

Nobody said laws have to make sense

Some days, you have to wonder what those people in Topeka are thinking about when they write our laws.

Starting yesterday, for instance, Kansas will have a law banning people from sending or reading text messages while driving. However, police can't write any tickets until Jan. 1. Only warnings.

If texting, or cell phone use in general, was really that much of a problem, how can we afford to wait half a year? The truth is, only about 6,000 accidents a year are attributed to "distracted" drivers from all causes, including phones and texting, in the entire country. The number of injuries is minimal. But sending texts sure seems dangerous, so we have a law against it.

That's bad? Look at the list of exemptions: The law excludes police officers and other emergency services workers. You'd think that if texting was dangerous, the last people you'd want doing it are people driving emergency vehicles. Go figure.

Ordinary citizens can send and receive texts when stopped off the roadway, when receiving emergency or traffic and weather alerts, to report crimes, or to prevent "imminent injury" or property damage.

This is a "feel-good" law. Emotionally, everyone agrees that texting while driving must be bad, though there's no actual evidence. So, pass a law against it, but hey, it's no big deal.

In the same bill, at the last moment, the state Legislature stuck a provision banning anything from covering all or part of a license plate, either a clear cover that interferes with readability or something opaque.

All or part ... that must include those obnoxious dealer brackets that cover up the state and other information. We've always said, "there outta be a law. ... " But still, not exactly a public emergency. The worst thing about that provision is, apparently, it was added at the last minute in a House-Senate conference committee. It was never given a committee hearing, never opened up for public comment, just rammed through both houses when everyone wanted to go home.

That's a poor way to make public policy. Surely some groups – the auto dealers who hand out those plate holders come to mind – would have objected at an open hearing. Laws should be made out in full view, with plenty of time for comment and advice. Not late at night, at the end of a session, when the people who might care are not listening, maybe even not present. But that's what passes for good government in most states, even in the U.S. Congress.

But we digress. If you think some of the traffic laws are silly and riddled with exemptions, there's the "statewide smoking ban" that allows smoking in state-owned casinos.

Hey, if it's bad, it's bad. That law will be tied up in court for some time, by the way, since owners of a handful of bars and bingo parlors think it's unfair to exempt the state and not them. They sued, and who could blame them?

But nobody said laws have to make sense.

— Steve Haynes

Hearing reveals a lot

The Elena Kagan confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice reveal a great deal about our country in its present state. One of the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, questioned the nominee about her personal beliefs. I was particularly struck by the following exchange.

"I'm talking about Elena Kagan. What do you believe? Are there inalienable rights for us? Do you believe that?" Coburn presses.

"I think that the question of what I believe as to what people's rights are, outside the Constitution of the laws, you should not want me to act, in any way, on the basis of such belief," she says.

"I think you should want me to act on the basis of the law."

All too often in today's society there is too much focus on personal agenda and not enough on what's good for the country. Questioning Ms. Kagan's own beliefs has no bearing on her eligibility as a Supreme Court Justice. One would hope she would adopt the attitude of many Justices who have gone before her and view each case based on its merits.

Confirmation hearings may in fact reveal the shortcomings of committee members rather than the strength of the nominee. The setting aside of one's own views to interpret the Constitution is at

Phase II Mary Kay Woodyard



the very backbone of democracy.

The area most concerning for committee members is perhaps one meant to gain political points than discover eligibility.

The military's Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, she felt, was in conflict with Harvard's anti-discrimination policy. This left some believing she was anti-military. The military was not banned during this time and did have access to students. The location changed, not the access.

This falls into the same category as those who believe if you oppose the war, you oppose the military ... a non sequitor.

I, for one, am hoping Ms. Kagan will be confirmed. She is bright, articulate and most of all has a sense of humor both about situations and about herself. She is known as someone who can bridge differences and search for the common thread. Putting aside her personal beliefs is mandatory for the position of 112th Supreme Court Justice.

Dear Editor,

It is quickly coming time for elections of our state legislators and once more the usual speeches will be given, promises made ... and as we have all unbelievably come to accept as normal ... some promises broken. Most candidates will say almost anything to get your attention and hopefully your votes. You see, I think most candidates for office feel that the recipe for a successful election is to grab a group of middle age, middle class, middle income voters, who remember with longing an easier time. They talk to them about family, and American values and character and cry to us about the economy and taxes and claim their opponent is the reason to blame, for your lot in life. They promise that with them on watch we will have more police, tougher sentences for criminals, and that our lives will be better. Yes, they tell us just what we really do want ... but they forget to tell us just how they plan on paying for it. You see, they spend so much time keeping their job ... that when we send them to the state house ... they sometimes forget TO DO their job ... and those same politicians have once more done that to a very essential group of your public servants. You see, our state wondered why we were spending thousands of dollars to hire and train just one of these employees ... and in less than 3 years ... they have moved on. Well, I never claimed to have all the answers ... but in this case ... I think I do.

The State of Kansas has one of the lowest rates of pay and benefits in the nation for this group of dedicated workers ... and in my 15 years of service in this organization ... I have seen so many exceptional young men and women leave to serve in other states. In most cases they have done this not because they wish to drive a new car, or live in a big fancy house, no, you don't choose to enter this profession for those reasons. It's because they can get almost double the pay in any adjacent state to Kansas. You see, those states recognize the unfortunate real need for top quality people in this profession ... and like it or not ... these quality young people have family's to raise and bills to pay ... just like you. Now, I mean no disrespect to the following professions, but after reading this, ask yourself this question. Is it fair for the State of Kansas to give these dedicated professionals a 2.5 percent raise (one of the very few raises they have received over the past few years. most years there were no raises at all for this group) when they give a grain warehouse examiner a 15 percent raise, or a beauty shop inspector a 10 percent raise? How about a utility worker. They were given a 15 percent raise. A judge ... 12.5 percent raise. A dental hygienist ... 7.5 percent raise. The list goes on and on, but I hope you get my point. And Ladies and Gentlemen ... I kid you not ... we need those talented young men and women. The facts are though, if a dental hygienist makes a mistake, your



teeth may end up with a bad cleaning, or if we have an incompetent beauty shop inspector you end up with a bad hair cut. On the other hand, if one of these people I am about to tell you of make a mistake ... your family could end up held hostage ... or even worse ... because unfortunately ... it has happened. With that in mind, I think I would want the best person money could buy in these positions. Especially when the daily decisions they make have such an effect on us and the ones we love. I hope you feel the same.

Let me briefly tell you of a group of people that are largely unknown. They have truly silently served the citizens of Kansas since 1859 and exemplify the concept of honest integrity and dedication to service. Perhaps this could be best explained by asking you a question. You can then make up your own mind and determine if what I say is just ramblings or an issue that needs your attention. Perhaps you may even take a moment to ask this question to your representative, because ... your very safety ... and that of your loved ones, depends on the answer.

The question is simply this. What would the average citizen say if it were proposed that police officers be assigned to a neighborhood which was inhabited by no one but criminals and those officers would be unarmed, patrol on foot and be heavily out numbered? I wager that the overwhelming public response would be that the officers would have to be crazy to accept such an assignment. However as you read this, such a scenario is being played out in all areas of our state, and right here in our local community.

We are "CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS," not Guards. (Guards are people that watch over our children at school crossings). We work at minimum, medium and maximum security Correctional Facilities and we are empowered by the State of Kansas to enforce its Laws, Rules and Regulations of the Department of Corrections. In short, we are policemen. Except ... our beat is totally inhabited by convicted felons who, by definition, are people who tend to break laws, rules and regulations. We are out numbered by as many as 80 to 1 at various times of our workday and contrary to popular belief, we work without a side arm. In short ... our necks are on the line every minute of every day.

A Correctional Facility is a very misunderstood environment. You see, society sends it's criminals to Correctional Facilities and as time passes, each criminal's

crime fades from our memory until the collective prison population becomes hordes of bad people being warehoused away from decent society in a place where they can cause no further harm. There is also the notion that prison inmates cease to be a problem when they are incarcerated. The truth is, Correctional Facilities are full of violence perpetrated by the prison population, against the prison population and facility staff. Felonies are committed daily but are rarely reported to the public. They are called "unusual incidents" and rarely result in criminal prosecution. Discipline is handled internally and, as a rule, the public is rarely informed of these crimes. In the course of maintaining order in these facilities, many officers have endured the humiliation of having urine and feces thrown on them. Uncounted Correctional Officers have been kicked, bitten, slashed and stabbed with home made weapons, taken hostage, murdered and even raped in the line of duty ... all while being legally mandated to maintain their professional composure and refraining from any retaliation which could be the basis for dismissal from service. What is the consequences to the inmate for these actions? Nothing really, we have already put him in prison, perhaps for life. What else can we do? In addition to these obvious dangers, Correctional Officers face hidden dangers in the form of AIDS, Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B and C and MRSA. Courts are now imposing longer sentences and the prison population is increasing far beyond our systems designated capacity. As the public demands more police on the street, our legislators in Kansas are cutting our budgets, which results in lower pay and fewer police in prison where violence reigns supreme, jeopardizing all those working behind prison walls and the public in which we serve. Although you will never see us on "World's Wildest Police Chases" or "Tru T.V." we are Law Enforcement Professionals. I, like so many others will continue to walk in that gate every day and do what ever it takes to keep you and your loved ones safe. It is a promise we have made to you, and a promise WE plan on KEEPING. Elections are fast approaching, and I for one, will be asking some straight forward questions of those running for office ... and I won't settle for the Topeka two step answer.

I hope you won't either. I think it's time WE put OUR HOUSE in order. In closing, I would like to ask just one more thing of you. At night when you get on your knees and thank the Lord for all that you have, please put in a good word for us. We could use all the back up we can get, because we are the "forgotten cops," hidden from public view, walking a dangerous beat, hoping someday to receive the respect and approval from the public who "WE SILENTLY SERVE."

Respectfully
Jeff Delimont
Norton

Winning the harvest bet

Out Back Carolyn Plotts



I know it's not up to me, but I'm excited and scared for her, all at the same time.

Perhaps her parents don't realize it yet, but this is the first step on her journey away from them and to who knows where.

— ob —

Our young friends, Jenn and Sean, drove in from Colorado to pick up another antique car they bought a few months ago. They have been our best customers and have become friends in the process.

They came early Monday morning and we all sat down to eat my version of breakfast burritos: Some sausage,

some finely diced potatoes and onions and, finally, scrambled eggs poured over everything and served on a fried corn tortilla.

Sean must have a cast-iron stomach, because he put more jalapeños on his burrito than I've ever seen anyone in Mexico do. As Jim would say, "That'll put hair on your chest."

I might say that would burn it off.

— ob —

Jenn and Sean were ready to leave when Jim said he would like to show them some old horse-drawn machinery. Jenn's ears perked up and she said, "Horse-drawn? You bet." She's a horse-crazy girl married to a veterinarian/farrier who would give her the moon if he could.

Jim and Sean are still discussing buying and selling other vehicles. Maybe even tractors. Sure hope they strike a deal so we can see those kids one more time. They've invited us to their spread, so we might just have to make a little road trip.

THE NORTON TELEGRAM

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654

Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

Nor'West Newspapers
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association



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