

Other Viewpoints

Judges don't need politician's changes

The Kansas House needs to halt a change to a judicial selection system that has served the state well for decades.

The Senate this week approved a 2014 statewide vote on a constitutional amendment that would empower the governor to select judges on the Kansas Supreme Court and Court of Appeals.

However nobly the motives are cloaked, this is a power grab. Gov. Sam Brownback wants to select judges who think the way he does, regardless of their record or status in the legal community.

Since 1958, Kansas has used a nominating commission to screen judicial candidates. The panel consists of five lawyers elected by the membership of the Kansas Bar Association and four non-lawyers appointed by the governor.

Critics say that makeup gives lawyers too much power. But Brownback and lawmakers have been unreceptive to offers from the Kansas Bar Association to realign the commission so that the majority of members would be appointed by the governor or legislators.

Instead, the lawmakers want Kansas voters to amend the constitution so that the governor would single-handedly select judges, subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Those pushing for the change contend it would make the judiciary more responsive to the citizens.

Actually, it would make judges more responsive to politics and the wishes of the governor and the majority party in the Legislature. That's not healthy for the state and its citizens.

Kansas courts are known for high-quality judges. That would gradually erode, as merit becomes less of a qualification for selection.

In one of those ironic twists we see often in Kansas government, a governor and lawmakers who decry nearly everything about the federal government want to adopt the federal judicial selection process.

But states like Kansas have already found a better way. The nonpartisan selection process avoids the brutal hearings and indecision that prevail in Washington.

The resolution needs a two-thirds vote by the Kansas House to be placed on a statewide ballot in 2014. House members of both parties have a chance to stand up for independent and meritorious courts by voting "no."

- The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press

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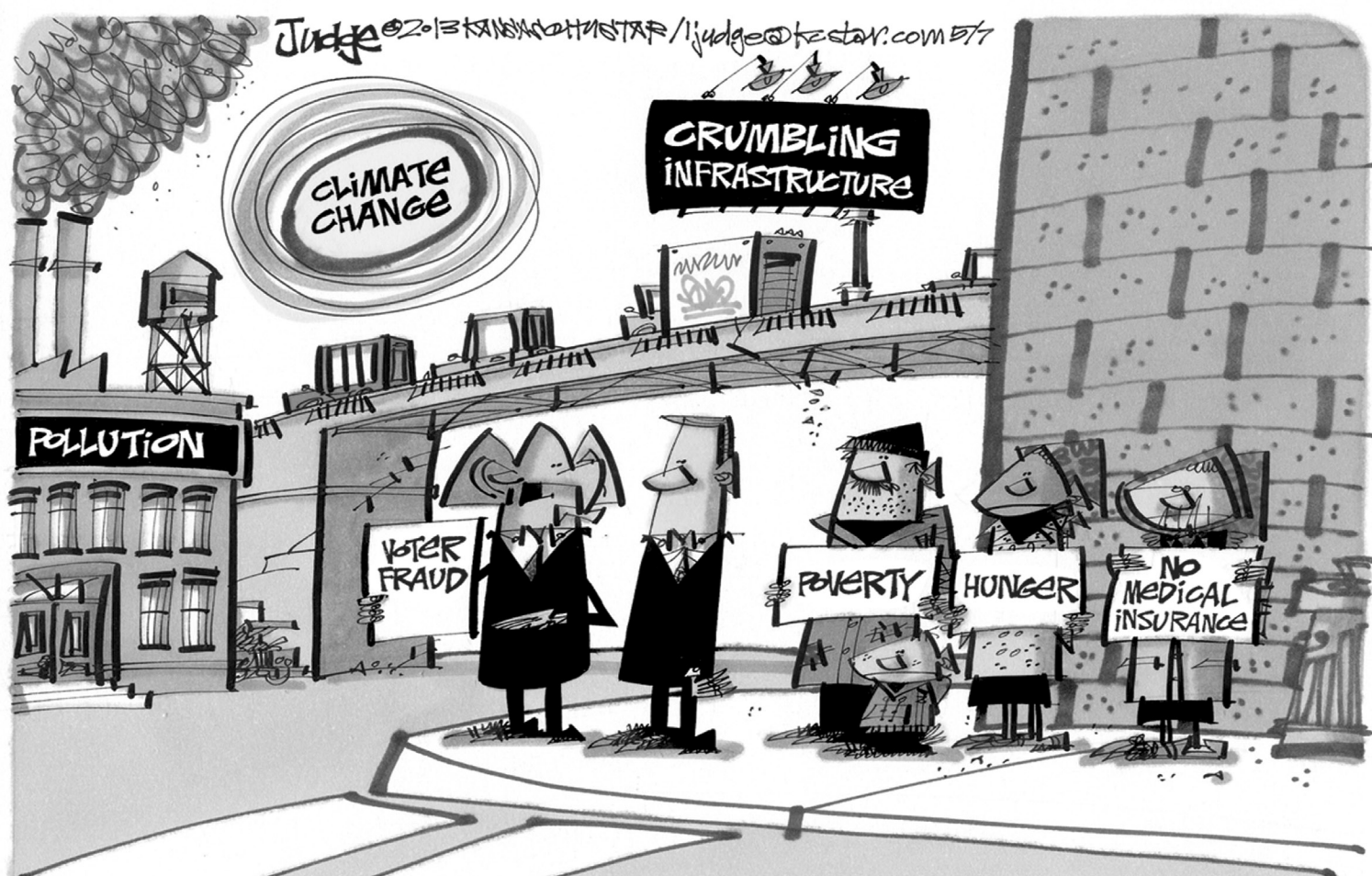
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"BUT WHAT REALLY CONCERNS ME ARE THE IMAGINARY PROBLEMS."

Get sick and fall apart together

It should be illegal! I think I could get legislators to go along with passing a law that says that husbands and wives are not allowed to get sick at the same time.

Recently my hubby and I both caught the dreaded virus at the same time. There are no books to tell you who has to do what when you both are sick. There is no one to be the caretaker and that is a major problem.

The only good news was that we both slept a lot with the fevers - and then took turns keeping each other awake while we coughed around the clock. So now you have two tired people with fevers and coughs, each needing someone to fix soup and bring the Gatorade.

I guess I should have trained the dog for this kind of event, but who would have thought it would be so necessary? Noah won't bring the Gatorade even though I think he knows how to open the fridge. He also looked at us as if to say, "Hurry up and get better. I need someone to feed, water, let me out and play with me."

I did get lucky in one respect. As I was getting sick, I went to the store and got everything I needed for homemade chicken noodle soup. I did get it made before I lost all of my energy and it kept us fed for several days. Of course the dog thought I made the soup just for him - and looked SO disappointed that we were eating his soup.

Nothing tasted good; in fact, everything tasted nasty. You know, the taste when you look at what you just took a bite of and want someone else to try it to see if it is really that bad or it's just you. Well, this time it was both of us. Only the soup tasted good and there was plenty of broth to keep us going.



Sharon Friedlander

Musings

Crackers weren't an option, and who had the energy to go all the way to the kitchen for them anyway. So there we were - both feverish, cranky and coughing to beat the band. Just as I would doze off he would start coughing. I returned the favor many times!

We also discovered that you run out of things to watch on TV no matter how many channels you have on cable, since you are watching it 24 hours a day. Repeats are more noticeable when you feel bad, and the shows weren't that good the first time you watched them. I also learned way more than I wanted about planes, tanks and weapons.

It also becomes painfully obvious that you will run out of clean clothes, clean dishes and energy all at the same time. So pick one and make a run at it and just ignore the rest.

I know I must have been sick, since I didn't want coffee and couldn't seem to read a page and remember what I read. As far as I am concerned, coffee is what gets me up and going and keeps me going all day. I drink lots of it and enjoy it. Gatorade G-2 is my second choice, and thankfully I did have a good supply in the cabinet.

I also love to read but that didn't seem to be an option for me. I must have reread the same

paragraph several times before I just gave up and went back to planes and tanks.

Late night cable is especially funny when you are sick. Some of the movies that were on were not comedies, but sure were funny with a fever. I did discover there is an infomercial for whatever ails you, and several that will fill your home with things that look cool at 3 a.m. but never get used once you get well enough to ask "now why did I buy that?"

I am not a fan of reality TV so that eliminated several choices of what passes for entertainment. I just can't get into folks behaving badly, even when I am sick. In fact, my tolerance level gets way smaller the sicker I get. I wonder why network wonks think it is entertaining to watch folks being this awful. Oh, well, guess that is one question that won't get answered any time soon.

Finally, we both started to feel more human and some energy did come back. I did find that the energy didn't last long, though, so naps became a wonderful thing. Slowly we got better and I came back to work.

Just when I thought we had made it through, my hubby came down with pneumonia and went back to the couch. At least this time I could take care of him. We both are better and still have our sense of humor intact, so all's well that ends well, I guess.

But - I still think it should be illegal!

Sharon Friedlander, publisher of the Colby Free Press, enjoys reading, hot rods and critters. Contact her at sfriedlander@nwkansan.com.

Chinese have train to the future

You board a Chinese bullet train in the center of the city. There is no long drive to the airport in the country. You chuck your baggage into an overhead shelf and settle into a wide comfortable seat. The train leaves on regular tracks at slow speed but moves up onto special 20- to 50-foot high pylons and accelerates after you leave the city behind.

Acceleration is so gradual that you and other passengers can move around in the aisle anytime. This train is electric. Poles that suspend the overhead electric lines whip past your window faster and faster until you no longer see them.

You would not know you were moving except for an electronic board at the front of each car that flashes your speed as the train accelerates to 150, 250 then 350 kilometers per hour - a speed faster than an airliner takes off and lands.

China is rapidly expanding this high speed system between Beijing and the provincial capitals, and from each capital to every other capital. They will join every city with a population of over 500,000 to every other city that big.

My trip was between provincial capitals, a distance similar to Topeka to Indianapolis of almost 500 miles. That would take 10 hours to drive. This train took two hours. It could have been less but we made several stops for exactly one minute each: 30 seconds to unload a few passengers and 30 seconds to take on new.

The newest bullet trains run from Beijing to Shanghai. A trip of 11 hours by car or bus, it takes just four hours with stops. Each train



John Richard Schrock

In the Public Good

carries 1,000 passengers and six run each way each day.

This "gao tye hwo che" or "high special train" is faster than European and Japanese trains that run at ground level. This is now Chinese technology.

For us, the real take-home message is that the first day that this bullet train went into operation between Xi'an and Zhengzhou was the last day that airlines flew between those two capitals. China's planned economy made sure passengers switched; this train was full from day one. Unlike the U.S., there would be no airline and train competing, each running at 50 percent capacity and both going bankrupt. Electric trains take one-seventh the energy to move a person compared to an airliner, one-fifth the energy of a car. And my train ticket was \$40, substantially less than an airline ticket.

The one serious high-speed train accident that has occurred was a result of a lightning strike on a signal box. It occurred in a month when two Western airliners went down around the world. By comparison, their super train remains super safe.

It may be hard for many Americans to ac-

cept the fact, but competition and short-term profits do not always result in the best product for the best future. High-speed trains represent a future based on long-term investment. A Chinese planned economy made it happen. It is best for their people. It is best for their environment.

But we are unable to rapidly build such an extensive system or make such long-term investments under free market forces. We piddle around over expanding Amtrak service, complaining that it will take a public subsidy. Unwilling to abandon our fuel-hogging cars and airlines, we dither under the illusion that our market competition will find a better way.

The rest of the world is watching the variety of political and economic models at work. With a world population of 7 billion heading to 9 billion, the Chinese high speed train is just one of many indicators that Western individualism will not meet future challenges.

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.

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

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