



Other Viewpoints

Bad judgment part of a pattern

So a member of Congress goes skinny-dipping in the Sea of Galilee after an evening of food and wine. What should happen?

This one is so weird that it is a little hard to say. But most people would rate such behavior as highly inappropriate and a reflection of poor judgment – poor enough arguably to warrant the congressman to step down.

This scenario describes Kansas' own – and Reno County native – Rep. Kevin Yoder, who represents the Kansas City-area 3rd District in Washington. The event happened a year ago but just came to public light in the last week. Yoder's escapade with a congressional delegation visiting Israel earned him a rebuke from House GOP leadership and, now, considerable embarrassment – for him and for the state.

Yoder has apologized and said that alcohol wasn't a factor in what was a spontaneous decision to take a dip into the biblical waters of Galilee sans garments. But one wonders what else explains such behavior.

Yoder, by the way, was cited in 2009, before his election to Congress, by the Kansas Highway Patrol for speeding and refusing to take a breath test following an early-morning traffic stop in the Lawrence area. He later pleaded guilty to refusing to take the test and paid a \$90 fine.

"I think it's reprehensible," Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney said of the Galilee incident. "I think it's another terrible mistake by individuals."

Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., was a little softer, saying he thought "something stupid occurred, and I think from time to time people do stupid things."

Despite the criticism, Yoder appears likely to survive the embarrassment. He faces only token opposition from a Libertarian candidate in the November election.

The Democrats in Kansas are kicking themselves for not putting up a candidate to challenge Yoder. And the Republicans apparently are content to let him be while they focus on a Senate race over the border in Missouri where their candidate made an asinine comment about "legitimate rape." In that case, the party called for Rep. Todd Akin to drop out of the race. But the difference in that race is that Akin could be disposed of and replaced with a Republican who would have a shot against the Democratic incumbent senator.

The reaction to these political scandals is almost as interesting as the behavior itself. It prompts the question, wouldn't it be better if the party reaction was about responsibility and not electability? And it should lead us all to conclude that ultimately integrity is far more important in whom we elect to higher office than how conservative or liberal he is.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press



Optimism, trust need to be restored

There is something fundamentally wrong with America right now that transcends this year's presidential elections.

Many Americans seem to have lost that sense of optimism that has been the catalyst for many of our country's greatest accomplishments. We seem acutely aware of what divides us and deaf to what unites us as a people. And there is no quick-fix scheme to solve the problems that plague us right now.

Conservatives argue that we need to resurrect the traditional values we embraced before the cultural upheaval of the 1960s. Perhaps there is a kernel of truth to this. Some aspects of the '60s certainly were bad for us, including unprotected sex and widespread abuse of hard drugs.

But there was something distinctly artificial about pre-1960s America. While the population may have had more respect for authority figures and a less cynical view of America – including turning a blind eye to some glaring double standards – was this really a good thing? Was the quiet really worth ignoring the racial discrimination, environmental destruction and lock-step conformity interwoven into the fabric of American culture?

In spite of all their excesses, the '60s birthed many positive developments including empowerment for women, environmental awareness, civil rights, a much needed challenge to our Puritan-infused sexual mores, the emergence of gay, Hispanic and Native American movements and a more nuanced examination



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

of U.S. foreign policy.

What's lacking in America right now is not moral decay – at least not in the form the so-called cultural warriors claim – but trust. And lack of trust breeds fear, and that almost never produces positive results. Today, Americans don't know what direction our country is going in, and it frightens many of them.

This is why some people nod approvingly when politicians prattle on about how we need to return to being the nation our Founding Fathers envisioned. While no rational person wants to return to being the country we were when Thomas Jefferson still roamed the country – blacks, natives and women were treated as second-class citizens or worse in that era – the idea of re-establishing the Founders' vision conjures up images of simpler days for folks who no longer feel they have a place in today's culture.

This same phenomenon is at work when people gush over the political figures who denounce big government – which is code speak for public programs – and "the culture of dependency" it has allegedly fostered.

Ironically, many of these same people protest any cuts to the government programs that benefit them. So, to the casual observer, it appears these folks are opposed to government programs – like universal health care and food stamps – except for the ones that benefit them (Social Security, Medicare, farm subsidies). While it would be easy to dismiss this as an example of ignorance or outright greed, I think there's more to it than that.

This kind of irrational logic is only employed on such a wide scale when people are desperate for a message that maps out a clear vision for our country.

But, I would argue that our culture doesn't need a message; it needs a new value system that features a blend of conservative and liberal ideals. We must learn to value both sympathy and thrift, empathy and self-responsibility, creativity and self-discipline and respect for sacrifice and a thoughtful questioning of authority.

Liberals and conservatives will always disagree passionately on some core issues, but we would get along much better if we recognized all the values we do share.

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Internet missing in 40 percent of homes

This fall, some Kansas schools required parents to enroll their students online. They assume that virtually all households have access to the Internet. If not, well they can always go to the public library or enroll on computers at the school.

School administrators should know better. Just as the former Kansas tax chief was wrong when she wanted to force everyone to pay taxes online (for an extra fee), schools are also wrong to require that school enrollment be done online. Paying taxes is not optional. And providing an education for your child is likewise enforced by truancy laws.

Anyone who assumes that the population that they serve is both Internet connected and Internet literate needs to get out more. While a few affluent Kansas communities may approach universal Internet, some rural regions may have less than half of their population "wired."

U.S. government data show that 6 percent of Americans live outside of broadband access. These rural folks can't get realtime Internet even if they want it.

But even where it is available, the cost of being online at home is high. A family must not only reinvest every four to five years in an up-to-date computer, but pay monthly connection fees that can approach or exceed a thousand dollars a year.

In 2006, the percent of households who were connected nationally had increased to nearly three-fourths. Then came the 2008 Great Recession. Staying connected was too expensive for many families that lost jobs or could not make house payments.

According to the last Pew Internet and American Life Project Survey, only 60 percent of American households have broadband ac-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

cess. That means that four out of 10 children cannot be enrolled online at home.

And "go to the library" or "use the school computer" is an empty option for parents who are not computer literate. And even the computer savvy can have difficulty navigating online school enrollment forms.

Counselors and teacher advisors have a responsibility to help students navigate the curriculum and select courses that are correct for their past performance and future goals. Sadly, that is being abandoned as they focus on assessment tests. Schools that do not take their advising responsibilities seriously are not serving their students.

But this overestimation of computer access continues throughout the school year. More schools are shifting homework online. Poor, minority and rural students who are most likely to not have Internet at home face a new form of discrimination. Half-hearted provision of computer access for a few hours after school does not begin to compensate.

The cost of rapidly-obsolete technology runs over 10 times the medium it replaces and flies against any save-a-tree rationale. Materials printed on home computers by inkjets and laserjets 30 times (by each student in a class) are vastly more expensive than 30 photocopies run once by a teacher, not to mention the student time wasted.

The vaunted "paperless schools" of Kansas have not only shifted these expenses to homes, but encumber huge costs as they move up each year to the newest iPads and equivalent devices.

Many teachers, paras and aides, whose salaries have lost purchasing power since 1971, cannot afford the thousand-dollars-a-year cost of being Internet connected. Yet more schools are requiring these employees to receive their school communications online and even be available to students. If "having home Internet" was not written into their job description when the position was advertised – and it is questionable if this would be legitimate – some schools are treading on thin ice.

It is time for these schools to get real and understand that nationally four out of 10 of their students are not connected to the Internet. And these students, and unconnected school employees, are not second-class citizens.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

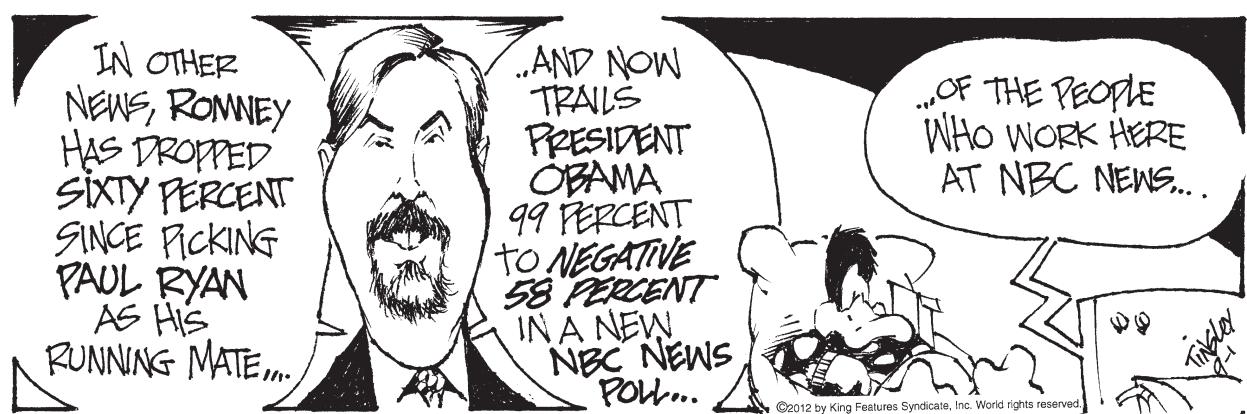
Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774 roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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