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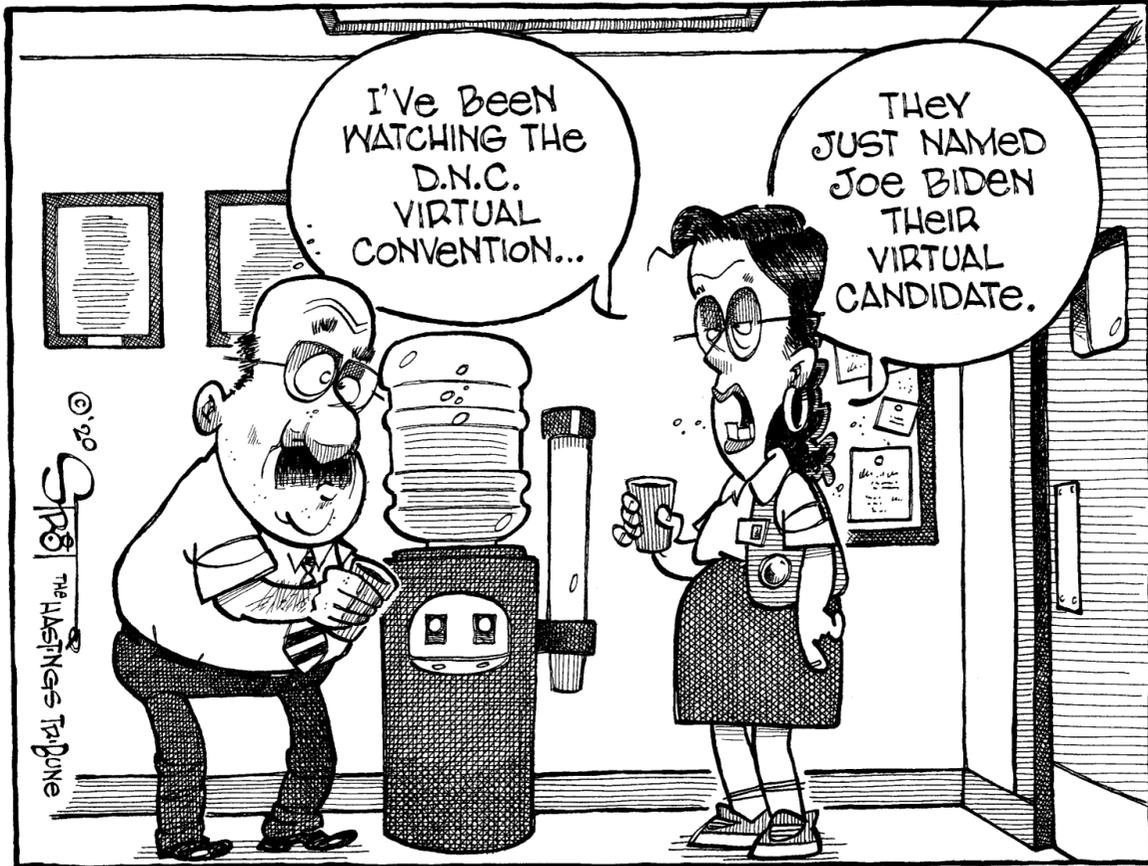
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Kansas, please protect seniors from COVID-19

"Forced isolation" is not a pretty phrase, but for Kansas senior citizens, that has been our new reality since COVID-19 struck.



Ross Boelling
Kansas Reflector

Whether it is the loss of social interaction with friends and family at graduations, holidays, the lake, the restaurant or ballgames, or the loss of worship, or the loss of meetings to attend, or the loss of daily socialization and friendship meals (and air conditioning) at the local senior center, or the inability to see family in the hospital, COVID-19 has significantly impacted Kansas seniors' lives.

Plus, just the fear of catching it limits our activities and interactions.

I have been closely tracking Kansas Department of Health and Environment COVID-19 data since mid-May. During that time, I have watched Kansas seniors' COVID-19 numbers grow each time KDHE updates their tracking information.

Early in the pandemic there was mention in the media of how it would adversely affect older folks. From my analysis, I can tell you that in Kansas, this is a fact. In Kansas, 78% of the people who have died and 43 percent of the people who have had to be hospitalized are age 65 or older. However, this group only represents about 11% of the state's total number of COVID-19 cases.

Kansas seniors who catch COVID-19 are more likely than the rest of Kansans to go to the hospital or die.

As of Aug. 21, KDHE reports that 3,979 Kansas seniors with COVID-19 have been identified, 925 have been hospitalized and

327 have died. These are not just numbers. Each represents a Kansas senior life adversely affected by COVID-19.

COVID-19 protections put in place by institutions have increased the isolation and loneliness of those inside. Those living in long-term care settings are now unable to see or touch family members.

I cannot help but think of the 925 people hospitalized. All they see are the eyes and masks of the doctors and nurses caring for them, as most hospital COVID policies prevent family visits, so they suffer alone. Experts tell us that complications from COVID-19 can extend these hospital stays too. The 327 who have died most probably died without any family or faith contact, a horribly isolated way to end one's life.

The frustrating thing for me, as I have watched this pandemic unfold, is its politicization. As Kansans, we obviously have not learned anything from almost tripling the number of new cases during July.

During August, Kansans seniors' cases have increased by 207, hospitalizations by 62 and deaths by 27 than over the same period in July. For the August 21 KDHE reporting cycle, Kansas seniors added 141 new COVID-19 cases. This is the second highest reporting period increase since 161 new cases were reported on July 20.

Kansas now has 419 reported fatalities from COVID-19, more than the state's estimated count of traffic fatalities in 2019, which was 411.

COVID-19 is not going away. We have an obligation to our families and neighbors to take appropriate action, even if it is a bit uncomfortable.

Medical professionals tell us that masks, handwashing and social distancing

are effective in slowing or preventing transmission of COVID-19. That is actually a pretty simple solution to stopping this thing, isn't it?

Cases in every Kansas age group are increasing. As schools and colleges start up, I worry about Kansas seniors. If we fail in our COVID-19 protection plans in schools, many more will become sick. Since many grandparents care for school-aged grandchildren before school, after school, or both, there is a real possibility we will see increasing cases among Kansas seniors.

Because it is clear that seniors get sicker with COVID-19, if this happens we will see more hospitalizations and deaths.

If you are a Kansas senior and do not think the risk is real, please reconsider.

The data clearly indicates that if you get COVID-19, you have a one-in-four chance of going to the hospital; if you go to the hospital, you have an almost 40 percent chance of dying. This is for each Kansan over age 65.

During August, Kansas senior hospitalizations and deaths are increasing faster than previously. It is time to take COVID-19 seriously.

For all Kansans, I ask that when you are out and about, consider Kansas seniors and wear a mask when necessary, wash your hands and practice social distancing.

Kansas Seniors truly depend on your compassion, responsibility and compliance. Please take a second to write, call or safely visit your parents or grandparents — they need to hear from you now more than ever. Forced Isolation is not fun.

—Ross Boelling represents Dickinson County in the Kansas Silver Haired Legislature.

Be wary of sweetheart scams

Deals that are often too good to be true are often known as "sweetheart deals." The price is hard to believe in exchange for the desired goods or services. There is another form of "sweetheart" deals, or rather scams, that are preying upon residents in greater frequency, particularly the elderly populations. We have seen the number of calls to the Consumer Protection Division increase in recent months.



Derek Schmidt
Attorney General

The scam works like this: An individual posts a message on a social media site looking for companionship. The posts are made in the usual social hangouts where singles meet and the scammers hide in plain sight, appearing to be legitimate people looking for love and friendship. Frequently the victims are individuals who recently lost a spouse and are looking to find someone new to fill the emptiness left behind.

After making the connection with a new object of one's affection, the scammer may tell the victim that they prefer

to text or email instead of using dating applications, but promises of a face-to-face meeting keep getting put off. The love interest is overseas for business or in the military, or they are afraid to travel and want to maintain proper social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The relationships move quickly and soon the scammer starts testing the trust of their victim. The new love interest needs money to help with bills or medical expenses. The amounts start small to build trust in cash transactions, which are difficult to track exactly how much is being sent. In other cases, victims are asked to purchase iPhones and ship them to the scammer.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, more than \$200 million was lost in online romance scams, an increase of six fold since 2015. The Consumer Protection Division in our office has also seen this scam on the increase. We have learned that often family members are unaware their parents have been left penniless after being scammed in a relationship until it's too late. However, there are simple steps to take to protect yourself from being the next victim:

► Slow down and stop communicating

with the scammer. Talk to someone you trust about the relationship and don't let the scammer rush you.

► Search online for the particular job the person says they have. See if others have heard of similar stories or scams.

► Never transfer money from your bank account, buy gift cards, phone or wire money to an online love interest. You won't get it back.

► Contact your bank immediately if you think you've sent money to a scammer.

► Report the incident to our Consumer Protection Division. We work closely with the Kansas Department for Children and Families and Adult Protective Services. When appropriate, representatives will meet face-to-face with victims to get the scam stopped.

During my service as attorney general, we have made justice for seniors a priority by targeting elder abuse, consumer fraud and related issues.

More information on how to protect yourself from these and other scams is available on our consumer protection website at www.InYourCornerKansas.org or by calling our consumer protection hotline at (800) 432-2310.

Still time to make it count

Dozens of Kansas communities are in danger of missing out on significant amounts of money from the federal

government because residents haven't completed their 2020 Census. Statewide, more than two-thirds of the population has completed the task so far, leaving 31.1 percent unaccounted for at



Greg Doering
Kansas Farm Bureau

this point.

As a whole, Kansas is doing better than the nationwide response rate of 64 percent, but there are 10 counties with less than 50 percent of residents completing their forms. All are rural, and they all stand to miss out on their share of billions in federal dollars that will come to Kansas over the next decade based on this year's census.

One county's response rate is below 40 percent, which could mean the loss of an estimated \$50 million in federal aid over the next year. That's the equivalent of missing out on about \$1,300 for every man, woman and child in the county each year. It's money unavailable to assist with local highway planning and construction, water and wastewater systems, health care assistance and hundreds of other programs.

Overall, a 1 percent undercount of Kansans would result in an estimated loss of more than \$600 million in federal funding over the next decade. That's money we pay in federal taxes going to projects in other states.

In short, the Census is about money and power. The people who complete the form get their fair share of both. If you skip it, both go elsewhere. COVID-19 has stretched our communities thin, which means ensuring you're counted is more important than ever.

I wrote about how vital it is to stand up and be counted way back in early March, just ahead of the Census Bureau mailing forms urging people to self-respond either through the U.S. Postal Service, online at my2020census.gov or by calling (844) 330-2020. Unfortunately, other events soon gripped our state and nation as the pandemic hit, pushing the counting of our population on the back burner for people.

While the pandemic certainly lowered self-response rates, it also hampered the federal effort to ensure everyone is recorded. Census workers who would have normally followed up with households that hadn't filled out a survey in May and June are just now knocking on doors.

The federal government, fearful social distancing measures will hamper the vast data processing required by the year's end, bumped up the response deadline to Sept. 30, shaving a full month off the original timeline.

Like just about everything else in 2020, trimming 31 days off the deadline isn't ideal. But there's still time to take a few minutes to respond, ensuring your town's story is told to help get the most out of the American dream.

If you've already responded, you can still help by checking with friends and family to see if they've done so as well. If they haven't, tell them what's on the line and direct them to the website or phone number above.

It's not going to complete the COVID-19 recovery overnight, but federal funding for roads, bridges, broadband internet connections and a litany of other projects won't just help Kansas' economic convalescence, but power us to an even brighter future. Act now while there's still time to make your voice count.

—"Insight" is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state's largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.

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The Coffey County Republican welcomes submission of news items of interest to the community. All news items are subject to editing and will be published at the discretion of the newspaper, based on timelines, newsworthiness and available space. The newspaper cannot guarantee publication or confirm publication dates of submitted news items.

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