

Other Viewpoints

End death penalty in Kansas next term

Sadly, Missouri and Kansas are not among the states whose lawmakers have understood what an unjust and costly system capital punishment is. Measures to abolish or even temporarily halt the death penalty have gone nowhere over the years in both legislatures.

So it's time for citizens and enlightened lawmakers to plan ways to make this matter of life and death a top priority in these two states for the next legislative sessions.

The arc of history is bending toward justice when it comes to the death penalty, and there's no good reason Missouri and Kansas should lag behind and continue to be on the wrong side of both history and justice.

Both states continue to support capital punishment even though the evidence is clear that operating a system designed to execute prisoners is much more costly than sending them to prison without the possibility of parole when convicted of heinous crimes.

In Kansas, 13 men have been sentenced to death since the state reinstated capital punishment in 1994, but no one has been executed.

A 2003 study calculated that the litigation and incarceration expenses of capital cases are 70 percent higher than what it costs the state to seek justice in murder cases in which the death penalty isn't in play.

In 2008, for instance, the California Commission on the Fair Administration of Justice estimated that the annual cost of the present death penalty system there was \$137 million. By contrast, it estimated that the annual cost of a system that instead imposed a maximum penalty of life in prison would be \$11.5 million.

So if this were merely a matter of economics, the death penalty should be tossed out.

But, of course, it's much more than that. Despite the costliness of capital litigation, the prospects for error are much too high.

The Innocence Project reports that, through the use of DNA evidence, 18 death row prisoners so far have been exonerated. They already had served a total of 229 years behind bars in 11 different states. That should never happen. Nor should execution of the innocent, but the only way to be positive it doesn't is to ban capital punishment.

There's more: Killing people who are accused of killing people simply puts the state on the same debased moral level as the criminals. And although such executions certainly deter the now-dead prisoner from committing more crimes, there is sound research to suggest that capital punishment has no deterrent effect on people who may commit offenses that could result in a death sentence.

There's a compelling argument that the death penalty is cruel and unusual punishment. What's incontestable is that by permitting the death penalty, the United States is keeping company with such countries as Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and Uganda. By contrast, all 47 members of the Council of Europe have either established a moratorium on the death penalty or abolished it altogether.

Surely it's time for the U.S. to join the abolition movement. Kansas and Missouri should follow Maryland's recent example and become the 19th and 20th states to adopt a sane and civilized approach to this matter.

— The Kansas City Star, via the Associated Press

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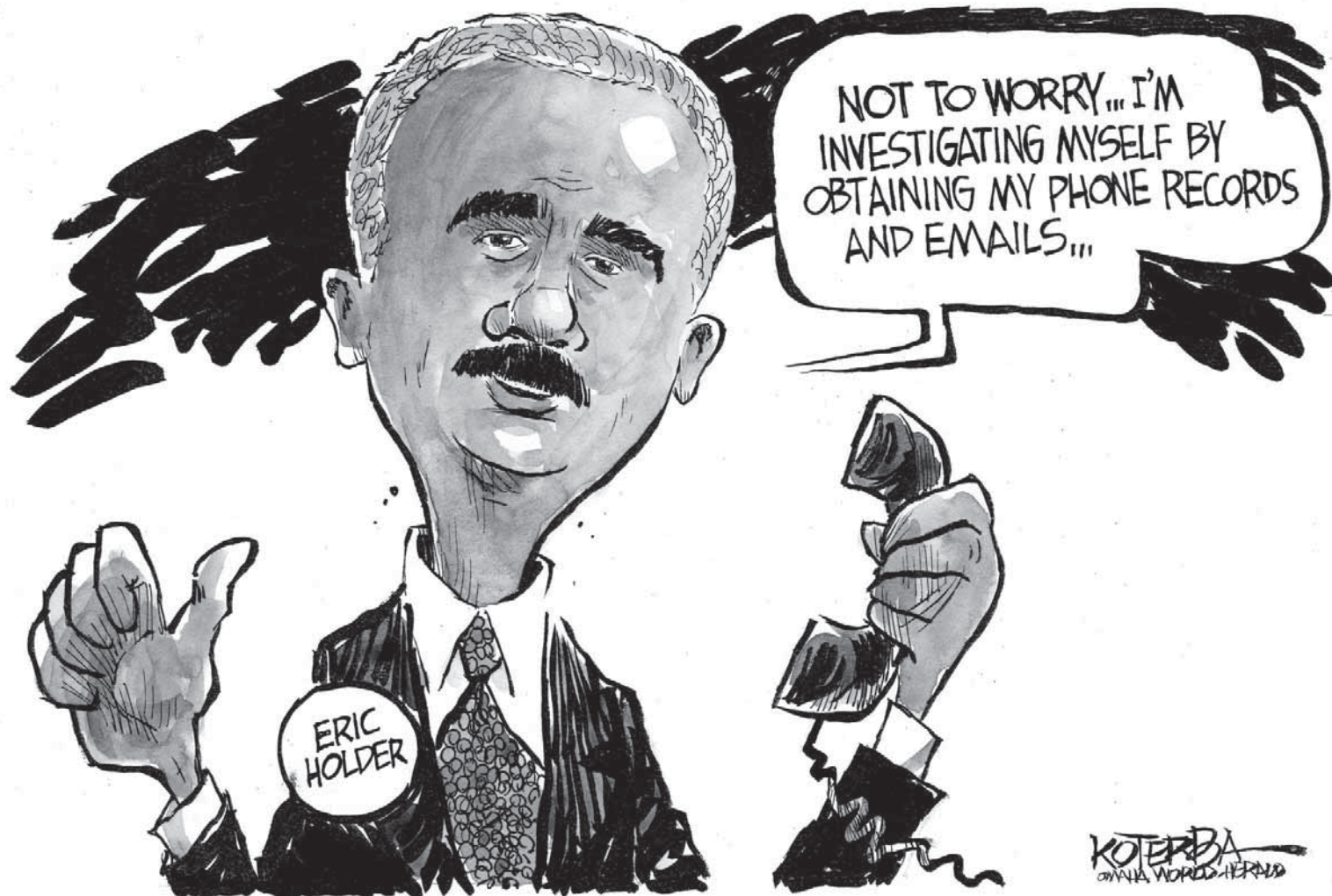
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Seek shade, not sun

The next time you take a few minutes out of the sun, dust off one of those old family albums. You know, the ones that date back to the 1920s, '30s, '40s and even the late '50s.

If your family farmed, you'll see photos of your relatives attired in wide-brimmed hats. Look at their shirts. They wore loose-fitting, long-sleeved, light-colored garments.

Now fast-forward to the photographs of the mid-'60s. Clothing styles changed. You don't see too many long-sleeved shirts. Broad-brimmed hats have been replaced with baseball caps proclaiming seed, feed and tractor suppliers, or organizations — just about any logo under the sun.

Today's farmer no longer wears the clothing of yesteryear — clothing that afforded protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. Instead he wears a smaller, softer, snug-fitting cap that will not blow off and bump into machinery. Farmers prefer their hats to be inexpensive or free, and they like them colorful.

While the ball cap is comfortable and affordable, it does not protect the temples, the tender, delicate ear tips and the back of the neck. The baseball cap just doesn't extend far enough to offer protection against the sun.

Health specialists in the agricultural field have been tracking skin cancer and the sun's harmful impact on farmers and other segments of society since 1983. While the number of deaths from skin cancer remains small, the amount of tumors has increased significantly, according to doctors who treat farmers in rural areas.

Ultraviolet rays are one of the leading



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

causes of cancer on farms today, researchers say. But with early diagnosis, treatment is possible. Farmers and ranchers should insist on inspection for skin cancer as part of their regular check-ups.

Without protective measures, sun will eventually result in skin cancer. Dermatologists recommend that anyone working or playing in the sunshine protect their skin completely by wearing clothing and a wide-brimmed hat.

The American Cancer Society will tell you there is a skin cancer epidemic. The number of cases is rising faster than any other tumor being studied today.

"If current trends continue, one in five Americans will get skin cancer in their lifetime, and many of these skin cancers could be prevented by reducing UV exposure from the sun and indoor tanning devices," says Tom Frieden, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. "Of particular concern is the increase we are seeing in rates of melanoma, a potentially deadly form of skin cancer. In the United States, melanoma is one of the most common cancers among people ages 15 to 29 years."

Spending time in the sun increases the risk

of skin cancer. Everyone can sunburn and suffer harmful effects of exposure to UV radiation. People can protect themselves by choosing a sunscreen that is right for them, wearing protective clothing and limiting time in the sun.

Youngsters and young adults must be educated today. If they learn about the sun's dangerous rays at an early age and practice prevention, skin cancer can be avoided in later years.

Seek shade when the sun's rays are strongest; avoid sunburns, intentional tanning and use of tanning beds; use extra caution near reflective surfaces like water and sand.

Farmers, ranchers — just about anyone who works or plays in the sun — should avoid direct exposure from 10 a.m. until about 3 p.m. in the Midwest.

If you can't wear a wide-brimmed hat and protective clothing, apply at least a SPF 30 sun-protective lotion. Today's farmers and ranchers would be well-advised to take a page out of their family albums — to return to those days of floppy, wide-brimmed straw hats and long-sleeved, cotton shirts.

Who knows, maybe they could start a new fashion craze as well as protect their skin from the damaging rays of the sun.

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.

Legislature still in session

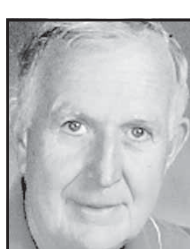
Those who are following this legislative session are aware that we should have been done three weeks ago. There have been no General Orders or bills "above the line" since we returned for veto session on May 8.

I have driven my 380 miles back and forth three times, and each time, I hoped it would be the last trip for some time.

The tax plan and budget are tied together, and the House and Senate cannot find common ground. The House is split dramatically on the sales tax expiring July 1. We have representatives who will only vote for a plan that takes the sales tax from 6.3 to 5.7 percent, and others who will only vote for a plan that retains the 6.3 percent.

I personally feel that with the tax plan that was passed last year (which I did not vote for), we should split the difference and see if we have the growth necessary to take it all the way back the following year.

The budget is a different matter. We have to



Ward Cassidy

• This week in Topeka

have the revenue to run the state, and the only way we can make things work is with more cuts. This is an example of how difficult this process is: in my district, we have a tech college and a community college. They are important to the economy of northwest Kansas.

I have been fighting to keep their funding. In a neighboring district, there are cuts being made to Kansas prisons. Of course, their representative is fighting for his district. There are 125 representatives and 40 senators all doing the same thing. How do we maintain fiscal responsibility and still provide services?

Another example: I have had many calls about the Department of Revenue and the way they are handling this year's tax returns. Their staff has been reduced and their workload increased. Less government — less service.

We have been here too long — and hopefully compromise is near. With the grace of God, my next article will be about how this all turns out.

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