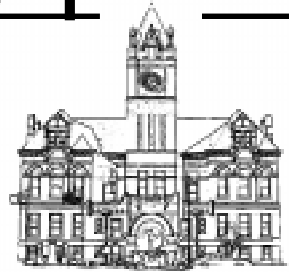


Opinion



Letter Drop

- Our Readers Sound Off

Something to keep in mind

To the Free Press:

The 2002 Kansas Legislature had to make some very difficult budget decisions due to revenue shortfalls. Some of the decisions made could be detrimental to people with disabilities and the elderly. People with physical disabilities who have a terminal illness and are receiving community based services in their home, such as bathing, dressing, meal prep, etc., will have to make a choice between these services and hospice services, such as pain management, grief counseling, etc.

The waiting list for people with disabilities who need assistance to get out of bed, eat, dress and perform basic personal hygiene in their homes has grown to 567 people as of July 10, 2002. That means people get no services for up to 6 months while they wait. SRS has projected that this list will grow at a rate of 80-100 people per month.

There are also 381 elderly people waiting to receive services under Medicaid in their homes as of July 10, 2002. Some of these 948 people are waiting to get out of nursing homes; many of these people are just trying to survive in their homes without the services knowing that an injury or illness could land them in the hospital at any given time, increasing their care costs. There were numerous other budget cuts that affected people with disabilities of all ages. I understand that decisions had to be made, and it could have been worse, but these are the poorest citizens in Kansas.

For FY '03, the total Medicaid budget for nursing homes is \$313,111,728 serving 10,973 people. The total Medicaid budget for FY '03 for the home and community based waiver services for people with physical disabilities and elderly is \$121,025,370 serving 9,173 people.

Consequently, there are approximately the same number of people who are elderly and/or have physical disabilities served in the community as in nursing homes, but the cost to the state for community based services is approximately 1/3 the cost of nursing homes.

Therefore, it is common sense that people should be able to receive services in the community if they choose; it is good for the individuals, and fiscally responsible for the state.

When the 2003 Kansas Legislative session begins in January, they will have even more difficult decisions to make as the revenue shortfall continues to grow. This is why it is vitally important for people with disabilities, the elderly, and their family and friends to get registered to vote, get educated about the candidates, get educated about how the incumbents voted on important issues last session, and be sure to vote in the primary as well as the general election.

Many people think their vote does not make a difference, but it does. All those single votes add up into numbers and shows strength. That strength is needed to vote for candidates who will make a positive difference in the lives of people with disabilities and the elderly.

If you need information about voter registration, advanced voting, candidates, and voting records from this last session in reference to issues that affect people with disabilities and the elderly, contact the LINK office closest to you in Colby (462-7600), Hays, Great Bend, Osborne or Hill City, or call 1-800-569-5926.

(Source of numbers: Jenny Hendrix, Social and Rehabilitation Services and Michelle Sweeney, Kansas Department of Aging.)

Lou Ann Kibbee
LINK, Inc.
Hays
(Letter #105)

About those letters . . .

The Free Press encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and length, and, likewise, reserve the right to reject letters deemed to be of no public interest or considered offensive or libelous.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

freepress@nwkanas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published daily, every Monday through Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

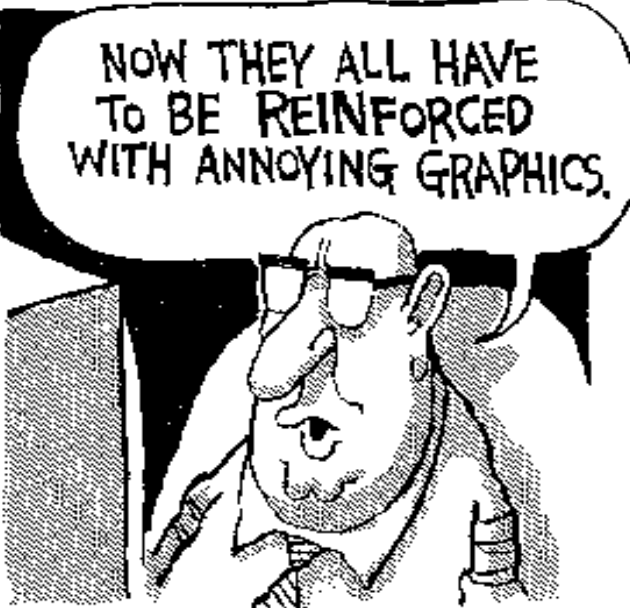
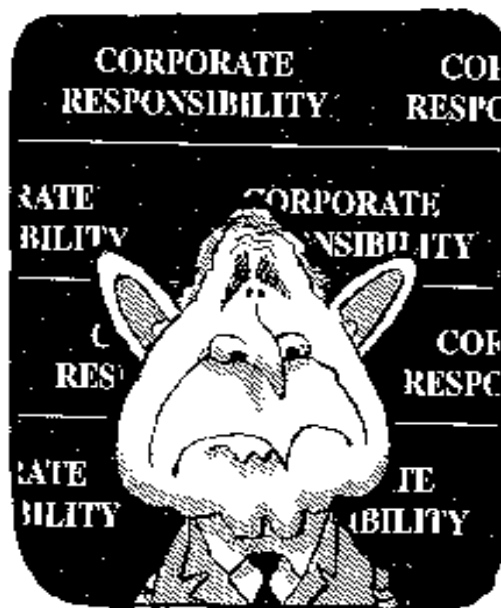
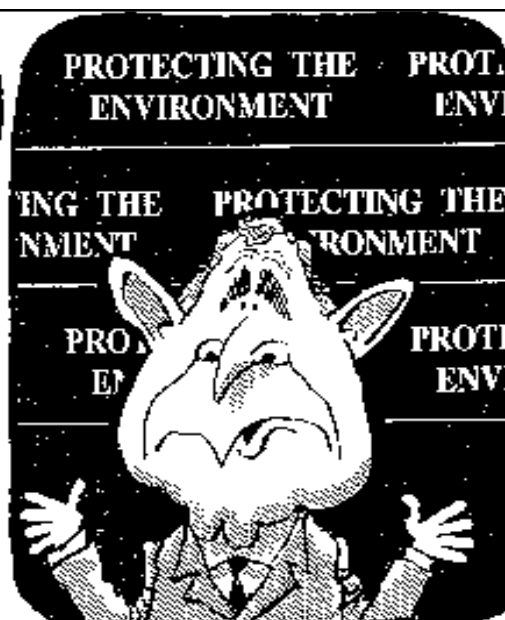
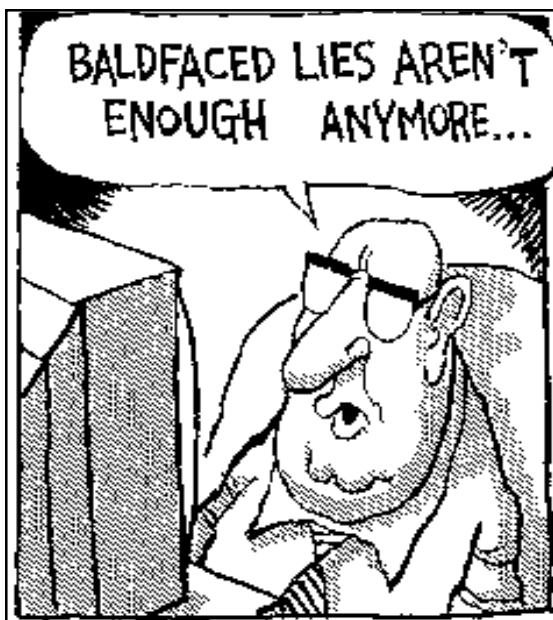
PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday.

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$32, 8 months \$47, 12 months \$64. By mail with Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$44, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$72. Other Kansas counties and surrounding states: 4 months \$51, 8 months \$61, 12 months \$75. All other states, \$75, 12 months.

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9/11 hasn't changed the news

Jason Salzman

• Another Viewpoint

After September 11, it was fashionable for news personalities to repeat, "Everything's changed," as often as possible.

Listening to this, you had to wonder whether it applied to the news itself: Would we be seeing fewer pets on local TV news? Would news magazines stop looking more and more like Cosmo? Would the celebrity-crazed morning TV shows put an end to their endless perkiness?

At the time, there was some hope that news in America might change. Celebrity journalists, who seemed to be trying to convince us that things would be different, looked back with amusement at the content of the news prior to September 11 — and what had disappeared since then.

Like Houdini, Gary Condit had made an overnight disappearance from the national media spotlight after 9/11.

The play-by-play of Michael Jordan's return from retirement was off the front pages.

The fluff was indeed gone.

Political activists — who usually have to get naked, get violent, or get in pig costumes to get coverage — were wondering if journalists would soon begin taking a serious look at the problems the activists have been beating their drums about for years.

The test would come when the post-September 11 media fare-all-terrorism, all-the-time-subsided.

Well, now it has subsided, and the results are in. The fluff and mayhem are back! Everything has not changed. In fact, little has changed regarding the dismal state of journalism in America.

On national networks, so-called "soft" news has

reached its pre-9/11 level of 20 percent, according to a recent report by the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Stories about national and international topics have fallen 33 percent since October and now constitute about half of all coverage.

The networks' morning shows are offering more issue-based stories than they did prior to September 11, but hard news has decreased by half and celebrity and lifestyle coverage is up three-fold.

As for local TV, we don't need a study to document the obvious. These "news" shows are again brimming with the same crime, disaster, and fluff that precluded any seeker of news from being informed prior to 9/11.

So, it turns out that the coverage of 9/11 conforms to well-established patterns of news coverage in America — particularly for TV news.

TV outlets still serve their audiences a steady diet, which looks remarkably similar day in and day out. However, they will stray from their news formula under unusual circumstances, like during the period after the September 11 attacks. Then for a short pe-

riod of time, coverage changes — and the broadcasts will serve up less fluff and more substance.

This occurs in 5 percent to 10 percent of the networks' evening newscasts each year, according to media analyst Andrew Tyndall, author of the Tyndall Report.

But, after a while, the old formula returns.

Why does this occur?

I did not notice anyone demanding more fluff on the tube. In fact, with more substance in the news, more citizens were tuning in.

After the 9/11 events, TV news audiences skyrocketed — which is what you'd expect. And the increase continued for months thereafter. During the first quarter of 2002, the three network nightly news programs added 900,000 viewers.

With the fluff back, we will have to see if the audience sticks around.

In any case, 9/11 marks an historic missed opportunity for journalism in America. News executives could have tried to hook viewers with more substantive coverage. Instead, they retreated back to their old formula — which they believe will be the most lucrative in the short term.

In the long term, however, it's our democracy that will pay the price.

Jason Salzman, author of "Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists," is board chair of Rocky Mountain Media Watch (www.bigmedia.org), a media watchdog organization based in Denver.

Feedback to td@nwkanas.com

Let's just call it 'chargin' times'

John Schlageck

• Insight

The times, they are a changin'. People have talked about this. Philosophers have contemplated this. Troubadours have sung about it and today some are holding seminars to deal with this phenomenon.

But, lest we forget, the times have been changin' forever — always have, always will.

To begin the 21st Century people across the world were awash with euphoria. In this country, many were concerned with where they'd be, and be seen, during the dawning of the next 100 years.

Many were giving it their best shot to "immortalize" this time in their lives.

But the times, they are a changin'.

In farm country, production costs are at all-time highs, yet in Kansas and other farm-country states, grain prices are as low as they've ever been.

In many areas of our state, moisture to bring on this country's perennial No. 1 wheat crop never came.

As we enter the sweltering summer stretch, our fall crops remain under the gun.

Milo, corn and soybeans need moisture and they need it now. The weather pattern we're mired in doesn't look good.

A farm wife from southwestern Kansas told me her family's wheat crop averaged 15 bushel per acre. They count on a 55-bushel crop.

The milo crop is usually at least knee-high by now instead of a few inches, she said spreading her fingers apart.

"Not this year," she shook her head. "You hear talk

of people leaving farming this year. There may be a lot."

But the times, they are a changin'.

While we made it through our Independence Day celebration, July 4th, our country remains on a high state of alert. Sept. 11th has been indelibly burned into this nation's psyche.

It will be a long time before citizens of this great nation board an airplane and visit our major cities without thinking about a potential terrorist attack. American innocence died on that September day nearly one year ago.

But the times, they are a changin'.

Look at the Middle East. Not to diminish what happened in this country with the attack on the World Trade Center, but terrorism is a daily occurrence in this part of the world.

Every day, pictures of carnage and suffering flood our television screens as we watch in horror at the events unfolding in these powder keg countries.

Our country is operating under the euphemism,

"whatever action is necessary," to root out terrorists in Afghanistan and other terrorist regions of the world.

But the times, they are a changin'.

The majority in agriculture does not hesitate to spend money to make money. They prefer to secure the future of their operations by purchasing the most cost-efficient inputs. Protecting their valuable assets remains the cornerstone of their family operations.

Farmers and ranchers look forward to each new year of planting, growing and harvesting their crops and finishing their livestock. They understand that each day will allow them another opportunity to work at their profession. They are not prone to bask on yesterday's glories, but committed to new growth. Farm and ranch families remain dedicated to making each day, week, month and year better than the previous.

For them each day is an opportunity to invest in tomorrow and future generations.

Like our farmer/rancher counterparts, we must look to the future with renewed hope and faith. We must gather strength and determination from our friends, neighbors and countrymen.

Doing so will help us change with the times.

John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living," a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

