

Other Viewpoints

Prevention cuts boost prison needs

The Kansas Department of Corrections announced this week a plan for a two-stage expansion of the El Dorado prison as a way to deal with anticipated prison overcrowding.

The expansion, which is projected to cost upwards of \$38 million, would house an additional 640 inmates. The Kansas Sentencing Commission recently offered new projections showing the state will run out of prison space by July 2017 and hold more than 5 percent above the department's capacity of 9,600 inmates.

At full capacity and at an estimated annual cost of \$24,165 an inmate, the state could expect to spend roughly \$231.9 million each year to house its growing prison population.

Crime is a massive expense that Kansans will pay for in one fashion or another, yet how Kansans choose to approach crime will determine how those tax dollars are spent.

In recent years, spending for programs designed to prevent incarceration have endured budget cuts while experiencing heavier caseloads. But those cuts don't equal real savings to Kansas taxpayers; the spending is simply delayed until the need for a prison expansion has reached a critical level. At that time, Kansans will be told it is in an emergency situation and that the community's safety is at risk unless money is allocated to build more prisons and house prisoners.

Adequate spending to programs such as community corrections or money to create new programs like the Reno County Drug Court – which works to keep drug offenders out of prison – are worthwhile investments that address the issue of crime before it ends with thousands of people in prison.

And much crime and drug use has its genesis, at least partly, in poverty. While taxpayers may feel that safety net programs, such as food stamps, are bloated and unnecessary, research suggests there is a correlation between poverty and crime. Whatever we may save on providing food and assistance to the poor likely will more than be consumed by the annual cost of incarceration and the growing need for additional prison space.

Kansans don't have much choice about whether they will continue to pay for crime, and even the best efforts to educate people and lift them out of poverty will yield a criminal population. But Kansans do have a choice about how to invest in addressing crime, and at a cost of \$24,165 a year, per inmate, additional incarceration seems like a risky and costly way to go.

– The Hutchinson News, via the Associated Press

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Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

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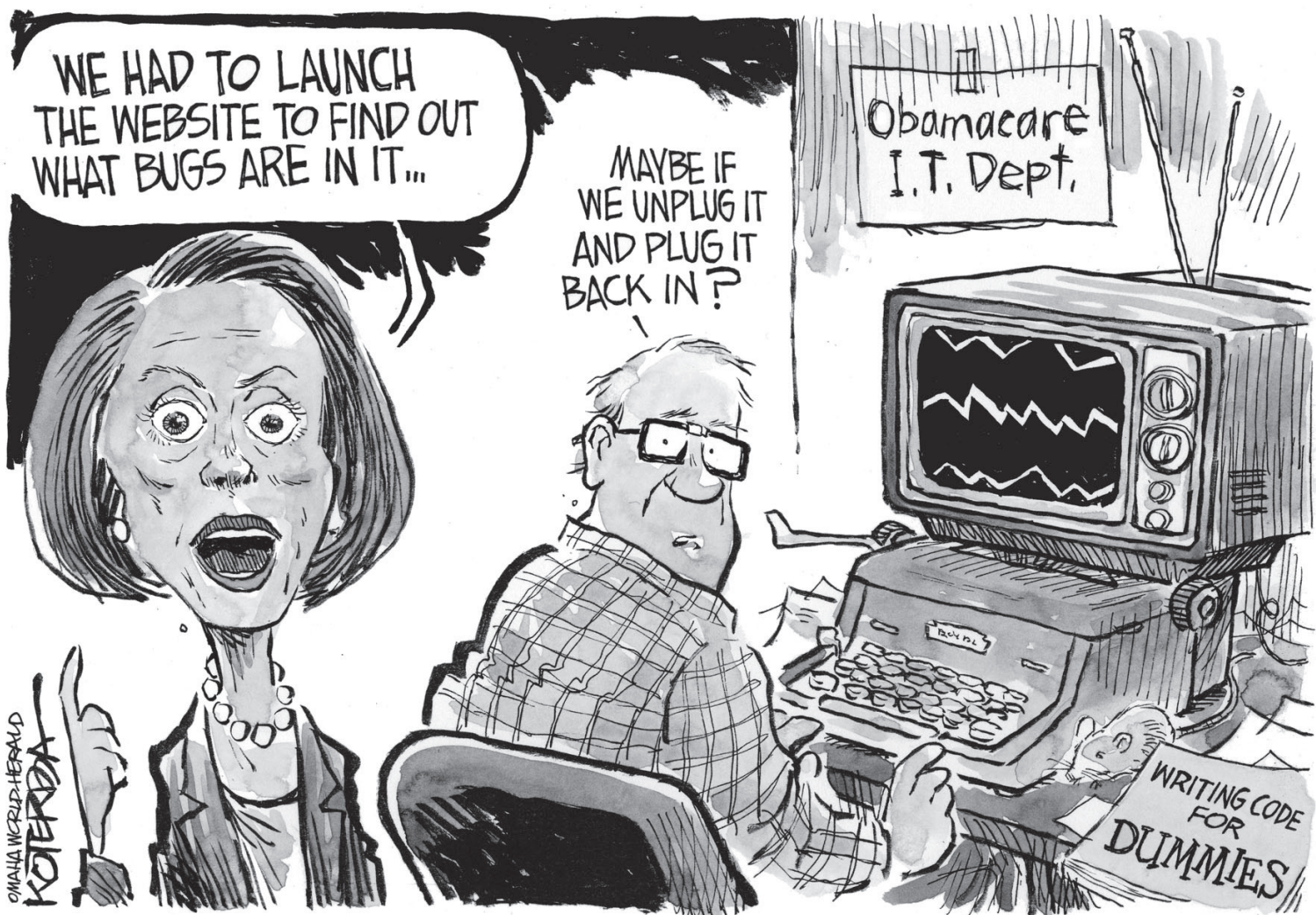
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Stalking cat starts day on the wild side

We were having a quiet breakfast in the kitchen when the show started to unfold. Our picture window featured something akin to a segment from Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom, or for the young, some program on Animal Planet.

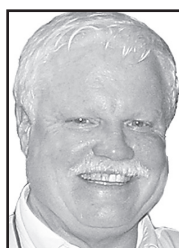
There was a rustle in the grass next door, then a black cat leaped, tail in the air, ran and pounced. Didn't take more than a second or two.

The cat just sat there, which said he had whatever he'd pounced on. I had been trying to scrape the last bite out of a melon, but this was a lot more interesting – even if I knew it wasn't a wild panther.

Then the cat leaned down to pick up his breakfast. A mouse or a ground squirrel, I thought. But no, he came up with a fully grown rabbit.

I know this cat. He lives with the neighbors on the other side of our house. Technically, he belongs to their son, who moved out of state to be closer to his kids. They inherited the cat. We've inherited a couple from our kids, so we understand.

He's just an average-size cat, but he like to hunt. He stalks through our yard most every day, and makes the rounds of the neighborhood. I'd never seem him catch anything before, but come to think of it, I think the ground squirrel that used to live in our woodpile is missing.



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

Anyway, the cat had a firm grip on the rabbit, and he apparently thought he could take it home. Cats always like to show off a catch, and besides, it's handy to have dinner close at hand. Our cats have brought us everything from mice (let one go in the bedroom) to rats (let that one go in the living room). Lots of birds, usually with the breast meat missing. And once, a pair of bunny feet.

Anyway, he started to drag that rabbit toward his house, two lots away. He'd get 10 to 15 feet, then have to rest. I'm not sure that rabbit didn't outweigh him.

I wondered if the rabbit was still alive; it wasn't struggling or trying to get away. But the next time the cat stopped to rest, I got my answer.

That rabbit shot out of there like a cannonball, all fur and blur. He was 20-25 feet away before the cat started out after him, and by then it was too late. That bunny turned west and made for the deck in front of the neighbors' house, the cat on his trail.

You can figure the rest. A stalking hunter has to depend on surprise, for a cat is no match for a rabbit in an open field.

A few minutes later, I saw the cat looking through tall grass in another yard, a little farther away. I remember a *Wild Kingdom* segment on a lynx which showed the hunter trying to chase a snowshoe hare. The announcer said the cat only gets one in 10 intended meals.

Like a human hunter who misses his deer, though, a cat just keeps hunting.

That was just the start of a wildlife day. After we hit the road, we saw dozens of antelope. Cynthia said she saw a couple of prairie dogs chasing each other. She couldn't tell if they were playing or fighting.

She had to brake hard for three mule deer looking to cross the road and dodged a coyote dashing in front of her.

Oh, and we stopped to pet a spider. It's tarantula mating season in the high desert, and when a big male gets underway, not much will deter him. They're so big, you can see them crossing the road at 65. Once, when our daughter was teaching science, we captured one for her to keep in her classroom.

Did you know the fur on their backs is really soft, like velvet?

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.

Newspapers take a hit and keep coming

I know of newspapers that kept their communities informed about clean water and shelter during terrible storms and disasters.

I know of newspapers that exposed crooks, lost a lot of advertising from the crooks' buddies and still put out a paper every week.

I know of a newspaper that had an ironic sense of humor that even offended a few readers and stood its ground with a "come on people, have a brain" retort.

I know of publishers who took pay cuts during the recession rather than cut staff.

I know of publishers who lost everything in a lightning strike but had such a dedicated crew the readers got the paper next week – on time.

I know of editors who have been screamed at, vilified and afraid for their children's safety because they wrote the tough truth.

I know of reporters who risked life and limb in war zones and came back to tell the community of their troops' bravery.

All of this has happened in the past couple of years.

And people say newspapers are dead? Come on, people. Have a brain.

Newspapers are alive and lively. Our communities shrivel and die when there is no

Other Opinions

• Robert M. Williams Jr.
Nation Newspaper Assoc.

newspaper.

The fact is: the Internet is no enemy of a good community newspaper. The enemy of a good newspaper is indifference. A community that doesn't care about honesty and clean government, effective schools, invigorating community service or the connections that bind us into a functioning society is a community that doesn't need a newspaper. That community won't be around long.

Good communities make good newspapers and vice versa. We have all faced a rough economy. We all are looking at how digital transformation affects every aspect of our lives. But as president of the National Newspaper Association, which represents nearly 2,200 community newspapers, as well as a publisher of thriving weekly newspapers in Georgia, I am

now calling for the death of the "newspapers are dead" rumor. We can't afford it.

The fact is that while very large newspapers have faced big challenges to their businesses, America's thousands of community papers are as healthy as their communities. NNA's research in partnership with the University of Missouri RJ Reynolds Institute reports 83 percent of the people in towns with community newspapers say they rely on those newspapers as their principal source of news and information.

We print better looking pages than ever because of advanced technologies. We can shoot video for our websites with as up-to-the-minute precision as TV crews. We put out tweets and posts and pin pictures to new social media sites. The Internet isn't going to kill us. It's giving us new tools to work better, faster and smarter.

People who say otherwise aren't reading their community newspapers. They are missing the real news.

Established in 1885, the National Newspaper Association represents 2,200 owners, publishers and editors of America's community newspapers.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

