

from our viewpoint...

Removing labels not the best policy

They say honesty is the best policy, but ethanol proponents apparently haven't gotten the message.

Backers of the alcohol-based fuel have pushed state after state — Kansas among them, unfortunately — to eliminate laws requiring gasoline pumps to be posted for ethanol content.

While some vendors have kept the labels, they've quietly disappeared from others. The underlying logic of this scheme seems to be that it's OK to fool all of the people some of the time.

Let us say right here, we see nothing wrong with ethanol-blended fuel. We might as well be burning the stuff as drinking it. Increased use of alcohol-blend fuels promotes farm income, reduces dependence on foreign oil and reduces costs.

But alcohol fuel isn't for everyone. Some people with older cars don't want to endanger their engines, and the need to know what's in the gas they buy. Others either don't want to use the fuel, don't think it's right or don't want to pay the extra price — and there is one.

As consumers, we think they all have a right to know what they are buying.

Farm groups backing the move away from pump labels say they hope to promote more ethanol use. It's their right to promote farm products, but it ought to be done above board.

Let the Farm Bureau buy ads to push the acknowledged values of ethanol fuel. They could write letters to the editor, put up billboard, buy time on television.

Tricking consumers isn't really a nice thing to do, but that's what this change amounts to. News reports suggest that many motorists don't know they're buying adulterated fuel. Many think the law still requires a label on the pump.

Some states require ethanol in all gasoline sold. Colorado is one, but there, all pumps are clearly labeled. Nothing wrong with that. The alcohol is used to oxygenate the fuel to reduce pollution.

Missouri just began requiring more alcohol in fuel, a move strongly backed by farm groups. One farmer-owned oil firm pushes the claim that alcohol-based fuel actually performs better than regular gasoline and that a 10 percent blend — the most common — should have "little effect" on gas mileage.

And that's true, as far as it goes. Ethanol blends are good fuel, with high octane ratings. Our experience with the newspaper's fleet is that a car will run about 5 percent farther on regular gasoline, though, so the cost difference can be as much as 10 cents per gallon.

For years, ethanol fuel sold at the same price as regular, then a couple of cents cheaper. Now, many stations sell it for six cents a gallon less, and that at least approaches a fair deal.

Ethanol is fine for those who want to buy it. Many people will buy it just because it burns cleaner, many others because it is cheaper. Some people object that it doesn't really save energy and may not want to buy it.

But all consumers deserve to know exactly what they are buying. A policy aimed to help farmers, but based on dishonesty and trickery, cannot help but fail. And the farm groups ought to know better.

Shame on them. — *Steve Haynes*



Time to take down decorations

On the 12th day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 12 cords for e-lec-tri-ci-ty.

Also two dozen strands of outside holiday lights.

Yes, the time had come to put away the Christmas decorations.

Actually, I had put away lots of the household items a week before.

The four wreaths went into a pair of big trash bags to keep them safe and dustproof until next Thanksgiving. I know that some stores sell wreath holders, but why buy some special plastic thingee when you can use a trash bag, which you can reuse for all that trash you create wrapping presents before next Christmas?

The snowmen, angels and Santa figurines got wrapped in newspaper and packed in a big green tub. Into the same tub, I tossed the garland that had festooned the rubber tree and other house plants.

The window decorations were next. They came down and went back into their cardboard



cynthia haynes

• open season

boxes, which I put in another trash bag.

Then I took all the Christmas bric brac to the garage attic.

Cleaning up the "stuff" didn't bother me. I was ready to get rid of the tinsel and junk cluttering almost every surface in the house.

The lights are a different matter. I hate taking down the outside Christmas lights and the tree.

It gets dark early this time of year and stays dark a long time. Christmas lights — both white and colored — provide some brightness in an otherwise dark and cold world.

Each morning when I come downstairs, the Christmas tree (which we never unplug)

sparkles with tiny lights, welcoming me to the shadowy living room.

I know that people driving down the street have enjoyed our outdoor display, although it wasn't all that much — just a dozen strings hung haphazardly on bushes and small trees. Some strings were so twisted that it looked like we were trying to write something in cursive on the bushes. Still, it was a beacon when I came home each night after dark and provided light for the *Salina Journal* carrier, who delivers our paper in the snowy dark all winter long.

Man, I hate putting Christmas away, and the cats, who enjoy sleeping under the artificial tree, don't like it either.

Now Steve says I have to pack up the nativity scene. Hey, the kid's only a couple of weeks old.

Well, at least the Light of the World will still be in our hearts, if not in the living room and all over our bushes.

Candidate reinvigorates conservatism

It won't matter how high Ron Paul finished in the Iowa caucuses or in the New Hampshire primary or anywhere else.

He's already won his prize.

Despite the fact that his ideas and his unconditional devotion to the Constitution are exactly what America needs, the Pittsburgh-raised libertarian doctor and 10-term Texas congressman isn't going to become the Republican presidential nominee.

In Iowa, he's been averaging about 6 percent in polls, though a Dec. 20-23 poll by the American Research Group shows him hitting double digits for the first time at 10 percent. In New Hampshire, he's been hovering around 7 percent or 8 percent.

The actual vote totals may turn out higher. But he and everyone else who hasn't lost his grip on political reality has always known that America's future doesn't include a President Ron Paul.

Yet Dr. Paul — arguably the closest thing to a libertarian America's voters have seen since Grover Cleveland — has already succeeded beyond his and any liberty-lover's wildest dreams.

In April, shortly after he announced he'd run for president, Paul told the Trib that his goal — besides winning, of course — was to make an impact on the race and to spread his ideas about maximizing freedom, limiting the federal government and practicing nonintervention overseas.

Though his presence at the debates has shown what a bunch of unprincipled, flip-flopping, war-loving, faux conservatives Messrs. Romney, Giuliani, Huckabee and McCain are, Paul's political impact on the primaries has been minimal — so far.

The "Paulistas" who are fomenting and funding "The Ron Paul Revolution" in the virtual streets of the Internet complain that the mainstream media have ignored Paul. But it's not true.



bill steigerwald

• newsmakers

He could be the most widely publicized libertarian politician in U.S. history. He and his "radical" ideas have been publicized, praised or treated with respect by everyone from the constitutionally impaired Tim Russert to Jay Leno, Stephen Colbert and Tucker Carlson.

Carlson — perhaps Paul's biggest fan on TV — recently traveled the campaign trail with Paul in Nevada and wrote about it for *The New Republic*.

Carlson observed the same humble, charisma-free candidate I saw late last June when Paul came to Pittsburgh to visit his old house as part of a "Today" show series on "Candidate's Cribs."

Paul, as debate-watchers know, is the anti-Mitt Romney. But Carlson notes, correctly, that Paul's seriousness and lack of political slickness is a large part of his appeal.

"His fans don't read his awkwardness as

a social phobia, but as a sign of authenticity. Paul never outshines his message, which is unchanging: Let adults make their own choices; liberty works. For a unified theory of everything, it's pretty simple. And Paul sincerely believes it."

Paul has shocked the political establishment by attracting a zealous Web-connected army of young people and raising \$20 million, almost exclusively over the Internet.

He isn't going to become president and he isn't going to convert the sleeping masses, the liberal media or even his own lost party to the tenets of libertarianism.

But sometimes winning the election isn't what matters in the long run. Ideas do.

Remember Barry Goldwater? His crushing defeat in 1964 reinvigorated conservatism and spawned the Reagan Revolution. In a country still cruising down the road to socialism, Ron Paul's success in selling freedom is a sign of hope.

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