

# BORDER WARS

*Kansas is bleeding again*

I sit in the Free State Brew Pub in Lawrence, Kan., trying to make sense of what I have just seen on Main Street. That's what Kansans call the 424-mile section of Interstate 70 that dissects their state: "America's Main Street." It's a reasonable marketing ploy for a straight stretch of road through the geographical center of the U.S., but as I drove the first 386 miles of that stretch today, I was reminded that, politically speaking, I am not at all in the middle of the country.

I was confronted by an abundance of political billboards with varied messages on a single theme. "Thank Mom for Choosing Life." "Adoption Not Abortion." "Breastfeeding — Let's Talk About It." And "Abortion Stops a Beating Heart."

Kansas is where Dr. George Tiller was murdered in 2009 while serving as an usher at his church. His killer justified Tiller's death saying, "preborn children's lives were in imminent danger." Kansas is where the most restrictive anti-abortion laws in the country have already passed or are being considered. These contemporary and, in Tiller's case, violent confrontations have journalists once again talking about "bleeding Kansas," a term that was used to describe the Kansas-Missouri border wars of 150 years ago.

The American Civil War is held by many experts to have begun not more than 30 feet from where I wait for my sandwich. It was in this very tavern where the abolitionist John Brown often spoke. The issue being debated then was whether the institution of slavery would migrate with settlers into the new Western territories, including Kansas.

Proslavery vigilantes from Missouri, known as Bushwackers, tried through manipulation of the ballot box and ultimately with violence to influence the outcome. The talking stopped on May 21, 1856, after a congressional committee ruled in favor of a free state constitution. That didn't sit well with the Bushwackers, who rode into Lawrence, set fire to the Free State Hotel, now renovated and less than a block from where I sit. They terrified citizens by ransacking homes and businesses. John Brown, the abolitionist, and the advocates of a free state, known as Jayhawkers, retaliated. Brown tracked down five proslavery men, pulled them from their homes and hacked them to death.

The violence of the border wars continued throughout the Civil War. In fact, the violence was the main reason my own ancestors first migrated from Missouri to Oregon.

By 1864, after nine years of constant raids by both sides to steal food and horses from his Missouri farm, my great-great grandfather on my mother's side was tired and afraid. Sometimes he even hid in the cellar to avoid his own conscription into the raiding army. Eventually, he loaded a farm wagon with necessities, took his family and headed out on the Oregon Trail to start a new life. I have just driven the same 2,000 miles that my great grandmother walked at the age of 9.

Some branches of the family stayed behind to hold their ground. My paternal grandfather was always proud to call himself a Kansan and a "Free Stater." He valued the battle his ancestors fought to keep Kansas free from slavery.

What would he think of an article I just read in today's *Topeka Capitol Journal*? The State Board of Objections held a meeting yesterday to hear testimony regarding President Obama's birth certificate and to rule on whether his name should be placed on the November ballot.

My grandfather wasn't a man who suffered fools and I think he would have found Joe Montgomery, who filed the initial complaint, to be one. There are 105 counties in Kansas. In 2008, Barack Obama won only three of them. According to Nate Silver at 538.com, President Obama has a 0.2 percent chance of winning Kansas in November. At the very least, my grandfather would have thought it was a waste of time and resources to even discuss the subject of the president's birth certificate. Grandpa died before the civil rights movement of the 1960s began, but I'd like to think he would disparage this type of thinly veiled racism.

I was very young when he died, but I miss him still. If we could talk, I think he would connect the missing pieces of how Kansas has moved so dramatically from one side of the political street to the other. More than anything, I wish he were here to share lunch with me. They have beets on the menu, one of his favorite vegetables, and his beloved Jayhawks are playing TCU just a short walk down the street.

*Nancy Webber of Eugene is a longtime Oregon political activist and author of Ground Game, a new book that chronicles her time in the field offices of the 2008 Obama campaign. The book is available at Amazon Kindle, iBook, Kobo and Inkwater Press.*

## LETTERS

### WE NEED BETTY

The rarest things in politics are compassionate liberals who are tough and fearless. They are the ones the coal shippers and exploiters spend tons of money to defeat. You know where they stand and will not fizzle out when the going gets rough.

We have such a one on the Eugene City Council: Betty Taylor. I have been thrilled over the years of her service watching her work. I implore the voters of south Eugene: do not be sidetracked. Keep Betty Taylor on the council. We need her as never before.

Jim Weaver  
Eugene

### STOP THE COAL TRAINS

I am strongly against the moving of hundreds of thousands of tons of coal by train through Eugene! Ward 7 is already overburdened by diesel fumes from the rail yards and all of the different chemical companies spewing out contaminants here [see cover story last week].

There are many reasons to stop adding coal trains to the mix: the extra particulate coming from the coal dust itself; the diesel from the two or three locomotives pulling 1-1/2 mile long trains four times daily; the traffic snarls that will ensue as these trains slowly move through town; the dangers of a derailment in the city (which has happened all over the country of late); the very explosive nature of coal dust (which is why it can't be covered); the idea that the city of Eugene will be condoning the export of more greenhouse gases and particulate pollution-causing coal to Asia, while we claim to be trying to cut them here; and that all of it will be blowing right back to Oregon after it's burned.

Most of the cities between Wyoming/Montana and Oregon/Washington are also working to stop this; and probably not one more job will be added to Eugene's workforce! These projects are only about rich corporations making even more money at our expense, as usual!

Exporting of coal through Eugene will adversely affect Bethel/Danebo, Trainsong and neighborhoods north of 6th Avenue more than other parts of town! Please do not allow this travesty to further compromise the health of Eugene's citizens. Councilor Alan Zelenka is right about the inappropriateness of this proposal. Stop the coal trains!

Robin Bloomgarden  
Eugene

### INAPPROPRIATE FASHION

Jeff Holiday [Letters, 9/20] undermines his position by telling someone to "shut up" before he even offers any arguments in favor of his perspective — a clear sign he'll be arguing for an untenable point of view.

Worse, he uses his anger to shield his ignorance of not only racism but the history of genocide and appropriation of Native symbols, spirituality and culture.

The world has not "moved on." Native people are still here despite the horrific genocide Europeans and Americans committed, despite being forcibly assimilated after their cultures

were nearly destroyed, and despite the forced immiseration on the reservations. The reward for persevering? Continued marginalization and ill-treatment by people who think the Indians in old movies are accurate portrayals — and now mockery at fashion shows and childish screeds.

I suggest that Jeff check out [nativeappropriations.blogspot.com](http://nativeappropriations.blogspot.com) for reasons why feather headdresses are not fashion accessories. Maybe he can take his own advice, remain silent and listen to others.

Ryan Foote  
Eugene

### SUCCAH CRAWL

BRING recently had its Home and Garden tour. The Whiteaker has its garden tour. Downtown has its art walks. The Jewish community is now adding to the this list of tours with its second annual Succah Crawl.

When most people think of the Jewish High Holy Days, they think of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Well, after the all day prayers of the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement, we Jews have a week of fun living in succahs — temporary structures with leafy branches for a roof.

And seeing as so few people know of this part of the Holy Days, we decided to make a tour of them — a different Succah and a different event each day of the holy days of Succot. You can find them in the *Weekly's* calendar (starting Sunday, Sept. 30), or by going to our website: [JewishEventsWillamette-valley.org](http://JewishEventsWillamette-valley.org)

Shmuel Cohen  
Eugene

### LIVELY IS BEST CANDIDATE

I was pleased and excited when I learned that John Lively had chosen to be a candidate to represent the Springfield area as our state representative.

Having worked with John on a variety of councils, committees and commissions, I know that John does everything possible to inform himself before taking any stands or making any decisions. Then, with his decisions based upon information rather than emotion, he very passionately works to accomplish what he feels best for his community.

Yes, I'll admit, I've not always agreed with John's positions; however, I've never found him to be self-serving or taking a stance that he didn't believe was best for those whom he serves — and darn it — he was, most frequently, right. He cares for his constituents, whether they voted for him or not.

When I learned who John's opposing candidate was, I first thought that since Joe Pishioneri has done a fair job as a Springfield city councilor, he'd not be a bad second choice. Then the campaigning began. Now there's no doubt we have to vote for Lively!

In the 40-plus years I've known John, he's been serving our community in such a tremendous variety of ways, without ever feeling the need to belittle, criticize or defame those who disagree with him. John's much more interested in saying and doing what's best for those whose lives