

VIEWPOINT

I didn't think ...

■ Kid's excuse passes for state legislator

Apparently one can make the state legislature in Alabama and still get by with the excuse: "I didn't think ..."

That's what Alabama Rep. Albert Hall is saying about his letting the air out of a tire on a car driven by the wife of Rep. Allen Layson because she had parked too close to his car at the capitol recently.

"I just wanted her to have to stop and put some air in her tire and trouble her a little, too," he said, according to an Associated Press story.

Amazing. Imagine if Mrs. Layson got into her car, perhaps in a hurry to go pick up the little Laysons and with a car full of kids she'd headed out on a busy interstate and found out about the bad tire at 75 mph when it blew out.

Hall complained that people have been misusing his parking spot for some time, and that could certainly be irritating.

But that doesn't make it right to vandalize someone else's car, even if they did park poorly.

This is supposedly what adults are to have outgrown, especially adults who are put in positions of authority.

Americans need to question people who have so little character that they would stoop to such a reaction, just because they believe they are justified.

Even if Hall's little plan had worked, if the anonymous person had noticed the deflated tire immediately and had to "stop and put some air" in, how was he to judge that he hadn't let out enough air to cause damage to the tire or the car?

And all because he's been inconvenienced. All because someone has dared to tread on his dignity by infringing on his holy parking space.

Surely there are more capable people to run Alabama.

— Chuck Smith

▼ PUBLIC FORUM

Reform talk continues on the state level

The majority conservative members on the Kansas State Board of Education invited criticism last fall when they chose an education outsider and school choice advocate, Bob Corkins, to oversee public education in the state. And they got it, including from this editorial board.

The howling has quieted some, but the skepticism persists: Can an attorney with no education or management experience be effective running the Kansas State Department of Education, especially as the state's 300 school districts scramble to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind law?

Corkins is making an impressive effort to inform his perspective by visiting schools and talking to superintendents and others on the front lines of K-12 education in Kansas.

With the state board having chosen not to pursue private-school vouchers at the Legislature this year, Corkins also is focusing energy on possible changes in the department to promote best practices and redistribute workload.

Where Corkins' agenda still departs most from school districts' is on charter schools. Kansas has 26 such schools now, and the state board seek to modify state law to make it easier to start such schools.

But if Corkins thinks more charter schools are essential to enabling more students to succeed in Kansas schools, he needs to better explain their unique value.

He complains that the 26 such schools are charters in name only and "not fulfilling the intent."

But saying that a true charter "is creating a more autonomous laboratory for change" doesn't clear things up.

Would focusing more resources and energy on charter schools produce better student outcomes? So far, the research is hardly definitive.

Much of Corkins' talk of reform still seems engaging as theory but a distraction, frankly, from teachers' daily quest to help students find success.

— Wichita Eagle

Riding eight miles on a Monkey's back

Sunday I rode my bike. The wind was blowing about 90 mph, gusting to around 120. At times, the head wind would about stall the bike, and sand bounced off my helmet and glasses like pellets from Dick Cheney's shotgun.

However, even if I had fallen down, caught on fire, and ran naked, screaming, through the woods, I would still have considered it a better ride than last week's "12 Miles of Hell."

Another 12-Mile has come and gone, and — as too many that have gone before it — I came back with a story instead of a trophy.

I am rarely in top shape at the beginning of the season. Generally, while my fellow racers are keeping shape with winter races or cross training, I am sitting at this keyboard telling tales and snacking on milk and cookies.

I have won a few races in my career, competed in a 24-hour ride, and placed second in the Kansas/Missouri off-road championships, but trophies at 12 Mile have always been just a little out of my reach.

My goals for the season opener have always been, finish, finish in the top 25 percent, and if possible, win a rock. I always end up settling for two-out-of-three.

My first year was a mud marathon. It rained several inches the night before and right up until race time.

I finished. Another year it was 14 degrees at start time and the course had a glistening sheet of ice covering most of it.

I also finished the year I got out of a 10-day stay in the hospital for pneu-

monia only two weeks before race day.

This year my bike was in poor disrepair, so Doug loaned me one of the bike shop's 29-inch Surly Karate Monkeys.

The bike had larger wheels, better shifting, and better components.

On the pre-ride, it handled the climbs and rockslides as well as can be expected. It went down the bone-chilling Kevinator as if it was nothing more than a big bump. I was optimistic, things around me were starting to look very bright.

Kind of like a deer in the headlights just before the moment of impact.

Race morning as I changed from casual to race gear, my phone fell out of my pocket. It bounced twice. Once onto the asphalt road, once directly under the tire of a passing truck.

Some might have taken that as an omen.

I scooped up the remnants of circuit boards, which contained the only recorded phone numbers of almost everybody I know, and went over to join the other 534 competitors on the starting grid.

At least I wouldn't be bothered with any ringing phones during the race.

The 19th Annual 12 Miles of Hell started like most before it, lot of riders banging wheels and handlebars.

One racer crowded me into my friend Herb. We banged bars, but remained upright and laughing about it.

Although, I do remember Herb referring to me with a different name than I see on my sanitation bills.

Halfway up the first crowded hill, a

Terry Spradley



little more bumping put me on the ground, but this is all part of 500-rider mass start.

I made up some places on other sections and had the Monkey running in the top 50 riders by mile seven.

Mile eight had me sliding sideways down a rock avalanche. Mile 8.5 had me pushing a Monkey with a flat tire.

A couple of teammates stopped briefly to offer assistance, but it wasn't happening.

I could have pushed a few hundred yards to the asphalt road for a ride back in a support vehicle, but I didn't.

I could have walked one to two miles of smooth road back to the start line, but I didn't.

The Monkey carried me on its back for the first eight and a half miles.

For the last seven miles, the roles were reversed. I finished 341 out of 465 finishers.

Trophies are great.

Not giving in to the voices that tell you to quit when things don't go as planned is even better.

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

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Miracle cats live after being walled up

In October in Louisburg, Kan., and January in Eau Claire, Wis., cats went missing after hiding behind drywall being installed in houses, eventually getting sealed in.

The unnamed Kansas cat was in for three weeks before workers returned and heard an intrawall shuffling noise, and "Mary Poppins" in Wisconsin moved between walls and ceiling for five days before homeowners tracked her down with thermal imaging equipment.

She tried the patch but couldn't keep it lit

China's Xinhua news agency reported in October that Ai Ai, the veteran chimp at the safari park in Shaanxi province, who is 27 years old and who started smoking cigarette butts at age 11 when her first mate died, has finally kicked her nicotine habit.

Zoo officials attributed her success to distractions such as exercise, music (via a Walkman "borrowed" from a keeper), and better food, such as fried dishes and dumplings.

You dirty rat!

Katie's Pet Depot in La Verne, Calif., is one of the few grooming salons in the country for rats, according to an October Associated Press report. A special \$10 treatment includes lustrous-coat shampooing, claw-clipping and flea and mite treatment, and employee Karri Garrison said the claw-clipping is the hardest: "They have very small feet."



▼ PUBLIC FORUM

Kansas needs to address pornography issue

Dear Editor,

The dangers of pornography to individuals and communities has been established and proven for a long time. Court-upheld evidence continues to mount pointing to pornography and obscenity as a real and growing danger to families and communities. Negative secondary effects of pornographic stores and other sexually oriented businesses continue to build in our communities.

Common sense tells us that something has gone terribly wrong and we can no longer ignore this issue but we must talk and act to address the danger obscenities present to the public. It's not just "harmless fun" practiced by consenting adults.

In Kansas there are roughly 9,000 inmates in Kansas prisons and 25 percent of those inmates are in prison for sex crimes. The cost to you in Kansas today for just one prisoner each year is \$48,000. The Department of Corrections annual budget is roughly \$431,000,000. Today, you and I pay the full burden of this cost and the sex industry that is feeding the lust is not having to pay for the damages.

According to the Kansas sentencing guidelines a first offense rape carries a presumptive prison sentence of 10 years. Total cost to you is roughly \$480,000 for just one rape sentence. In nearly all rape cases, pornography was found in the offender's possession.

But some say it is too late, that we

have become desensitized to the point of indifference. That indifference is no longer the prevailing wind in Kansas. However the Kansas obscenity statute does have one small flaw that has chilled the forward progress of prosecuting obscenity in Kansas's communities, including our own Barton County prosecutor.

On April 1, 10 counts of promotion of obscenity charges were brought against the Lions Den Adult Superstore in Dickinson County. The 10 items charged were derived from the grand jury indictments of 29 counts of promotion of obscenity. On Sept. 7, Honorable Robert D. Innes, Assigned Senior Retired District Judge, dismissed the Dickinson County obscenity charges based solely on the unconstitutionality of the words "sexually provocative aspect" in harmony with the 1990 Kansas Supreme Court "Hughes" ruling.

Work is now taking place to amend Kansas Statute 21-4301 to remove the words "sexually provocative aspect" on lines 30 and 35. The United States Supreme Court 1973 "Miller" decision determined obscenity is not protected First Amendment free speech. However obscenity was not defined for the entire nation but left to "community standards" determined by a judge or a jury trial.

The Supreme Court has clearly and repeatedly held that obscenity does not merit First Amendment protection. The government has a legitimate

and constitutionally valid interest in regulating obscenity through, among other things, the enforcement of relevant federal and state statutes. The government has a compelling interest in pornography prosecution.

On May 5, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it is establishing an obscenity prosecution task force "dedicated exclusively" to the investigation and prosecution of obscenity crimes.

Distribution of hardcore pornography, has reached epidemic proportions, and law enforcement must make a concerted effort to deal with it.

A number of communities in Kansas want to move forward with promotion of obscenity charges against pornography outlets but have been hampered by the issue of the words "sexually provocative aspect" found to be unconstitutional in our current Kansas statutes.

Our representative, John Edmonds, is chairing the committee overseeing introduction of a bill to change Kansas law. I encourage you to contact him and let him know how important it is to our community and the state of Kansas.

It is time for the average citizen in Kansas to shake off our indifference and have the tools to effectively do our part in defining community standards.

Pastor Jack Sweany, Great Bend

Send letters

via e-mail:

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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.
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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202-224-6521.
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U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1st District, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. 202-225-2715. Hays office, 785-628-6401.
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Kansas senators or representatives: State Capitol, Topeka, 66612. 785-296-0111.
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