

VIEWPOINT

Going AWOL

■ New drunk machines are just too dangerous

At 26, Dan Zwonitzer is the youngest member of the Wyoming state legislature and if his judgment doesn't improve, he's likely to be the youngest ex-member, as soon as there is another election cycle.

Zwonitzer made the national news recently when he told the Associated Press that he was upset the Wyoming legislature took action against AWOL machines, which aren't being seen in Wyoming yet.

Alcohol Without Liquid machines — they are available on the Internet, so they may well be used all over Wyoming, for all anyone knows — provide a quick high by allowing consumers to inhale a mixture of oxygen and vaporized alcohol.

It hits the blood stream much quicker than the ordinary way of ingesting alcohol; it's already banned in seven states including Kansas; and it's being spoken out against by people who sell traditional liquor and understand how dangerous it can be.

Those concerned about it suggest people can get drunk faster, more severely and can take in dangerous amounts of alcohol without getting sick.

In a country where young people die every year from alcohol poisoning as it is, the AWOL machine seems like a really bad idea.

That attitude isn't held by Zwonitzer, though. "I don't think we should base public policy on the fear of the unknown and on the scare tactics of certain legislators to convince everyone that these machines are evil."

Which part is unknown? The exact number of young people who will die from alcohol poisoning?

The number of families that will be destroyed because of drunk driving deaths?

Those seem like figures we'd just as soon remain ignorant of.

If there is one thing that America doesn't need more of, it's ways for people to get dangerously drunk.

And we don't need a study to determine that, whether Rep. Zwonitzer can understand that or not.

— Chuck Smith

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Thanks for a great performance

Dear Editor,
We would like to congratulate the Great Bend Community Theatre on their production of the play *W;t*.

The play itself speaks to the issues of living and dying, but the performances of the Great Bend actors brought added meaning to the words they spoke on stage.

Joni Haines gave a flawless and very moving performance as a woman dying of cancer. Her dedication to her difficult role made us feel the suffering she portrayed.

The cast in orbit around the dying woman portrayed the hospital staff with humor and compassion.

The direction of Warren Deckert brought the written text to life for the audience.

The talent and hard work of all involved in this production was evident from the time we entered the theater to the time we exited.

Thank you for a job well done.
**Alice and Terry Young,
Diane and Robert Feldt,
Laurie Hesel,
Great Bend**



Get out and test yourself on the rocky track

Each year, after pre-riding this racecourse, I spend a restless night filled with dreams of medivac choppers and notifying next of kin. Each year, as I push my fatigued — usually battered body — over the last few climbs of this grueling mountain bike race, I tell myself I will never come back. Yet, each year as the starter counts down the seconds, I sit here on the starting line wondering exactly why I do this.

I have been riding the trails on a fat tire bike for approximately 12 years. For about eight of those years, I've been a racer. The first race I ever competed in was the infamous body and bike busting 12 Miles of Hell skirting the artillery impact ranges of Ft. Sill, Okla.

For anybody with a fair amount of common sense, and a strong will to survive, that first race would have been enough to convince them to take up golf.

12 Mile is to mountain biking what the Daytona 500 is to stock car racing. The first Sunday in March, this kickoff to the mountain bike race season attracts from 400 to 900 riders.

With one mass start, the first few miles look more like a buffalo stampede than a bike race, as riders climb and descend the rocky terrain. If you have time to look it is rather inspiring to see a line of bikes stretching over the hills in front of you, and hopefully more over the hills behind you. On the first few downhills, one rider's mistake can become several riders' problem.

With craggy rock climbs, high-speed descents, and technical sections that can give mountain goats reason to check their life insurance, 12 Mile is truly a legendary ride. The awards are only rocks taken from the course and emblazoned with brass plaques denoting your finish position. There is even a big bawls award for the rider with the

worst injuries, but I generally try to avoid that one.

The course is full of tank trails covered in loose packed razor sharp rocks varying in size from softballs to small children. Hitting your brakes on one of the fast descents usually turns in to a fast lesson in bike surfing on a rock avalanche. Go too slow and you might end up being the wave, the rider behind you surfs to the bottom.

12 Miles' trademark is a slickrock descent known as the Kevinator. Most likely named after one of its first victims. As you approach the edge of the drop, it looks more suited to hang gliding than rolling over on a bike. A steep descent starting with a sharp drop onto 40 feet or more of steeply inclined hard smooth rocks

This is where I learned to despise photographers. They hang like vultures waiting for the inevitable crashes. You can usually judge the difficulty of an upcoming section of trail by the number of photographers standing around it.

I remember one year as we descended the first hill, I caught a quick glimpse of a bike wheel about six feet in the air as some hapless rider tried the cartwheel method of descending the hill. Even in his upside down state he was moving faster than I was.

I remember another year when moving at a fast rate of speed in the middle of a group the rider in front of me went down.

Riding a narrow ridge, with really no place to go, I remember the girlie voice in my head squealing, "don't stand up, don't stand up," as I bunny-hopped over the pile of bike and body parts.

I also remember the year, I went over the bars and destroyed a helmet, the year a guy just in front of me crashed and broke his ankle, and

Terry Spradley



the year that Doug Chambers beat me out of the trophies by one position. We battled for a few yards towards the end, but he dug a little deeper and finished 10th in our age group. I was 11th.

However, the thing I remember the most is that each year, no matter how scary, cold or painful it got, I had a smile on my face and a song in my heart. Or was it a song in my heart and rocks in my head?

Either way I remember that pushing yourself to your limits, conquering something previously thought unconquerable, and surviving to laugh about it with friends is what makes life worth living.

Scars are just tattoos with much better stories to share with your grandchildren.

Let me put in a little disclaimer here, I am not suggesting that everybody should get on a bike and throw themselves off of a cliff somewhere, but I do suggest that you go out test yourself occasionally.

Fear is good for the soul.

So while many of you are reading this column, I will be joining the rest of the Great Bend riders sitting on the starting line for my ninth time, staring at one intimidating pile of rocks, and wondering just how much a good set of golf clubs costs.

(Terry Spradley is an area reporter for the Great Bend Tribune. His e-mail address is tspradley@gbtribune.com)

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Another reason not to follow Europe

Denmark's government ruled in 2001 that institutionalized citizens have the right to have sex and that caregivers must even take them to visit prostitutes.

Prostitution is legal in Denmark.

According to a dispatch from Aarhus, Denmark, in London's Observer, Mr. Torben Vegener Hansen, 59, who has cerebral palsy and lives at home on government assistance, is challenging the government also to pay for prostitutes to make house calls, claiming that he is unable to have sex manually because of his illness and must be accorded this "human right" by a service similar to the government's meals-on-wheels program.

Traffic has really been murder

The family of a 55-year-old motorcyclist filed a lawsuit over the man's death, which allegedly occurred when he was hit on Highway 16 near Custer, S.D., by an airborne toilet.

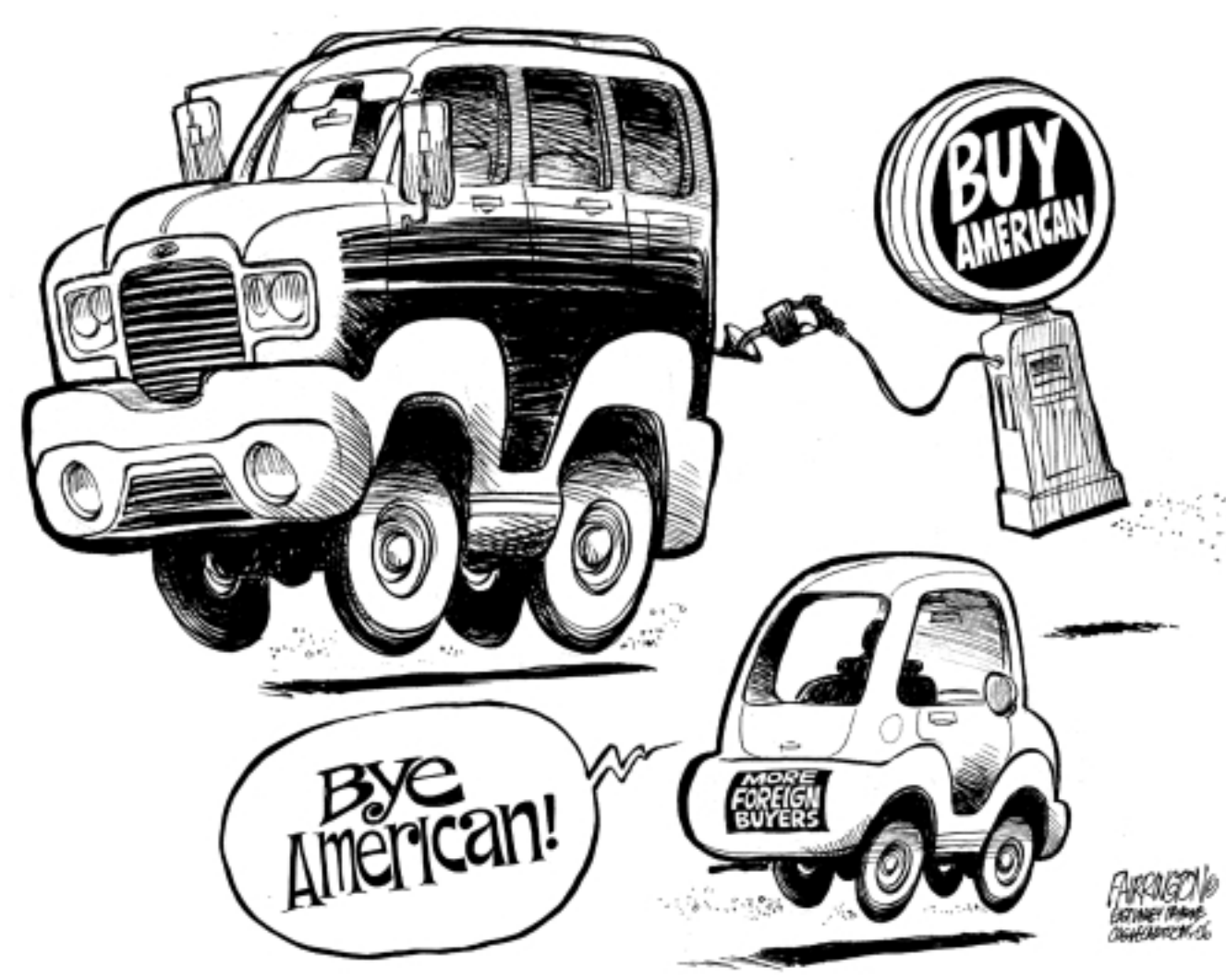
The portable toilet had come off of a truck of Sander Sanitation Co.

And a 47-year-old passenger in a pickup truck on the way to work near Childersburg, Ala., was killed instantly by an airborne deer (struck by an oncoming car and knocked through the pickup's windshield).

Send letters via e-mail: email@gbtribune.com

Where to write the lawmakers

President George W. Bush, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Washington, D.C. 20500. 202-456-1414 Fax: 202-456-2461. president@whitehouse.gov
U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510. 202-224-4774. pat_roberts@roberts.senate.gov
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202-224-6521. sam_brownback@brownback.senate.gov
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1st District, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. 202-225-2715. Hays office, 785-628-6401. jerry.moran@mail.house.gov
Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, 2nd Floor, State Capitol, Topeka, 66612. 785-296-3232. www.ksgovernor.org
Kansas senators or representatives: State Capitol, Topeka, 66612. 785-296-0111. Legislative hot line: 800-432-3924. For e-mail addresses, see www.kslegislature.org/senateroster/index.html or www.kslegislature.org/house-roster/index.html



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Standardized testing's value questioned

Dear Editor,
When I was in school, way back when, we took tests. There were weekly tests, semester tests, and those dreaded tests called final examinations.

I didn't like any of them. I don't think any of my classmates did either, except for Eleanor Heidel, who was the class brain. Eleanor never complained when we were to be tested, but I did.

After one such grumbling protest, a benevolent teacher, with whom I had a good rapport, told me I shouldn't be too harsh a critic, because the testing was not only of the student.

He said the tests were given so the teacher could honestly assess how well he was teaching, as well as how well the student was learning.

It was a two-way street; all tests were supposed to be a learning situation. Learning for the student of strength and weakness, and learning for the instructor, also.

From that point on I looked at tests a bit differently. I didn't like them any better, but I didn't complain as much.

If the teacher was being tested as well as I, then it wasn't half as bad as I had thought.

My children are in the midst of school and tests right now, and they are being tested regularly. But it seems

certain new tests have taken on significance greater than that of teaching both student and teacher.

These new tests, required by the federal government, are so important that the teachers are openly teaching the tests, rather than the subject; and I don't know how much real learning is going on.

The main point of the standardized tests seems to be to satisfy government requirements.

Maybe that is good, it could even be necessary, but teaching tests with practice tests, and pep rallies, kudos and prizes seems to fall away from facilitating education.

In fact it does nothing to teach ethical conduct, moral uprightness, or professional worth. It only teaches, maintain a standard, no matter how or what.

Somewhere along the education line some of these students are going to take on that idea as an appropriate one for the way they conduct their lives. Somewhere along a career path a teacher might learn of the demeaning of their craft and profession, as they are no longer asked to teach their subject, only a test.

I suppose then the real learning of standardized testing will become apparent, its worth will be observed, and a lesson will finally be learned.

George Martin, Ellinwood