

Opinion

Not just a business

By Jason Salzman

Over the past year, the board of Knight Ridder—the nation’s second largest newspaper company—has been under pressure from unhappy stockholders to sell the company.

The company was sold in early March, despite the opposition of its founder.

Why were Knight Ridder’s stockholders unhappy?

Because the company wasn’t profitable? Actually, no. Knight Ridder made a 16 percent profit last year.

But a company’s profit doesn’t mean much to stockholders. What matters to them is the stock price. Knight Ridder’s has been dropping, from about \$80 per share in 2004 to \$53 per share last year.

Now why, you might ask, would a profitable company’s stock drop like that? It’s because of the uncertainty about the future of newspapers. There are some bad signs on the horizon for this industry. Among them is the fact that circulation has been dropping at most large dailies over the past few years, as more people, particularly young people, get news online.

As the online world-like Craig’s List—has grown, newspapers have lost revenue from classified ads, which were once a cash cow. In addition, newspapers are costly to run (reporting is labor-intensive) and newsprint costs are going up with no sign of coming down.

But on the other hand, it’s far from certain that newspapers won’t be as valuable—and profitable—10 years from now as they are today. Why? For the simple reason that advertisers will always be looking for ways to sell stuff to consumers. Newspapers have always attracted people wanting to read news—and collaterally, they present readers with ads for stuff advertisers think readers want. It’s unlikely this symbiotic relationship between publishers and advertisers will ever change.

But in the future, newspapers will be on the Web—not printed on dead trees. This has some big advantages for newspaper publishers, like the fact that there are enormous cost savings achieved by not having to print and deliver their product.

But there are also giant unknowns, the biggest of which revolves around this question: How will online newspapers make money? Right now, most newspapers are offering all their content online for free, because people aren’t used to paying for the privilege of viewing a Web site. Newspapers run paid ads online, but it’s not clear that online advertising will be able to make enough money to support journalism as we know it at a major daily newspaper.

No one is saying online papers won’t be able to survive in the future, but there’s uncertainty—even though some combination of online and print editions of newspapers will certainly continue to make lots of money in the near term. And for now, this basic fact remains: Newspapers still deliver a huge number of eyeballs to advertisers—and they can do it more cheaply and with more options than TV. In the end, market forces could well be kind to newspaper journalism, but because of the unknowns involved, newspaper stocks are falling and publishers are cutting reporters and printing smaller papers with less news.

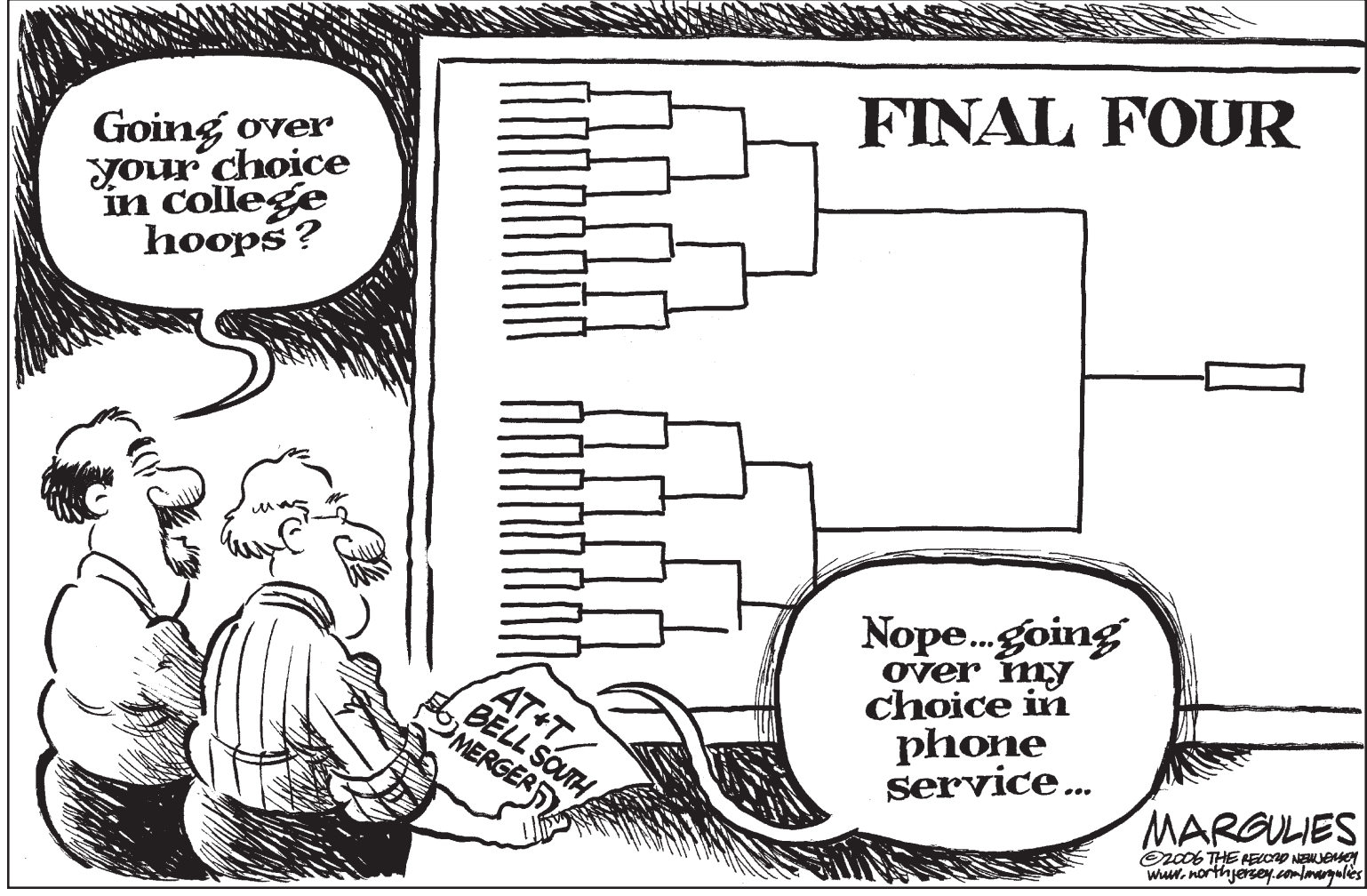
Newspapers with less substance are undoubtedly going attract even fewer readers—which makes it even more likely that people will drop their subscriptions and the newspaper industry will suffer. So, it’s critical that newspaper owners keep the public interest in mind and not get panicky about the future of their business, especially when profits are as high as they are now.

And our political leaders need to understand that stories like Knight Ridder’s shouldn’t be viewed as another business transaction, because, as Rebecca Rimel and Donald Kimelman recently pointed out in the Philadelphia Inquirer, “journalism is a public trust, an essential element in the democratic mosaic.”

Congress should be ready to step in and, without censoring content, protect journalism—both print and broadcast—from market forces. One obvious way to do this in the short term is to provide more support for public broadcasting—and explore other ideas to protect newspapers.

Jason Salzman is author of “Making the News: A Guide for Activists and Nonprofits” and board chair of Rocky Mountain Media Watch www.bigmedia.org

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 jvannostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com.



Recycling, just the facts ma’am

Even though Earth Day is still a month away, there’s no reason to wait when it comes to saving the planet through recycling efforts. While most of us have seen information about recycling many times, maybe this year will be the year we take action.

A lot of people in Colby and Thomas County do their part every day to help the cause, but for those of us who are still skeptics of recycling, maybe some facts will help. I uncovered some of this information recently while organizing my desk and I think it’s as important today as when Lynette Koon with the Northwest Recycling Center, gave it to us months before.

For example, people in the United States throw away enough glass bottles and jars every two weeks to fill the 1,350-foot World Trade Center towers.

We also use enough cardboard each year to make a bale as big as a football field and as high as the World Trade Center towers.

As for garbage, Americans produce an average of over a half a ton of garbage per person every year or about 3.5 pounds a day.

In a lifetime, the average American will throw away 600 times his or her adult weight in garbage and if you add it up, this means that a 150 pound adult will leave a legacy of 90,000 pounds or 46 tons of trash for their children.

Why recycle? For one thing, it saves money — when there’s less garbage, we all pay less to dump it. It also saves natural resources and energy and with our country importing 50 percent of its oil, saving energy by recycling means we depend less on foreign supplies.

How can we save energy? Well, when it comes to glass, most bottles and jars contain at least 25 percent recycled glass because glass never wears out and can be recycled forever.



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

We save over a ton of resources for every ton of glass recycled and a ton of glass produced from raw materials creates 384 pounds of mining waste. Using 50 percent recycled glass cuts it by about 75 percent. In addition, we get 27.8 pounds of air pollution for every ton of new glass produced. Recycling the glass reduces that pollution by 14 to 20 percent and saves 25 to 32 percent of energy used to make it.

Another interesting fact from statistics was office paper. While most of us hear a lot about recycling newspaper, it actually isn’t the most valuable paper to recycle. By far, office paper is the best.

As Americans, we throw out about 85 percent of the office paper we use, but for recycling centers that paper is prized for its strong fibers that hold up well the second time around.

White paper is worth twice as much, or even more, than colored paper and because it’s already bleached, there’s not much ink on it that has to be removed (compared to newspapers).

Along with white paper being valuable to recycling centers, corrugated cardboard is a prized catch as well. Believe it or not, corrugated cardboard boxes can be recycled many times and if each household in this country were to recycle just one box per month, we’d save more than a billion boxes a year.

Most cardboard boxes contain between 20 and 40 percent of recycled material and making the paper pulp used in cardboard boxes creates sulfur dioxide, which is a gas that causes acid rain. By recycling cardboard boxes, we can cut pollution in half and save nearly 25 percent of the energy used to manufacture it.

Ever wonder how much “junk mail” Americans get every year. It’s about four million tons every year or about 248 pieces a year for every man, woman and child.

While there are a lot of contaminants in mixed paper, making recycling extremely messy, it can be recycled into boxboard, commonly used for cereal-type boxes or made into roofing paper, tar paper and asphalt shingles.

The list of recyclable items goes on and on. Aluminum, plastics, steel and tin cans, magazines, brown paper bags, plastic bags, vinyl and polypropylene and styrofoam.

There are a lot of ways to set up a home for recycling. For example, figure out how you’re going to dispose of a product and/or its packaging before you buy it.

We can also reduce waste by simply making correct buying choices.

As said earlier, there are a lot of serious recyclers in this community that would love to help a newcomer along. We all just need to ask and Lynette would be a good start.

One last thought on the subject: Did you know that if we lined up our 3.5 pounds of garbage bumper to bumper, a string of garbage trucks hauling the nation’s daily waste could reach halfway to the moon.

Decker is editor of the Free Press.

Voters need to stand up for local control

From the Lawrence Journal World
“When did we suddenly not trust local boards of education?”

The rhetorical question posed by Carol Rupe, a member of the Kansas Board of Education, demands the attention of all Kansas voters.

The issue was raised after the state board once again dipped into the micromanagement of local school districts by mandating that districts obtain written permission from parents before enrolling children in sex education courses. The measure was passed on a 6-4 vote that followed the now-familiar split between conservative and moderate members of the board.

Board Chairman Steve Abrams, an Arkansas City Republican, sought to portray the decision as an issue of parental control, saying, “It’s about empowering parents; that’s the bottom line.” But the much larger issue involves the state’s attempt

to usurp local districts’ control over curriculum decisions.

The crux of the measure ... is to change the current “opt-out” policy for sex education classes to an “opt-in” requirement.

Board members who favored the new mandate said it would force parents to become more involved in their children’s education. Opponents say the likely result is that children whose parents fail to get more involved — and, by extension, probably are less likely to provide any sex education at home — will simply end up getting information about this important life and health issue from sources far less reliable than a classroom teacher.

The issue here is not parental involvement; it’s already a simple matter for any parent who is paying attention to keep a child out of sex education classes or, conversely, make sure their

child is in a sex education class. The real issue is taking authority away from the local school boards that are in a far better position than the state board to represent the interests of local students and parents.

Board Member Sue Gamble, in fact, said the mandate violated the Kansas Constitution and “local districts can ignore this entirely.”

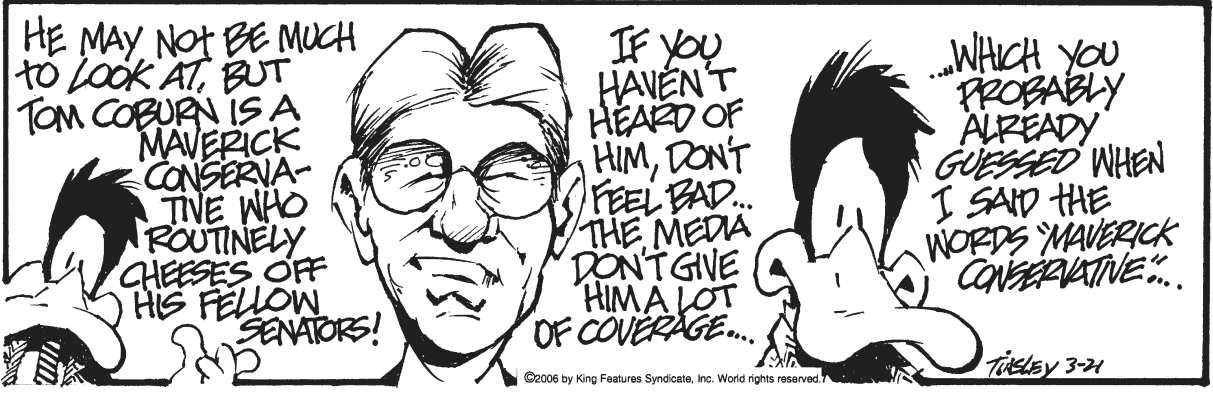
Perhaps that is what districts will do, but it’s not a good situation when local districts find themselves in the position of openly defying the state board.

The bottom line is that the Kansas Board of Education’s interest in imposing personal agendas on public schools is having an increasingly disruptive impact on local districts.

The answer lies at the ballot box; Kansas voters need to stand up for local control of school curriculum.

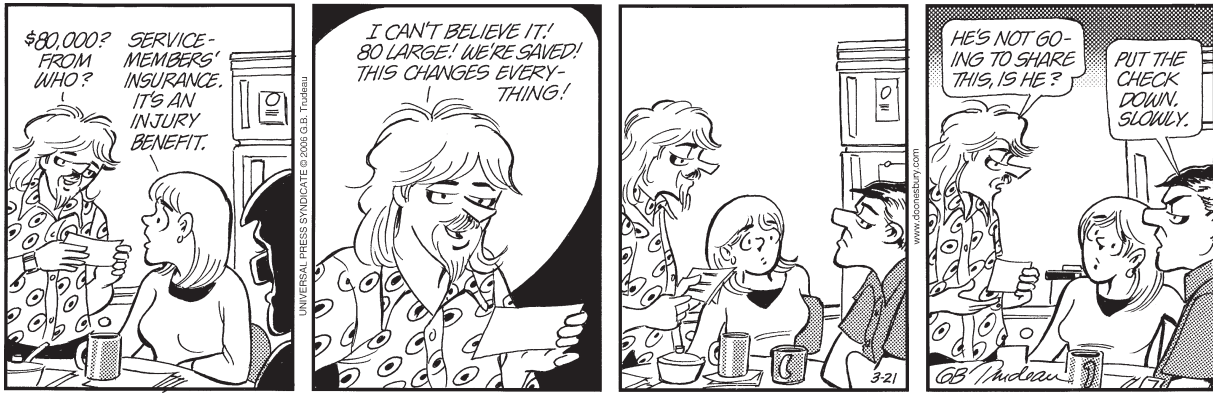
Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley



Doonesbury

● Gary Trudeau



Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company