

Other Viewpoints

'Scarlet Letter' a shameful practice

The state supreme court now will decide how long Kansas reasonably can require sex, drug and violent offenders to register with law enforcement. That is a good question, and the higher court should find that Kansas is excessive in its requirements.

That was the opinion of a Shawnee County district court judge, who on July 16 ruled in favor of an offender who had sued the state because a new law extended the time he was required to register from 10 to 25 years and did so retroactively for a 2003 conviction in Johnson County.

The Legislature amended the registry law in 2011, requiring offenders to register for 15 years to life, depending on the severity of the crime. Kansas offenders also are required to report in person four times a year. They must register within three days of changing residences or jobs and must tell law enforcement when planning to travel internationally. They must pay a \$20 fee each time they report something and are identified as sex offenders on their driver's licenses.

Judge Larry Hendricks noted that people can use the Johnson County website to post registry information on social media websites and then social media users can comment. He compared the web notification provisions and driver's license notations to "traditional colonial punishments."

The judge also said the state's registration requirement exceeded the time necessary to protect public safety, citing studies that found the risk of a sex offender committing another sex crime drops significantly as he or she ages.

Hendricks acknowledged the emotion surrounding the offender registry law.

"However, people controlled by this act also have relatives that are affected by the act. The increased requirements that are in effect, increased punishment, do not and cannot survive the revealing light of our Constitution," he wrote in the decision. "We must protect the individual rights of all people to insure the protection of our own individual rights, no matter what our emotions might tell us."

The judge is right. We have returned to the Scarlet Letter days with the virtual branding of these offenders nearly for life. The 10-year registration requirement under the previous law allowed sufficient time to show that even a sex offender could be rehabilitated. Lifetime shaming is not right. Everyone deserves a second chance.

Other states have struck down similar laws. The Kansas Supreme Court should do likewise.

- The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press



Feline friendship can be fickle

Cynthia says I should write about brushing the cat.

I told her I can't do that. I'd be laughed out of the old men's society, and so soon after my 65th birthday.

I've never fathomed the reason, but it's true that older men don't seem to like cats, while older women tend to adore them. Maybe it's that the women start adoring the cat more than the old man, I don't know.

I do know that when Cynthia wrote frequently about the kids and the cats, she got complaint after complaint about those "danged cat columns." And every one came from an older man.

Older women would write and coo about how cute their kitties were - and how much they loved those cute cat columns.

I know there are men who like cats. I've been one of them since I was a boy. After Cynthia and I moved into our first house, we started looking for a kitten. We've had cats ever since.

So just put me down as one of those rare older men who actually likes cats.

We have this one cat I'm never sure about. Jezabel is more of a hair factory than a cat, re-



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

ally. And she doesn't belong to us. She's sort of on permanent loan. By day, she's skittish, afraid of about everything, but at night, she comes out and demands to be petted.

Then you find out how much a cat can shed. She has longer hair and a couple of thick undercoats, and in the summer, it seems like she might lose it all.

She was shedding so much on the carpet and beds upstairs the other day that I took her out on the back porch and started brushing her. She pretends to hate the brush. She bites at it, hisses and growls. But she never tries to leave the bench where I'm brushing her.

In an evening, you can brush a pound or two of hair off that cat, I swear, and her hissing and mewing the whole time.

The other cat, our Molly, does not pretend to hate the brush. She loves it. She'd stay and let you brush all night. And if you want to really be on her good side, brush her on top of the head, then under her chin. She adores that.

But Molly doesn't need that much brushing. Jezabel, well, that's another story. An hour doesn't solve the problem. Two might do it, but she'd nail you with one of her fangs before then.

But I can't write about that. I have to do something more mundane, like grandchildren or politics. Because I can't risk my status with the guys.

You'll just have to wait until Cynthia gets bold enough to write about cats again.

Oh, and by the way, you shouldn't believe everything you read in her column. Any of it, really. I've studied it, and I'd say there's only a 2.9 percent chance any of it's true.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

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Limit government overreach

The nation learned in May that the Justice Department secretly obtained the phone records of more than 100 Associated Press reporters and monitored Fox News reporter James Rosen's personal e-mail and cell phone records, branding him a "possible co-conspirator" in a classified leak case for asking questions of a government source.

These revelations sent shock waves through newsrooms nationwide. Reporters can no longer assure their sources that interviews will remain confidential, because there is no way to tell whether the government is listening.

This attack on journalism reaches far beyond hard-working reporters and their sources. Make no mistake: The ultimate victims are the millions of Americans who rely on investigative journalism to inform them about their government and their communities. When the government casts a chilling effect on newsrooms, it keeps important news away from the American public.

In Washington, real change often occurs in response to a crisis. That is precisely what is happening here. For centuries, the American public has assumed that journalists are the public's watchdog, overseeing and revealing government abuses. But the AP and Fox News stories have exposed a sad truth: The government is spying on journalists. The only way to limit this government overreach is through passage of a law that lays out clear rules for when the government can obtain information from the press.

Members of Congress from across the political spectrum recognized that need when in

Other Opinions

• Caroline Little
Newspaper Ass. of Am.

May they proposed the Free Flow of Information Act of 2013, which would prohibit federal prosecutors, criminal defendants or civil litigants from subpoenaing information from journalists unless they convince a federal judge that the need for the information outweighs the public interest in the free flow of information.

This "shield law" would be a huge improvement from the current federal system, which enables prosecutors to decide whether to notify the media of a subpoena and how broad the request should be without any oversight or any chance for the press to challenge these government actions.

Rep. Ted Poe, a Texas Republican and a former judge, said that he sponsored the shield law because maintaining confidentiality for reporters' sources "is critical to ensuring the free flow of information without government interference."

His co-sponsor, Rep. John Conyers, a Michigan Democrat, noted that 49 states and the District of Columbia protect journalists' sources.

"It is long past time that our federal gov-

ernment provides similar protections," Sen. Conyers said.

Sens. Charles Schumer, R-N.Y., and Lindsey Graham, R-Fla., co-sponsored a similar measure in the Senate. Schumer aptly observed that a law is needed, as "there's no supervision." President Obama recently reaffirmed the administration's support for a shield law and said that journalists "should not be at legal risk for doing their jobs."

The response can be summed up in one word, which is rare these days in Washington: bipartisanship. The swift reaction of legislators of both parties demonstrates that press freedom is not a Democratic or a Republican talking point. It is a quintessentially American value that transcends politics and shaped our nation's founding. As Thomas Jefferson famously wrote, the "only security of all is in a free press."

As an organization representing the nation's newspapers, the Newspaper Association of America is a proud member of a coalition of more than 50 media groups that supports a federal shield law. Over the next few weeks, we will urge senators and representatives nationwide to sign on to the shield law (H.R. 1962 and S. 987) and codify this fundamental American principle. We encourage you to contact your members of Congress to tell them why a free press matters to you.

Caroline Little is president and chief executive officer of the Newspaper Association of America in Arlington, Va.

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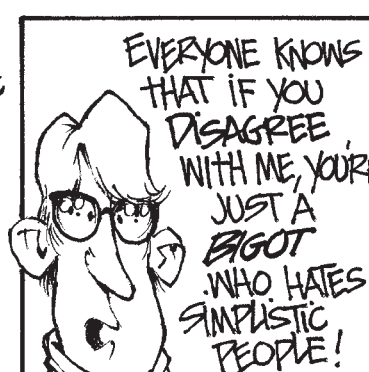
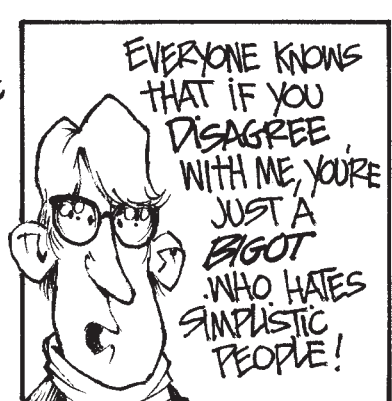
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Mallard Fillmore

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