

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint

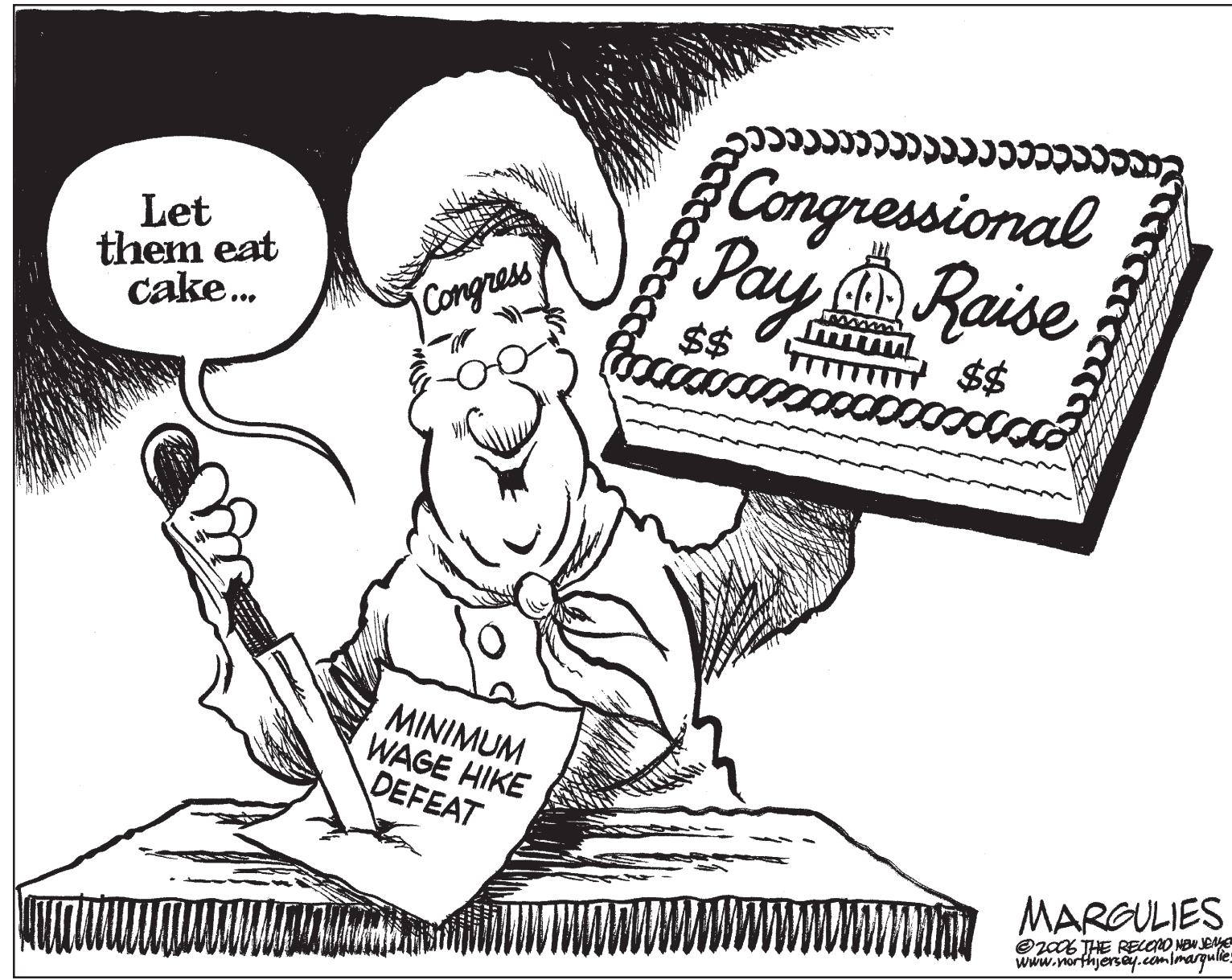


Stars and stripes carry much emotion

Do we need a constitutional amendment to ban flag burning? The Senate is debating what would become the 28th Amendment this week, and observers give it half a chance of passing. The more conservative House passed a similar measure last year, so if this one gets by the Senate, it's likely that the amendment will go out to the states for ratification. And it's more than even money that the states will give the required three-fourths consent, since all 50 legislators have passed resolutions asking for an amendment. We may know by the end of the week whether burning an American flag will be just an insult, or a federal crime. Why the amendment is so popular now we're not sure. Flags burned along with bras in the hippie era of the 1960s, but flag burning is not in vogue today, at least not in this country. And the U.S. government isn't going to send the FBI out to catch flag burners in France or Syria. Maybe it's just the emotional content of the act. Most of us were brought up to revere the flag. We learned the stories of soldiers who risked their lives to snatch a fallen banner, who died carrying the colors, who braved enemy fire to raise it over a captured island. We get misty-eyed when the flag goes by during a parade and irate when we see a city car dealership flying a faded, tattered Old Glory to bring in business. When we were Scouts, we learned how to fold the flag, how to display it, how to keep it from dragging on the ground. We pledged our allegiance to the flag as youngsters and many of us swore to defend it — and the nation for which it stands. Debate on the flag amendment splits mostly along party lines, with Democrats claiming Republicans are using the issue to boost their flagging numbers before the fall elections. Not all Democrats have lined up against the amendment, though. Wary of being branded as pro-flag-burning, such liberals as Senators Hillary Clinton of New York and Dianne Feinstein of California have come out for the ban. Rest assured, even if the amendment passes, someone will burn a flag. As Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania said, flag burning is a mean act, designed to hurt. In some ways, it's an ultimate protest. Our enemies abroad will continue to burn Old Glory. The amendment may prompt them to even further excess. But we should remember, glorious as it is, the flag is only a symbol. The nation for which it stands is stronger and more enduring than ever. Protesters may burn a flag, but that does not hurt America. It makes us wiser, tougher and more determined. So why do we need a constitutional amendment? — *Steve Haynes* (The Senate on Tuesday failed to pass the amendment by one vote.) *Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press*

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.

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Caught holding the bag

The other day, a friend sent me an article about women's purses and some frightening facts about how clean they really are. I don't think I will ever look at my purse the same way again. For instance, while we may know what's inside our purses, the author asked if we have any idea what's on the outside? A microbiologist decided to put purses to the test — for bacteria — with surprising results. The conclusion was we women might want to rethink where we leave our purses in the future. Like most women, I carry my purse everywhere — from the office, to public restrooms, to the floor of the car. In fact, there's not too many places I am not carrying my purse around during the day. In the article, one woman said she drives a school bus, so her purse has been on the floor of the bus a lot. My purse also has a home in the grocery shopping carts and I have seen some women put their purses on bathroom floor stalls while changing a diaper. Getting back to the point, the idea was to check for bacteria on purses. Microbiologist Amy Karren of Nelson Laboratories in Salt Lake City, Utah, did a test on the inside and outside of purses. The outcome of her tests were all of the purses were not only high in bacteria, but high in harmful kinds of bacteria.



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

In the study, Karren said most women told the laboratory they didn't stop to think about what was on the bottom of their purse. Most said they usually set their purses on top of kitchen tables and counters where food is prepared. "Most of the ladies we talked to told us they wouldn't be surprised if their purses were at least a little bit dirty," Karren said. "It turns out purses are so surprisingly dirty, even the microbiologist who tested them was shocked." Among the bacteria found, *Pseudomonas* can cause eye infections, *staphylococcus aureus* can cause serious skin infections, and salmonella and e-coli found on the purses could make people very sick. In one sampling, four of five purses tested positive for salmonella, and that's not the worst of it. "There is fecal contamination on the purses," she said. The good news was leather or vinyl purses tended to be cleaner than cloth purses, and

lifestyle seemed to play a role. People with kids tended to have dirtier purses than those without, with one exception. The purse of one single woman who frequented nightclubs had one of the worst contaminations of all. "Some type of feces, or even possibly vomit or something like that," she said. As a final thought, Karren said a woman's purse won't kill the owner, but it does have the potential to make someone sick if kept on places where we eat. As for suggestions, Karren said women should use hooks to hang a purse at home and in restrooms, and don't put it on your desk, on a restaurant table or on your kitchen countertop. Experts say you should think of your purse the same way you would a pair of shoes. "If you think about putting a pair of shoes onto your countertops, that's the same thing you're doing when you put your purse on the countertops," Karren said. Another suggestion was to wash cloth purses and use leather cleaner to clean the bottom of leather purses. As a avid purse carrier, I hadn't really thought about some of the places I tend to lay my purse, but I will pay more attention now. In fact, maybe it's time to buy a new purse. If for no other reason, bacteria is a great excuse for going out shopping. *Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.*

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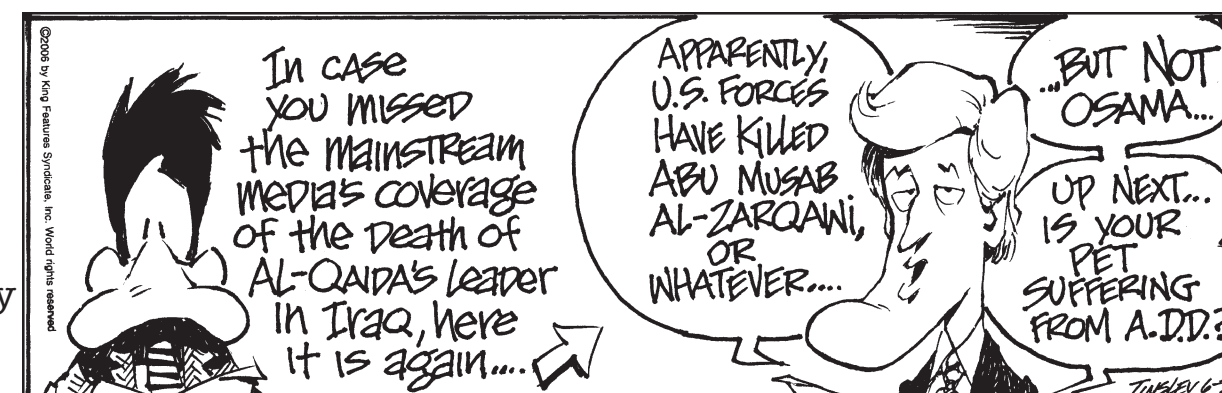
Your turn

Center provides help for mental health

Gary J. Parker, Dana Schmid
Colby
As the state of Kansas looks at its mental health programs, it is very proud of its consumer driven operations. With 20 consumer run organizations across the state "Wings Upon the Prairie" is proud to call Colby its home city. Wings Upon the Prairie, located at 485 N. Franklin, is dedicated to raising awareness about mental health issues to the public and to its members. It's main emphasis is to support consumers of mental health services by providing opportunities not available through the community mental health centers. Wings Upon the Prairie

has taken on the motto from this year's recovery conference theme, "Transformation: Consumer voice, choice and outcomes." Wings Upon the Prairie is a non-for profit 501c3 and is funded by the state of Kansas through an SRS grant writing process. Wings Upon the Prairie has to demonstrate leadership, education, training and research as outlined by its grant. Wings Upon the Prairie works in partnership with the Self-Help Network of Kansas and the Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health. Also, area businesses such as Tuffy and Linda Taylor, Sunflower Bank, Colby Bowl, Taxes & More, Ed's Barbershop, Wal-Mart and others who support Wings Upon

the Prairie at its various activities. Wings Upon the Prairie participates in national and state conferences, is an active member in the CRO Network and has hosted a Kansas Consumer Advisory Council for Adult Mental Health quarterly meeting. This year a highlight has been hosting a luncheon for the governor's mental health services planning council. Wings Upon the Prairie was honored to be the only CRO that the council managed to visit this year. For more information about Wings Upon the Prairie and its programs, please feel free to contact Dana Schmid or Gary Parker at P.O. Box 385, Colby, Kan., or (785) 460-7477.



Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley