

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint



Giving blood a community service

Dear Editor:
 About every two seconds someone in the United States needs blood and the American Red Cross is working hard to help fulfill these needs. We would like to thank our blood donors for helping to save the lives of patients they don't even know by donating at the American Red Cross blood drive Sept. 14. We had 163 people who came in to share the gift of life.

Statistics show the number one reason people do not give blood is that they are not personally asked. The American Red Cross counts on our loyal blood donors to spread the word about their wonderful experiences. We hope each blood donor will share his or her positive experience with someone who has never donated.

Blood shortages are increasingly common as many people who were once regular blood donors are now in need of medical treatments that require blood. We need more people to make blood donations a routine community responsibility. Donating blood is safe and easy, and something so simple is also so very vital.

Thank you to everyone who made our last blood drive a success - to all of the wonderful volunteer blood donors and all of the generous community volunteers who make the blood drive itself run so smoothly.

Our next Red Cross blood drive is scheduled for Jan. 18, 2006. If you would like to help, please call me at 462-2082.

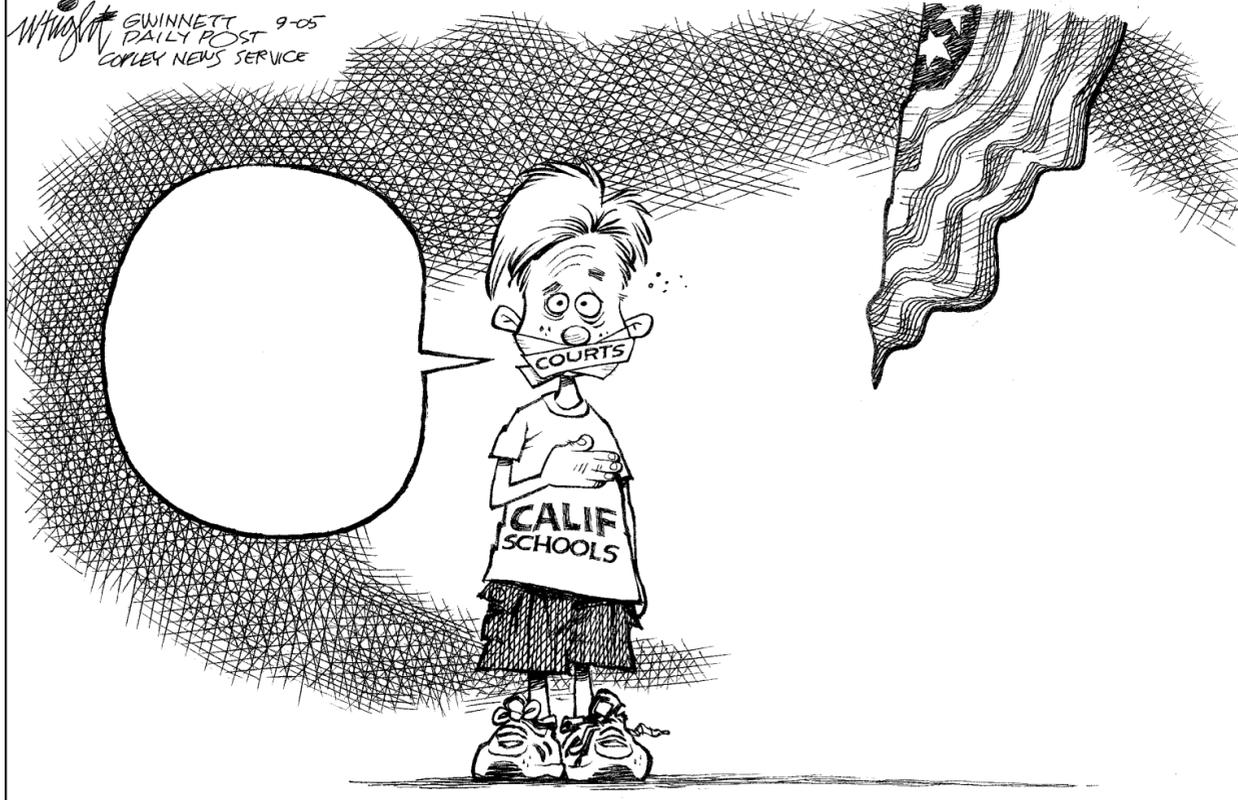
Thank you for your contributions to this critical and life-saving cause.

Jo Cheney
 Blood Drive Chair
 (Letter #73)

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 pjschief@nwks.com or pdecker@nwks.com.

Where to write, call

- U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts**, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774
- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback**, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
- State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer**, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us



Scams abound after disasters

Wouldn't you know it? As soon as disaster hits, scam artists come out of the woodwork to cash in on people's willingness to help. It is absolutely, totally, without hesitation despicable. It is sad, cruel, unconscionable, criminal - but real. In an attempt to help hurricane victims you have to be careful not to become a victim of theft through deceit.

Within hours after Katrina hit land, there were e-mails and websites offering to take your contribution to assist hurricane victims. Most of those were scams. Greedy opportunists were poised and quickly moved to action. In the days following Hurricane Katrina, the scams have continued to multiply.

Be extremely careful with e-mails that claim to have breaking news or photos from Hurricane Katrina disaster areas. Katrina-related messages are being used to persuade people to open attachments that may contain viruses, worms, and other malware. Don't go to unfamiliar websites. When it comes to e-mails or websites, the experts tell us if you have any doubts, don't open them unless you are sure of the source. If the e-mail is from an organization that you have dealt with before and you have confidence in that organization, then it should be safe to open. Still, use caution. You may receive an e-mail bearing the name of someone you know well, but the message is not really from them. That kind of thing happens all the time. Again, if in doubt, don't open the message.

Before making a donation to a relief fund, validate the organization. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, has several pages of legitimate, disaster-assisting organizations

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● Thomas County Extension Agent

listed on their website (http://www.fema.gov/press/2005/resources_katrina.shtml). At that website you will find addresses for the Katrina Fund overseen by former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, as well as emergency relief funds in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The site also lists church-affiliated groups that operate disaster-relief programs and provides information on donating goods and services. As a quick check on only one of the websites listed I clicked on the link to bushclintonkatrinafund.org. Sure enough there was information on sending contributions by mail or online. I then changed only the extension from .org to .com and the very same website appeared. If I wanted to donate online to the Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund I'd probably use the .org extension as it was the direct link from the FEMA website and should assure its legitimacy. The .com could be more questionable. But as a general rule remember .org extensions are not always as legitimate as we'd like to think. Anyone could set up a .org site. The safest method to assure your contribution will go toward Katrina relief is to rely on organizations that have a proven track record. The American Red Cross is best known to capably provide disaster assistance. Many church denominations have disaster relief teams that are very effective.

There is a National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NVOAD) group that has been organized long before Katrina hit. I would trust that organization to be legitimate. For a list of their member organizations go to <http://www.nvoad.org>. Another way to check references on organizations is to contact the Better Business Bureau. Their website is <http://www.bbb.org>. Keep in mind that the Better Business Bureau can only tell you if they have had negative or positive reports. They do not have enforcement capabilities.

The state attorney general's office also is a place to check on the legitimacy of various organizations. Go to <http://www.KSready.gov> for helpful information and links. An excellent place to check the legitimacy of charitable organizations is at <http://www.charitynavigator.org>. They have a section for hurricane relief that tells you organizations they have identified so far to steer clear of.

While I've concentrated on electronic scams, don't forget the more low-tech scam methods are at work as well. Telephone and mail solicitations can steal your dollars and your identity. Don't give any information over the phone about your credit cards, bank accounts, employee numbers, etc. Check out mail solicitations before sending money.

There has been enough disaster already. Don't create your own emergency by falling victim to the disaster predators.

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Katrina cripples gulf farms, ranches

It will be months before this country learns the full-scale impact Hurricane Katrina has on Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida farmers and ranchers. It will also be months, maybe years, before rural life returns to normal.

Some of the immediate losses are known and changing by the hour as producers struggle to pull their lives and operations back together. One thing is somewhat certain and that is all three states were hit hard and Louisiana maybe the hardest.

Lost farm revenue in this state is expected to exceed \$1 billion. Louisiana's citrus, beef cattle, nursery, sugarcane and dairy operations were literally blown and washed away when the storm made landfall Aug. 29.

Dairy producers in the state's Florida Parish dumped thousands of gallons of milk that couldn't be processed due to power failures and loss of transportation, Louisiana Farm Bureau spokesperson told American Farm Bureau Federation conference call listeners from across the country on Sept. 12. To make matters worse, FEMA is said to have commandeered diesel fuel and used it for rescue purposes - fuel that was to be used to harvest crops.

Ag specialists believe dairy farmer losses have already topped \$21 million. This includes animal health costs, forage losses and loss of future milk production.

"Cattle are gone, there's nobody in this parish where the bulk of the dairies are located," Mike Danna, Louisiana Farm Bureau, said. "There is nothing to go back to around New Orleans. I don't know if the dairies will survive."

People are working around the clock to assess damage and provide farmers the help they des-

John Schlajek

● Kansas Farm Bureau

perately need right now. Most farmers need diesel fuel and other daily necessities so vital to their operations. They are working now to provide feed and fresh water to the surviving animals and working out a plan to handle the lost animals. Officials believe cattle losses could top 10,000 head.

"Timber is down flat," Greg Gibson, Mississippi Farm Bureau, said. "The bottom six tier counties were destroyed."

Early data indicates that approximately 65 percent of the affected timberlands are private, non-industrial owned timber.

Of the row crops in the Mississippi Delta the rice crop was hit the worst. The affected crops are lodged to some degree or flattened. Farmers planted 245,000 acres.

"Because combines harvesting this downed rice crop have to run at one-half the normal speed, producers are having to use two to three times the fuel," Gibson said. "Farmers are paying twice the amount for diesel that they paid last year."

Poultry is big business in Mississippi and this industry suffered huge economic losses. There are approximately 9,000 poultry houses in Mississippi and more than 2,000 poultry farmers. A poultry house typically contains 20,000-25,000 birds.

"Our early estimates indicate that 2,400 poul-

try houses sustained damage, and of the damaged houses, approximately 300 are totally devastated," Gibson said. "A lot of this damage came from the tornadoes. Our value lost due to this storm is enormous when you factor in loss of production, loss of property, increased expenses associated with inflated energy costs, clean-up and income lost during recovery."

Gibson reported that corn yield losses will be substantial with harvest conditions extremely difficult and expensive for a crop in which margins are extremely thin. Cotton was hit with high winds that left the crop gnarled, mangled and in some cases flattened. Mississippi farmers planted 1.2 million acres this year and heavy losses are certain. Soybeans escaped with very little damage.

"The biggest problem our farmers are facing is finding fuel and then paying the prices charged for it," Gibson said.

When everything is tabulated, the numbers are going to be something this country's never seen before. There is no short-term solution in the Gulf region devastated by Katrina.

Agricultural producers are going to need disaster assistance and they're going to need assistance for a long time if they are to get back on their feet.

Right now, these states are looking at survival, saving lives and feeding people, however attention must be paid to the losses in food and fiber production because it's farmers and ranchers who help provide many of those resources.

John Schlajek has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for 25 years. He is the managing editor of "Kansas Living."

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