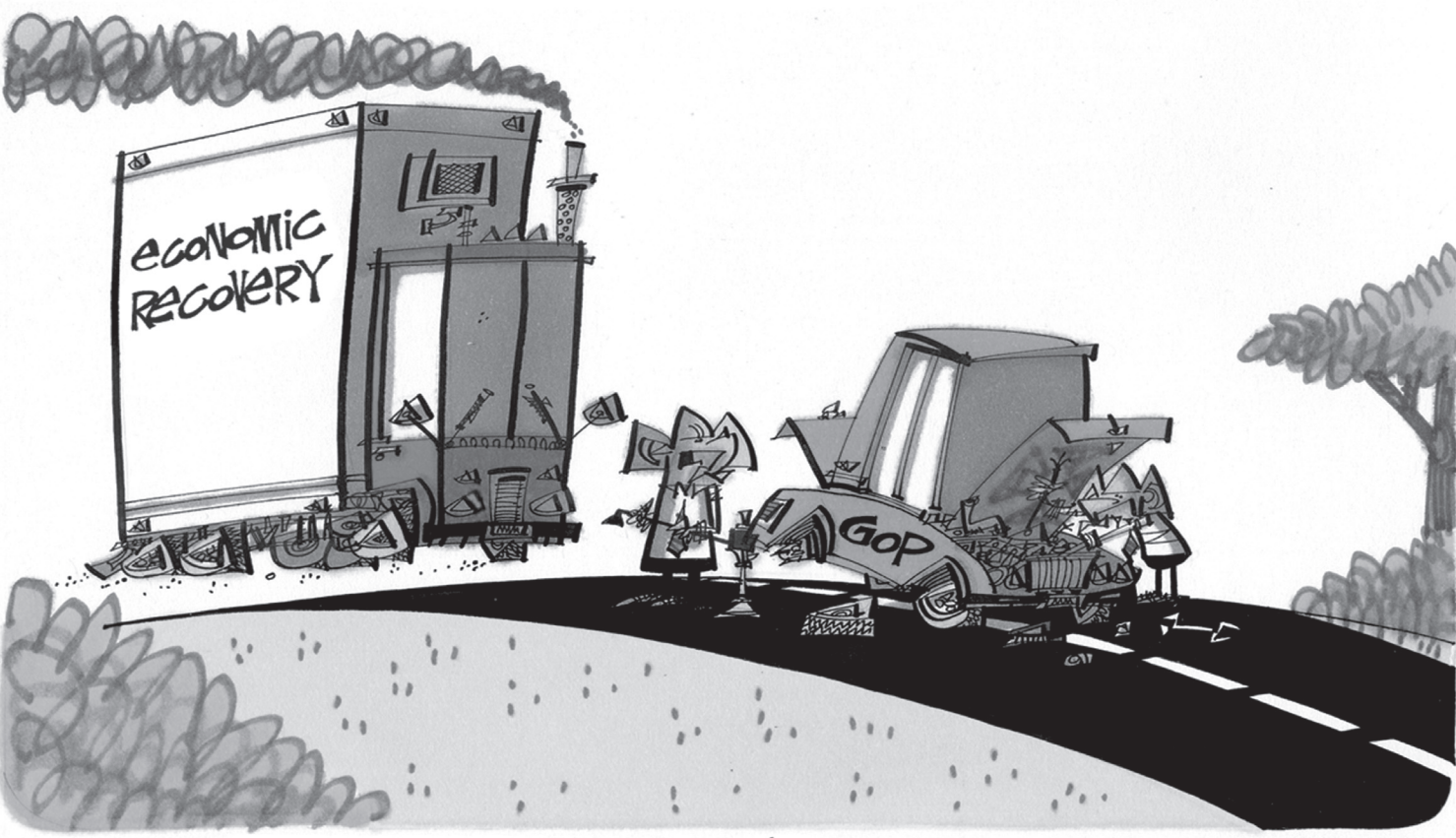
PERIODICALS POSTAGE: paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72.

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"LOUSY CANDIDATES, A RACE THAT WON'T END...WHAT ELSE COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?"

Wait for rain, plan for drought

It's becoming an all too familiar refrain among western Kansas farmers: "We need rain."

Last year's drought has continued into 2012. The wheat crop was planted late and many farmers doubled the normal planting rate and drilled 90 to 120 pounds per acre versus 50 to 60 pounds in a normal year.

Because there was little to no subsoil moisture, the wheat crop started slowly once it germinated. Very little growth occurred until rains fell in November and December.

In January, nearly a foot of snow blanketed a large region of wheat in southwestern Kansas. Since then, the crop has received scant rainfall and the crop is heading south in a hurry.

"We need rain," says Gray County farmer/stockman Joe Jury. Annual rainfall averages about 20 inches in the sand hills he farms.

People often ask Jury how he can grow crops on that amount of moisture.

"I'd love to have an average rainfall of 18-20 inches in one year," the Gray County farmer says. "I can grow a wheat or milo crop on that amount of moisture."

In 2011, the small farming community of Ingalls that Jury calls home recorded less than six inches of rainfall.

"You can't grow much of a crop with that little moisture," he says. "Last year we turned our cows on pasture in late April and started feeding them the first of June. We've been feeding them ever since and I'm afraid we'll do the same this year unless we receive rain and soon."



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

As of mid-March the wheat crop was beginning to suffer from a lack of moisture. Eighty degree days, winds of 50 and 60 mile per hour and 15 percent humidity are sucking dry what little moisture remains in the soil.

In his region of southwestern Kansas some crop farmers have already stripped some of their fields to stop the wind from blowing the soil out of their fields. Feedlots west of Garden City have been cleaned out of manure that has been spread on wheat fields in an attempt to keep them from blowing.

"We're starting to get beat up already," Jury says. "Without additional moisture, we can't afford to lose the remaining soil moisture we have. It could get ugly."

That's why Jury and some producers who have heard about the Dirty '30s and remember the drought of the early '50s are looking at alternative crops this spring instead of the traditional fall crops of corn and soybeans. He'll probably park his 30-inch planter and hook up to his drills because row crops may not provide enough of the cover his land will need to keep the soils in place.

Jury plans to plant pearl and German mil-

lets, sedan grass and forage sorghums. With the drought of 2011, he didn't grow any crops. He planted milo but it hardly emerged from the soil before it died so what little residue and stalks that remain on his land are from wheat and milo stubble back in 2010 — hardly enough to keep his valuable soil in place.

"This cover is degrading every day and it's pretty sparse," Jury says. "We've got to plant these alternative crops and get something to grow and cover our soil up out here."

The Gray County farmer has no-tilled for many years and believes that without this practice there would already be dust piles in southwestern Kansas with conventional tillage.

Like last year, farmers in southwestern Kansas are staring the probability of another major drought straight in the face. Farmers like Jury are thankful they have crop insurance and the livestock business has buoyed up their faltering crop production. For strictly dry-land farmers it's been a real bust.

"I'll say it again, we need rain and we need continuous rains during the next few months to make this crop business happen out here," Jury says. "My dad had a saying that it always rains at the end of a drought. I'm hoping and praying this doesn't turn into several years of little moisture."

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.

Wind tax credit good for Kansas

By Gov. Sam Brownback and U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran

The increasing cost of conducting business in the United States threatens innovation and investment in new technologies.

In today's unstable environment, American industries are understandably reluctant to invest the time and resources necessary to grow their businesses. This is especially true for domestic energy production.

Energy production is one of the most highly regulated markets in the U.S. today. Government policies are hurting our country's ability to compete within the global economy, limiting our domestic energy supply and driving up the cost of energy for consumers. To ensure Kansans have access to a reliable and affordable supply of energy, we must develop more of our nation's natural resources.

One resource that is plentiful in Kansas is wind. Our state has the second highest wind resource potential in our country and leads the nation in wind production capacity currently under construction.

If we expect the wind energy industry to provide for future energy needs and make long-term investments in their businesses, Congress must reauthorize the wind production tax credit that expires this year. By extending the wind production credit, Congress will allow the wind industry to complete its transformation from being a high-tech startup to becoming cost competitive in the energy marketplace.

Failure to do so will result in a tax hike on wind energy companies and will only further delay this industry's ability to compete.

Other Opinions

• What others say in Kansas, elsewhere

There are those who view government intervention in the energy sector as picking winners and losers. But the wind credit is a winning solution because it allows companies to keep more of their own dollars in exchange for the production of energy.

These are not cash handouts; they are reductions in taxes that help cover the cost of doing business. Unlike President Obama's failed stimulus plan that rewards individual unproven companies like Solyndra with handouts, the wind production tax credit is an industry tax credit that has led to \$20 billion in annual private investment in our energy infrastructure.

Today, the American wind industry includes more than 400 manufacturing facilities in 43 states. In 2005, just 25 percent of the value of a wind turbine was produced in the U.S., compared to more than 60 percent today.

Because of their close proximity to wind farms, American workers can produce the critical components at a lower cost than their European and Asian counterparts. As more components are manufactured in the U.S. and not overseas, the cost to produce electricity from wind farms will be further driven down.

If the wind production credit is allowed to expire, local economies across our state will suffer. Kansas counties will lose \$3.7 million in annual payments from wind companies.

Kansas landowners will lose nearly \$4 million annually in additional income they earn from leasing or selling their land for wind farms. And every Kansan will ultimately be affected because the power generated by these wind facilities contributes to our supply of electricity. By eliminating additional sources of electricity, utility rates will climb.

To meet our country's energy needs and remain competitive in the global market, Congress must develop a national energy policy. Recent events in the Middle East have demonstrated once again the importance of having access to an ample domestic energy supply so we are less dependent on foreign sources.

If Congress fails, Kansans will soon be paying higher energy prices — for the gas to fill our cars, for the fuel to power our farm equipment, and for the electricity to turn on our lights.

Temporarily extending the wind production tax credit is not about picking winners and losers — it is about preparing our country to meet our growing energy demand. Rather than make it more difficult for the private sector to develop energy sources, we should lower taxes, reduce regulations and allow the private sector to succeed in the free market.

In turn, the wind industry will grow and become fully competitive — no longer needing the tax credit. By strengthening American energy production, our country's future will be stronger and more secure.

Health care law approaches second year

To the Editor:

As former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi famously said about health care reform, "We have to pass the bill so you can find out what's in it."

Friday marks the second anniversary of the new law's enactment. In two years, we've found out the law cuts Medicare, raises billions in new taxes and increases premiums for families by \$2,100 a year.

We've found out many employers are dropping, and still more are planning to drop, the



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

coverage they provide, so if you like what you have now, you may not be able to keep it.

We've found out the law is so unpopular that the government has granted more than 1,700 waivers exempting labor unions and others from participation.

And, we've found out the law's mandates may be unconstitutional. Kansas and other states will challenge them before the Supreme Court later this month.

That's why I am working to repeal health care reform. It's one anniversary I don't want to observe again.

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, Dodge City