

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Standards count, not politics

From The Hutchinson News
Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns continues to stay the course on dealing with mad cow disease — even though doing so has cost cattle producers billions in lost exports to Japan.

Johanns has relied chiefly on diplomacy to persuade Japan to resume U.S. beef shipments, a time-consuming process. For example, American and Japanese negotiators ended talks May 19 without setting a date for reopening the Japanese market to U.S. beef.

The key trading partner renewed its ban on American beef shipments in January after Japanese inspectors found veal cuts containing backbone, which the country has banned from its food supply. Less than a month earlier, Japan had finally ended a ban on American beef imposed in 2003 after the first U.S. case of mad cow disease.

From the outset, however, Washington has sought to convince Tokyo to accept minor adjustments instead of working diligently to revamp beef inspections to meet a key export customer's expectations for quality.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association estimates that the drop in exports related to mad cow disease cost U.S. producers up to \$2.9 billion.

At the trade talks earlier this month, Japan approved an audit report on compliance checks carried out at 35 meatpacking plants that applied to exports to Japan. All the plants complied with Japanese import rules.

Next, Japanese officials want to accompany American inspectors on unannounced spot checks of U.S. beef plants to ensure compliance.

Some reports indicate that Tokyo wanted to lift its ban on U.S. beef imports by the time Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visits the United States in June. But government officials responded to that report by stating they would base the decision on food safety standards rather than political considerations.

With a variety of factors causing the number of cattle on feed to swell this spring, cattle producers simply want to regain access to a key export market. If diplomacy doesn't work soon, Johanns should focus on meeting Japan's food safety standards.

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. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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Spring cleaning

If you know of a 12-step group for how to get used to three-day holiday weekends, please tell me where to sign up. Tuesday felt like Monday and today felt like Tuesday. Even though it is a pain, we here at the *Free Press* want to give you what you are paying for despite the holidays - four papers a week.

That third day did give me an opportunity to clean out a list of column ideas that never fully developed.



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

I am like the rest of the car owners and I'm bummed how much it costs to fill up. At the current rate, it costs about \$60 to fill the family's van, although we fit in our smaller, economy car that costs about \$30 to fill.

Some members of Congress are upset a recent federal investigation showed no conclusive evidence of price gouging at the pump. Congress members tried their darndest to get oil company executive to say something they should not have related to the price of gasoline.

What I am concerned about is how much pressure we are putting on this one issue. There are many other things that supposedly have a high price. Every so often some group says X amount more are without health insurance mainly because of the cost of the premiums. More lives have changed because of the high cost health care than the \$2.75 a gallon gasoline.

Health insurance companies have not been

treated like the oil companies.

The gasoline price story is yet another example of society's complaining over prices. US Americans want the \$20-an-hour with benefits job, but also want to pay the lowest price possible for everything. That can't happen at the same time.

In that same vein, it was refreshing to hear a conservative, financial advisor radio talk show host blame both Democrats and Republicans for our growing national debt.

Remember, this is the same group of legislators that approved new, stricter bankruptcy laws then turned around and approved the billions for the Iraq War and other expenses without specifically stating how they will be paid. More than likely future generations will be paying for it.

The talk show host said that demand for bet-

ter financial decisions among government goes down to the local level too.

Even though the last lap at the state track meet is not even a week old, I'm sure there are Colby High fans awaiting next year's sports season, specifically yet another new football coach. One fan recently told me Colby High averages a new football coach every three seasons.

Everybody probably has their cure to make Colby football better, but I wonder what would happen if the entire football team went out for track?

I once met a professional football player who credited his time running track for his football career. Running track is great conditioning for summer football camps and practice. That carries over into the season and players still have gas in the tank in the fourth quarter. Makes sense.

With the summer travel season upon us, we need to be good to those people who travel through Colby. Please be polite and give them good directions to whatever they need. The Taco Bell/KFC sign on westbound Interstate 70 and the sign for the Mexican restaurant that does not exist are embarrassingly misleading.

John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.

A slippery slope

It has been said the struggle with sin is not man's worst problem; his worst problem begins when he ceases to struggle. That is perhaps where western society is headed with its dual infatuations with unlimited rights and equality.

I say western society because, although the more conservative among us like to point to the depravity of European culture, the truth is that we are only a couple of decades behind them.

That should frighten us to the bone when we read about where the more left-leaning countries of Europe are going in their headlong rush into decadence.

Very few movements begin on a large scale and our own movement toward cynical immorality is no different. It did not begin in the 1960s, or even in the wild and woolly 1920s.

It has instead been a steady up and down cycle among various nations and groups within what we know as the western world. First, they have embraced those qualities of life of which God approves but which do not necessarily make one a follower of the Almighty.

Strength of purpose, dignity, humility and hard work are all part and parcel of the life of a believer, but they also benefit the unbeliever in that they are generally good for society.

We can see that among our earliest pioneers. Regardless of their reason, and some were not very pious at all, those who came were required to have the aforementioned qualities in spades if they wanted to survive.



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

Next came a religious awakening. In our case, there were two and historians have dubbed them "The Great Awakening" in the mid-18th century and "The Second Great Awakening" at the beginning of the 19th. Not very original, I know, but it gets the point across.

Each of these created an understanding among the people of man's need for God and resulted in a search for God's truth among the people. Some historians point to a third "Great Awakening" at the end of the 19th century as well.

At some point in time, however, the combination of hard work and God's blessing on people who seek him coalesced into a wealthy nation and a generation which had forgotten the source of their wealth.

No, we have not lost our spirituality, but we seek it in different ways. Instead of seeking God's will, we seek that which meets our wants, which may or may not be what is actually good for us.

We have mistaken being nice for kindness. Nice people are inoffensive. They do not take a stand when easy divorce, abortion, and homosexuality threaten to destroy the very fabric of our nation because they do not want to hurt the feelings of others.

Nice people seek to remove the pangs of conscience because such things are painful. Unfortunately, once the pangs of conscience are gone, lying becomes a way of life, and cheating, whether in school or the boardroom, is condoned at worst and excused at best.

Nice people seek to change our vocabulary. Adultery becomes an affair, sodomy an alternative lifestyle and drunkenness a disease.

Kind people are not always so nice. They see the dangers of such behaviors and seek to protect society, including those who are caught up in the trap, from the results. True kindness is not easy it requires work and it requires emotional investment in people, but it will stop our slide.

You see, kind people do not wish to hurt people anymore than nice people. Kind people, however, see the hurt from sinful behavior, both to society and to the individual and want to stop the pain. Nice people just want to ignore it and let the slide continue.

I guess being nice isn't really all that good.

Jay Kelley is a local minister and writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

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Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

