

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint

Drug controversy just tip of iceberg?

Vioxx struck out. Celebrex faces a full count. Aleve is in the bullpen. What's next? They keep telling us we need to keep our congressmen in check so they don't pass legislation allowing importation of "unsafe" drugs from Canada and elsewhere.

Elsewhere? We must be the 'elsewhere'! The Food and Drug Administration is supposed to be the safety net. But it looks like the drug makers have yanked the safety net away and it's everyone for himself. Or so it seems.

This drug mess isn't going to go away anytime soon. And the deeper the investigative minds dig the more concerned the American public will get.

There will be lots of questions in the public place, lots of suspicious eyes.

Reports on CNBC this week told of the drug makers kicking in countless sums of money to the FDA so it can do its job. It's job is to make sure what the drug makers make is safe. But when the makers become financial partners with the very agency that determines the safety of their product, wouldn't it be safe to assume that they'll say, "Ah, it looks pretty safe."

This could be just the tip of the iceberg. It could become so expansive that it could involve more than anybody ever imagined.

The unmasking of Vioxx — the so called miracle drug — alerted this country, the country considered the safest depository of drugs, that something is amiss. Anymore revelations will certainly drive millions of users away from the counters.

Let's see if Congress has what it takes to bring this thing to the forefront and call those in the FDA and the drug making companies on the Hill for a fiery clash.

The television report softened the punch some by declaring that most of the drugs used are safe.

Sorry, but 'most' isn't good enough.
Tom (TD) Dreiling
Free Press Publisher

Comments to any opinions expressed on this page are encouraged. Mail them to the Colby Free Press, 155 W. 5th St., Colby, Kan., 67701. Or e-mail td@nwkansan.com.

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BROOKING RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH 12/04



Hope for the holidays

A short trip around town some evening will confirm that the Christmas season is upon us. Lights are everywhere and the stores by this time are crowded with last minute shoppers, me included.

Christmas is always a fun time of year for my family. For many of us it is the only time we see each other. My brother lives near Denver now and usually stops through on the way to mom's house in Newton.

Although I enjoy seeing my brother, my 3-year-old nephew makes the visits even more fun.

I don't know when the tradition of getting together at my mother's house on Christmas Eve started. As near as I can tell it was while I was in the Navy, but that covered the entire 1980s, so there is no telling.

Those who can make it come to mom's house in the early evening and we have a big dinner, followed by a gift exchange. Christmas Day usually finds smaller groups getting together at different houses and, of course, Santa visiting the smaller members of the family.

This year will be a little different because it won't be at mom's house. My step-brother has bigger digs, so it will be at his place, but it will pretty much be the same Christmas get-together it has always been.

There are other people, however, who won't be spending Christmas at home. There are thou-



Jay Kelley
 • Speaking MyMind

sands of men and women in the armed forces in harm's way as we speak and who will be there on Saturday as well.

I was fortunate when I was in the Navy in that I don't ever remember spending Christmas at sea. I wasn't always able to come home. One year we were at sea through Thanksgiving and during other years we were preparing for a deployment and couldn't go on leave, but at least we were in port during Christmas.

I was always able to spend Christmas with someone away from the ship. It wasn't as good as being home, but it was better than being at sea. I spent three birthdays in combat zones, but it wasn't the same as being gone for Christmas.

Most of those who are away defending our country have families who love and miss them, and even those who don't should have someone who appreciates their sacrifice.

Some of our people will never spend another

Christmas at home. We have lost more than 1,000 people in Iraq and it does not matter what one thinks about the war, that is a tragic loss.

There are families who will never again have a son or daughter, father or mother, sister or brother home for the holidays this year. They take their place among those who lost loved ones during our earlier conflicts.

There are also those who came home, but left a piece of themselves on some far away battlefield, in the skies over a war zone or on a burning, sinking ship. No one comes home unscarred.

Some of the fortunate will come home this year for the holidays, but many of them will have the specter of deployment hanging over them as well.

Most are uncomfortable with accolades. In the Navy, the saying went "You take your money, you take your chances," but deep down, it felt good to know someone cared.

When you get together with your family this weekend, say a prayer for our troops and their families. They may never know it was you, but God will.

Jay Kelley is a local minister and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@nwkansan.com. He is a member of the Colby Free Press Writer's Club.

Farmers need to voice their opinion

Now that the election of 2004 is history, voters must face some important questions.

Will our political system take time, amid political fund raising and heated rhetoric on cultural issues, to focus on the plight of family farms and rural communities?

Will Wall Street be the only winner, as indicated in a recent Associated Press article? Will our government reflect the general concern that our country "is going in the wrong direction," that "growing the economy" results in more and more concentration of farms and processing companies, and that our food and energy often come from foreign lands?

If elections turn on personalities and cultural issues like these of 2004, the future of family farming and rural prosperity must turn on voters' attention to their elected officials. Benign neglect or policy that benefits giant multinational agribusiness corporations will mean rural America is relegated to being the home of private hunting preserves or factory farms. These offer unhealthy and low-paying jobs along with polluted streams and a stench that literally takes your breath away. Gone will be diversified farming where livestock is raised with fresh air and room to roam. Gone will be crop rotations that benefit the environment and provide economic opportunities throughout the year. Gone will be the rural communities of mutual support based on the Golden Rule and investment in local schools and county hospitals. Election rhetoric and crazy TV ads may get people elected, but what are we electing people to do, and will their performance matter in future elections?

Family farming was once recognized as the institution that guaranteed democracy and eco-

George Naylor

• Guest Commentary

products of dubious quality thanks to free trade agreements like NAFTA. Major commodities like corn, soybeans, and wheat are priced so low that only billions of taxpayer dollars provided in the U.S. "farm bill" prevent a complete collapse of the rural economy. These commodities serve as cheap livestock feed that benefits corporate livestock factories that buy all their feed. Isn't the future of family farming a moral issue, too?

Family farming can be the engine for growth and economic opportunity if voters focus on the issues that assure fair returns to family farmers, widespread ownership of farms, and the promotion of free and open markets not dominated by multinational corporations. Every citizen and our nation's security will benefit if we demand that our elected officials support our food sovereignty. They must also respect other nations' right to reap the benefits of family farms and democracy. If voters tell our elected officials to write a new farm bill that restores price floors under basic commodities, renews opportunities for farm ownership and local markets, and halts free trade agreements that hurt our farmers and those in other countries, America will deserve the respect of people all around the world and of future generations. The 2004 elections are over; it's time for action!

George Naylor is a corn and soybean farmer from Churdan, Iowa, a member of Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement and President of the National Family Farm Coalition. The Coalition was founded in 1986 to serve as a national link for grassroots organizations working on family farm issues. www.nffc.net. This column is distributed by MinutemanMedia.org.

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