

from our viewpoint...

Retro patrol cars compromise safety

The Kansas Highway Patrol tapped into nostalgia for its last 20 full-sized cars, Ford Crown Victorias dressed in the traditional blue and grey from half a century ago.

They are only a drop in the bucket compared to the 400-some cars and sport utilities the agency fields, however, and your chances of seeing one driving down the road are slim. This area has one, posted in Oakley, among a sea of multihued patrol cars.

The patrol started buying cars in random colors years ago when someone figured out that the resale value of these vehicles was much higher than cars painted to look like a police car. Instead of driving the blue-and-greys until they were worn out, troopers started getting a new car every year or two. The used vehicles are sold while they still have good value.

Usually, only white cars get roof-mounted lights. Most of these are sold to city and county police agencies that don't mind the holes drilled in the roof. Colored cars get lights mounted inside or behind the grill, then are sold on the open market.

Because this program so reduces costs, it's not likely we'll ever see more grey-and-blue cars. However, another change may be putting troopers at risk on the road, especially at night.

Seems the cost of the huge "state trooper" screen print shot up this year, so the patrol decided to go without it. Some cars came out with only a small shield on the door and much smaller reflective lettering. Lately, the patrol has gone to larger shields, still reflective, but the cars don't show up as well at night or look as good on the road.

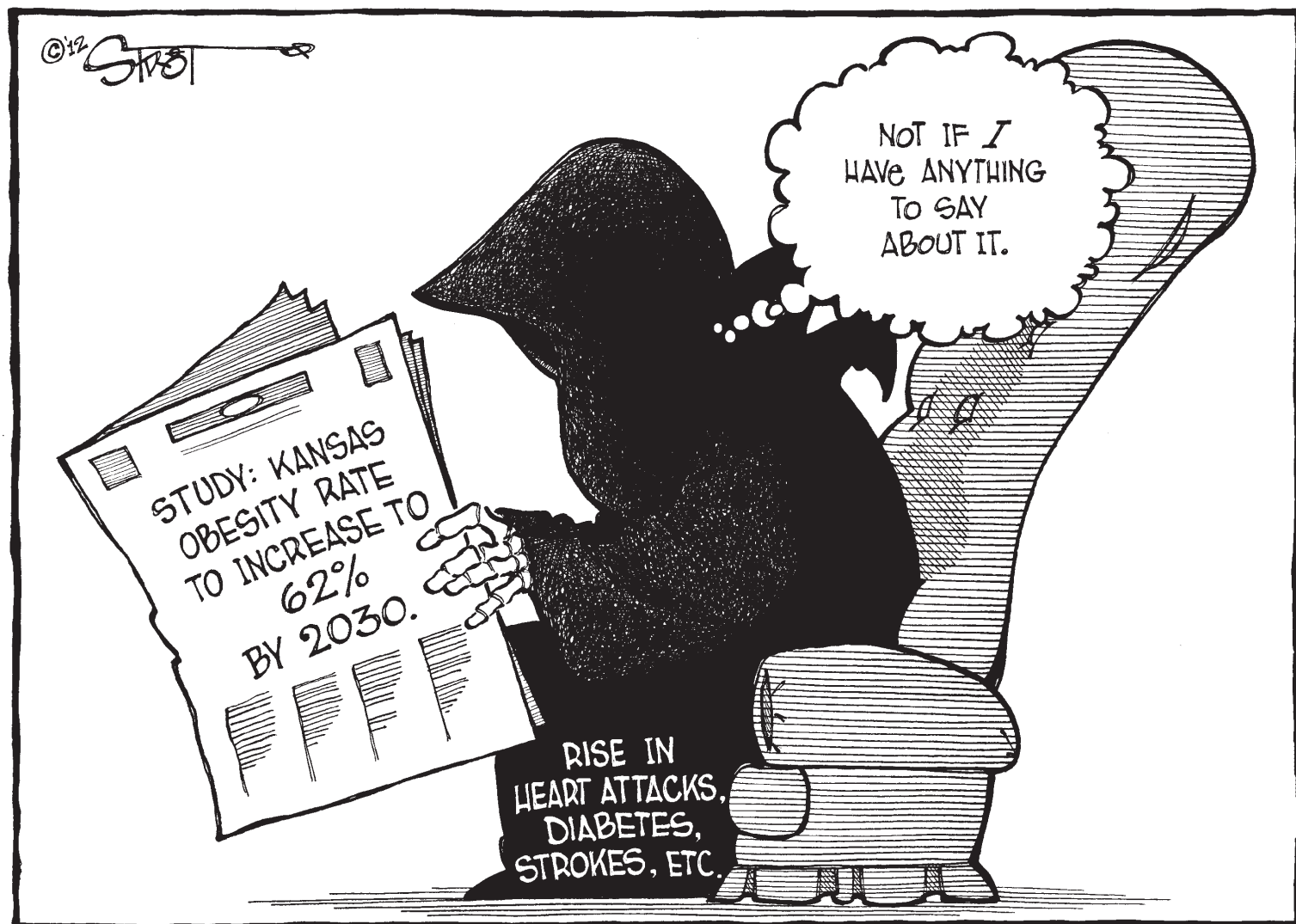
The bigger decals turned the cars into beacons at night, ensuring that people would see a parked patrol car beside, or blocking, the road. For cars without roof-mounted lights, that could be vital. Their lights don't show much to the sides, but the stickers sure do.

With the new, small lettering and just a reflective shield on the door, a car's visibility from the side might be as low as 10 percent of what it has been. It could make a lot of difference to a trooper out on the pavement at night.

If we had our way, and we suspect a lot of troopers would agree, we'd paint all the cars blue and grey. They look sharp. But we understand just duplicating the single-light red flasher of the old cars in electronic form costs upwards of \$1,000 each. Then there's the money saved by the early trade-in program, and in tight budget times, that counts.

However, we think the patrol should consider safety first and find a way to get more reflective material on the sides of the cars, either with a return to the big screen-print "state trooper" or something else.

The safety of the public, and the troopers themselves, is too important to compromise. — *Steve Haynes*



Colorful mountain vacation

The hills were ablaze with color.

Actually, these babies weren't hills; they were part of the Rocky Mountains.

We were in Creede, Colo., in the southern Rockies. On all sides are mountains — the La Garitas, the San Juans, the Sangre de Cristos. As you might guess, the Spanish got the naming rights for the area. About the only places around here that don't have Spanish names are Creede and its silver mines. The Last Chance, Holy Moses and Kentucky Belle produced thousands of ounces of silver in their day, and with mineral prices on the upswing, modern miners are climbing all over these ancient cliffs.

But we weren't here for the mines. We were here for rest, relaxation and maybe a play at the repertory theater.

We got all three. We each finished a book and started another, browsed through several magazines, saw two plays, listened to the Rockies lose some baseball games and played with our new iPhones.

We also did a little work, but we tried to keep that to a minimum.



cynthia haynes

• open season

Mostly we enjoyed the fresh mountain air and walked in the woods. Steve did some fishing while I tried a couple of new recipes.

It was a great week, and we had an added bonus. The aspen were early this year.

After a dry spring and summer and a damp August, the aspen in the high country were turning at a rapid rate.

Only a month ago, it was hard to tell the aspen from the spruce, fir and pine trees. Everywhere you looked, the mountainsides were a deep green.

Then a couple of weeks ago, we were out here and noticed that you could pick out the aspen groves on the mountainsides. They were turning a lighter shade of green.

Now, the mountainsides are a rainbow of light and dark green, yellows, gold and bright

reds. The evergreens are still their dark green selves, but the aspen have gone into autumn splendor.

If you've never seen the mountain aspen, take a drive to Colorado and check them out. It's an amazing sight and a lot easier and cheaper than going to see the beautiful hardwoods in New England, although they say that's a worthwhile trip, too.

Anyway, while we were up in the mountains I picked up leaves. I can't help myself. Everywhere I looked, the ground was covered with the beautiful leaves, each one more gorgeous than the last.

I brought my treasures back and arranged them in a candleholder my nephew made for us several years ago. I've done this before, and I know that the leaves will dry up, but keep their colors. They get brittle, but if you don't touch them or open a window near them — like someone did last spring — they'll be fine until next fall.

Remember that, Steve. Don't open any windows near my leaves like you did last year, or you get to sweep them up this time.

Feds playing nutrition nanny

Our commander-in-chief and agriculture secretary are apparently moonlighting as Nutrition Nannies.

From our farms to our businesses to our doctors' offices, one would think that the Obama Administration should have run out of places to invade.

But, as school children and their parents learned as the kids headed back to the classrooms this fall, the administration has found one more place over which to exercise domination: the school cafeteria.

In the final weeks of 2010, as Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi prepared to pass the gavel to Republicans, House Democrats got a bill to President Obama's desk that empowered the U.S. Department of Agriculture to completely re-write school lunch standards.

With a title like "Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act," one would think such a law would have a goal of making sure kids have full stomachs.

But, as school administrators and cooks, students, and parents have told me, the department's rules that resulted from this "Hunger-Free Act" are having the opposite effect.

Calorie limits are leaving student-athletes



tim huelskamp

• u.s. rep.

under-nourished ahead of intense practices. Three hours of practice after a 750-850 calorie lunch with limited protein at noon?

An emphasis on what goes on the plate — rather than into the body — has only increased the amount of food that goes into the trash can.

And, now that kids are not getting the food they need and want, many are going off campus for even less healthy alternatives, fast food or convenience-store fare, undermining altogether the whole purpose of the school lunch program.

The last Congress was wrong to pass the law that led to these new regulations. But, the current Congress can make it right by exercising our oversight function. Earlier this month, my colleague Steve King and I introduced the "No Hungry Kids Act" to repeal these school-lunch

guidelines.

In the same way that one-size-fits-all does not work for what we teach in our classrooms, this legislation recognizes that no single set of cafeteria standards should apply to every single school across the nation — let alone every single student. By lifting the calorie caps and protecting the rights of parents to make decisions for their children, our bill will ensure that children get the food they need in order to stay alert in the classroom and healthy on the athletic fields.

The school-lunch program was created to combat hunger. That should still be the goal. But, when calories have been curtailed, less appealing food is on the plate and students are filling the cafeteria trash cans rather than their stomachs, the goal of overcoming hunger and obesity is defeated.

To learn more about the "No Hungry Kids Act" and to share your own family's experiences with the school lunch program, go to the website www.facebook.com/nutrition-nannies.

Public schools under attack again

The public school attack dogs are at it again. This time they are pointing to two reports on student assessment results and ramping up their tirades against public schools in Kansas. It is alarming, they want us to believe, that ACT scores are flat and state assessment scores have declined for the first time since 2001 when No Child Left Behind began.

But is it really shocking that we seem to have run into some trouble? We are reminded of TV's Gomer Pyle who used to point out the obvious and then shout, "Surprise, surprise, surprise!" as if we didn't know what was coming.

For most of Kansas' 150 year history, our public schools have been admired, promoted, and in continuous improvement. While the funding formula has changed over the years, it generally has been improved. We have held high standards for getting a teaching license and sought to keep pace with inflation when it came to funding. We were not always successful with that funding part and twice lawsuits have put funding back on the right path, the last time in 2005-06.

In 2006 following the decision in the Montoy school finance lawsuit, our legislature increased funding over three years to almost the level that their own cost studies said was needed. By 2008, we were back on track. The Legislative Post Audit Division studied the impact of the



from other pens

• karen godfrey

new funding and found a nearly one to one correspondence between funding increases and student achievement.

Then came the economic bust. That bust was felt in Kansas as it was in most states and declining tax revenue meant declining school funding. The last cut — the largest ever in Kansas school funding history — was recommended by Governor Sam Brownback in 2011. By then we had lost more than 10 years of funding increases and, when adjusted for inflation, funding was reduced to the 1992 level.

The result of these funding cuts was the elimination of paraprofessionals and support staff, administrators, and classroom teachers. Supply budgets dried up, textbook purchases were put on hold, and in some cases schools were closed and consolidated. We've even heard stories of schools where half the light bulbs were removed, tutoring activities dropped, and summer school cancelled.

At the same time, the economic crisis put

enormous stresses on our communities and families as many workers lost their jobs. Today, 48.9% of Kansas students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Nearly one of every two Kansas students lives in poverty today! The supports we worked so hard to provide for the needs of poor and minority students, students learning English, and students with special needs have been challenged, reduced, and in some cases, even eliminated.

So it should really come as no surprise that these stresses are beginning to take their toll.

Now let's not be too despondent. We don't like what's happening, but it was predicted. And despite these reports, our assessment results still outshine most of the nation. But the point is, we can now see the cracks in the dam and they are beginning to leak. Kansas cannot afford to allow our schools and our school funding system to continue on the current path.

It's time to recommit to the children of Kansas; to restore funding lost to the economic downturn, and repair those cracks in that dam.

Recommit, restore, and repair — it's really a pretty simple formula.

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