

Other Viewpoints

Oil boom lesson in wise planning

Towns and counties in south-central Kansas are preparing for an oil boom and all the good, bad and unknown that accompany such "progress."

Population gains and business growth top the lists of most community leaders, such as those in Harper and Barber counties, but officials should remain mindful of the unsavory aspects — including likely increases in crime rates — that come with such rapid expansion.

"Slow and steady" ought to be the motto adopted by every community currently benefiting from the oil boom in Kansas, brought on by a horizontal extraction process called fracking. Harper County likely is most representative of how the oil boom is affecting communities.

Restaurants are full, and no vacancy signs are posted at motels. Residents who prided themselves on knowing everyone in the community now are seeing strangers everywhere.

Bob Murdock, president of Hutchinson-based Osage Resources, an independent company working to develop Barber County's oil reserve, said no one knows the impact the oil boom might have on Kansas.

That is a warning as much as a statement. Communities that rush to open new restaurants, build motels and clear land for housing developments before doing their homework, might be left with vacant buildings if the oil boom goes bust.

A new 45-room hotel will be built in Anthony — in Harper County — based on the lack of current hotel space due to the oil boom. The question to ask and answer: Would the town and hotel investors be able to support the additional hotel if the boom went bust?

Slow and steady. No doubt, the initial boom is full of silver linings. Rural communities need the economic boost. Oil field workers and their bosses are buying locally — from equipment to gasoline to groceries — and that's good for any economy.

Even Hutchinson and Reno County are trying to cash in on the enormous influx of oil companies and their workers.

Some Hutchinson/Reno County Chamber of Commerce officials want to court the "white collar" side of oil companies.

Oil, it seems, would be a natural complement for Hutchinson's other energy component — wind. The city is home to a Siemens wind energy plant, which opened in December 2010 and eventually will employ more than 400 people.

But slow and steady — and advanced planning — also apply to Hutchinson's efforts to lure oil company managers and supervisors to Reno County.

Oil is not a four-letter word. In fact, it's already made some Kansas landowners millionaires and spread some "green" throughout western and south-central counties in the state. But as Kansans have witnessed in the past, oil can leave a stain on a community when the commodity dries up and the workers leave town.

That is a good reminder for everyone not to put all your oil in one barrel.

— The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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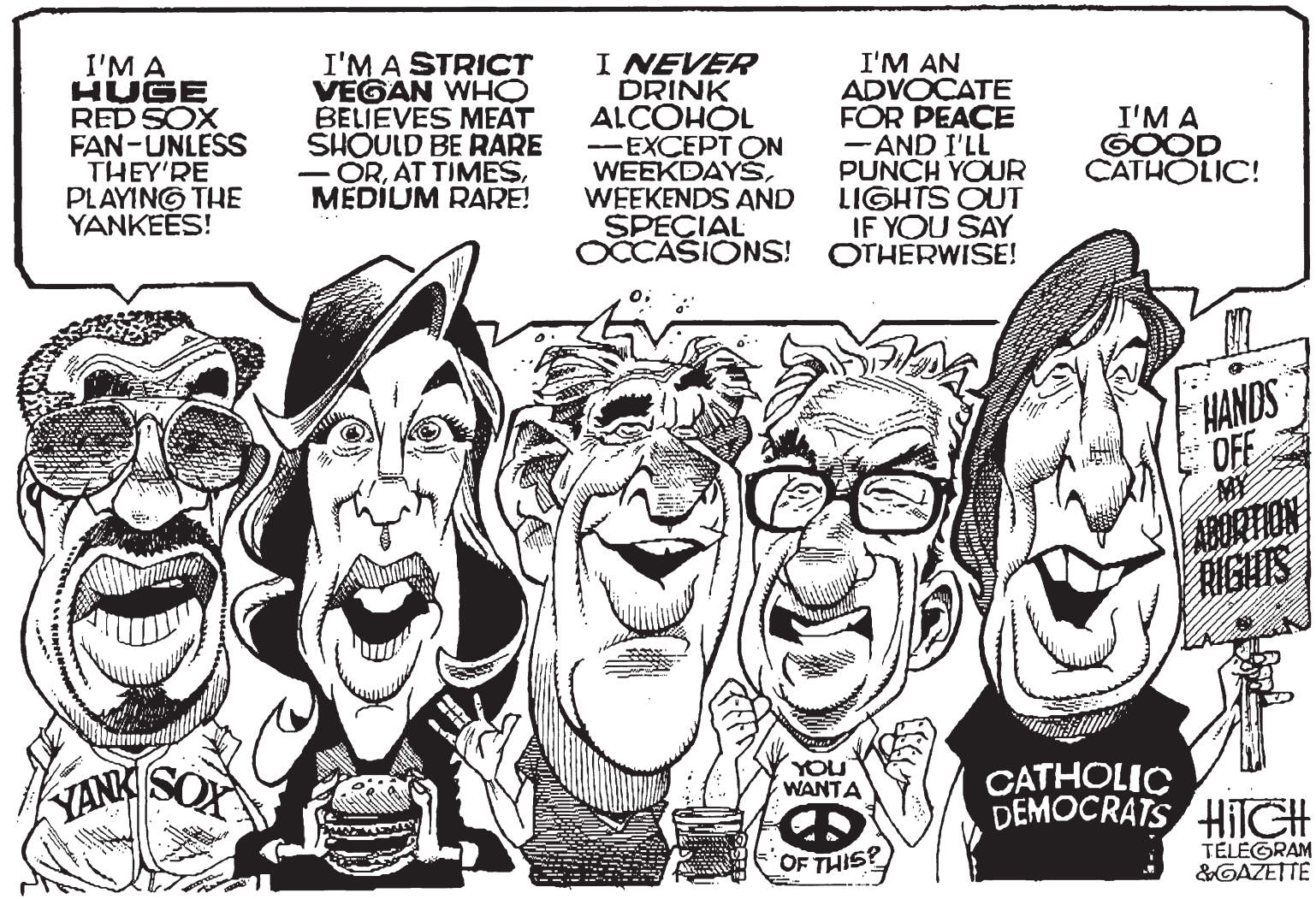
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Partisans highlight self-centeredness

I'm back.

The political world of partisan politics hasn't changed much. The Republicans and religious right are frantically trying to discredit President Obama and all legislative or administrative policies since the Bush years. Facts and truth are irrelevant. The end justifies the means.

The Kansas Republicans are in a twist trying to re-configure our political boundaries. (This will most likely be settled by the time this makes print.) They aren't satisfied with their supermajority across the state. Now they are in a dither trying to figure out how to strengthen the ultraconservative candidate's advantage over the "moderate" Republican candidates.

The coalition of moderate Republicans and Democrats outnumber the ultraconservative Republicans. Why can't we just use geography and census numbers and draw the lines to keep districts in sensible shapes?

You don't need to consider voting registrations or past performance of legislative representatives. It is unfortunate that our founders didn't perceive such childish behavior by state legislators. Oh, I know, states' rights are all



Ken Poland

• Ken's World

important. But if that is carried to the extreme, you destroy any concept of "United States." In the same sense, individual rights carried to the extreme destroy civilization.

A recent quote from "A Thought for Today":

"The world, we are told, was made especially for man — a presumption not supported by all the facts.... Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?" — John Muir, naturalist and explorer (1838-1914).

This old heretic in the Christian community would have to disagree with the presumption that the world was made for man. It seems a little more evident that according to the creation story in the Bible, the world and all of its

natural plant life and animal life was created before man. Is it a little more reasonable to assume that God created man to enjoy the world He had created?

There is ample proof that evolution has been taking place since the beginning, however the beginning is perceived. Some of those changes have taken place by natural selection through nature itself. But man has absolutely altered landscapes and animal species. And it is becoming more evident all the time that man is altering the cosmos beyond this globe we exist on.

The nature of man seems to be selfish and egotistical. We want everything for ourselves and we determine that "No. 1" is just that. We will voluntarily help nature and our fellow man if we think it will benefit "me." But if we can't see something in it for "me," then forget it.

Ken Poland describes himself as a semi-retired farmer living north of Gem, a Christian, affiliated with American Baptist Churches, and a radical believer in separation of church and state. Contact him at rwinc@cheerful.com.

Attack of the bam-bam warrior

On the last day of April 2002, son Ben, Dinnie Wooster (our Sheltie) and I went for a walk. Not too long into the journey, I spied some dandelions in a deserted lot on the east side of the street.

These weren't just any old dandy lions, as my then 2-year-old pronounced the word, but rather perfectly shaped white fluff balls just waiting to be blown off their stems.

I reached down and picked a couple and told Ben to watch as I placed the dandelion a few inches from my mouth. I gave a stiff blow and the miniature parachutes flew in a southerly direction with the prevailing wind.

Watching them drift through the air, my boy danced with glee.

"Let me do it, Daddy," he pleaded.

I picked a couple more and held them up for him to blow. He didn't get the hang of it right away and had difficulty blowing them off the stem.

That's when I spied a small stick, walked over, grabbed it and proceeded to practice my infamous golf stroke using the dandy lion head as a golf ball.

Ben saw this and raised his jig one notch higher, anticipating the fun he would soon have "bamm" these dandy lion heads.

"Give me the stick, Daddy," he demanded.

Once it was in his tiny mitts, he proceeded to strike the planet. That's right, he hit the dirt, rocks, grass and almost everything on the ground before he finally connected with the dandy lion head. When he finally perfected his aim, these white-headed victims were in danger of being wiped from the lot.

But then tragedy struck.

Ben threw down his two-foot branch and announced it was too small. He said he needed a BIG stick. Teddy Roosevelt would have been proud, although the former U.S. president would have had to work hard on the part about "speaking softly" with my son.

Ben proceeded to beat his feet like a drum, flail his arms in the air and scream for a bigger stick. What man hasn't — at one time in his life — cried out for a bigger stick?

Sorry, I'm regressing.



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

When a 2 1/2-year-old wants something, he wants it yesterday. Ben expected me to produce a big stick and do it now.

While I'm not a magician, he sometimes expects me to produce television shows, cookies, chips, sticks, just about anything and everything upon demand.

I quietly explained to him that we would have to look for a bigger stick. The emphasis was on the two words, WE and LOOK.

There was no way Daddy was going to search for a stick while his son remained rooted to the ground while screaming at the top of his lungs.

We set out together in quest of the BIG stick. I was prepared for an epic journey through the neighborhood to find the perfect stick. In fact, I suggested we go home, have dinner, watch Sponge Bob, sleep for the night, have breakfast — all before we continued our search.

Ben was having nothing to do with any of my suggestions.

Being twice his height, I spotted a stick I knew would do the job and motioned Ben in that direction.

He threw his head down and dashed full speed ahead. When he spied the dandy lion killer, he shouted, "There it is Daddy. A BIG stick."

His little mind outran his feet and before he could stop and pick up the stick, he tripped and launched himself head first.

Not to worry. He never said a word, picked up the stick and proceeded to stand up and looked about for the dreaded dandy lions he was about to slay with his new BIG stick. His smile stretched from ear to ear as he waved the weapon several times over his head while giving his best Tarzan ape call — no, just kidding.

He'll get lessons in that later.

When he finally found the first dandy lion, he proceeded to club it into the ground. He didn't give up until the plant was undistinguishable from the black soil. The smile never left his face.

After he'd performed his own childlike version of a scorched earth expedition on the hapless dandy lions, he puffed out his chest a bit more and proceeded to drag his war club at his side, looking a bit like B.C. in the Johnny Hart comic strip.

He wasn't giving this weapon up for nothing, and yelled a resounding, "NO," when I suggested he leave it for next time. In fact, he carried it another quarter mile to our yard, where he abandoned it only after his mother announced it was time to eat chicken dinosaurs.

"I will bamm those dandy lions again tomorrow," he announced, chucking his wooden club on the ground and trading it for a silver fork.

So it goes in the world of my 2 1/2-year-old bam-bam warrior.

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.

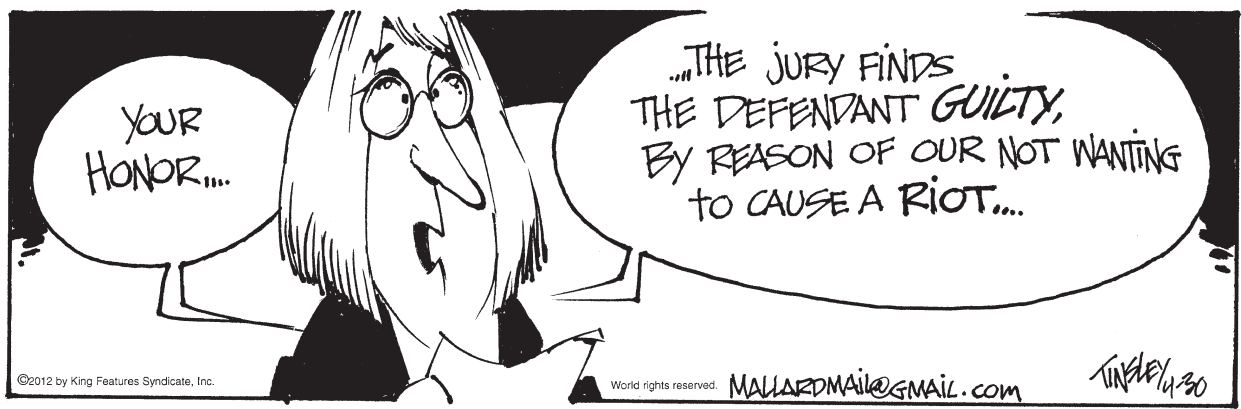
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