

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### One question can save lives

By Steve Haynes

Emergency service in rural America gets better all the time. New computers and global positioning equipment can track calls and pinpoint an accident site.

Ambulances are better equipped and crews better trained than ever. Hospitals are more prepared for emergency cases as air ambulances rush victims to city trauma centers.

The national 911 system integrates response and saves lives. There's one little detail that's often overlooked, though, a flaw that could be easily fixed.

The dispatch system still relies largely on local county dispatch offices. Dispatchers in hundreds of locations across the country take 911 calls and route them quickly and efficiently.

Most have not really adjusted to the era of cell phones, however. Most still answer the phone with something like, "911 emergency."

That's fine if the caller is right there in town. It's not so great when you're out on the highway and have no idea who you are talking to.

At thousands of points across the nation, a cell-phone call might be routed to as many as a dozen different towers. On any given day, a call from the same hill might go to one county dispatcher one time and another county the next.

Callers simply can't tell what dispatcher they will get, and most aren't thinking clearly enough to ask.

One night this spring, a group from Texas wrecked a car a few miles south of the Nebraska line. A local man pulled up and asked if everyone was all right. Some were hurt, none seriously.

"Have you called for help?" he asked. "Yes."

He called the county emergency center just in case. Sure enough, the dispatcher had no idea there was a wreck just north of town. He called a deputy from home and sent an ambulance.

While it seemed to take forever, the deputy, rumpled hair, wrinkled pants and all, arrived a few minutes later. He was followed closely by the ambulance, manned by volunteers also roused from bed.

Five minutes later, a sheriff's deputy and a fleet of fire trucks from Nebraska roared up to the scene in a blaze of red and blue.

The original call had gone to a Nebraska dispatcher. He had sent his troops, not knowing the wreck was well into Kansas. Not finding anything in their state, they kept going — to their everlasting credit.

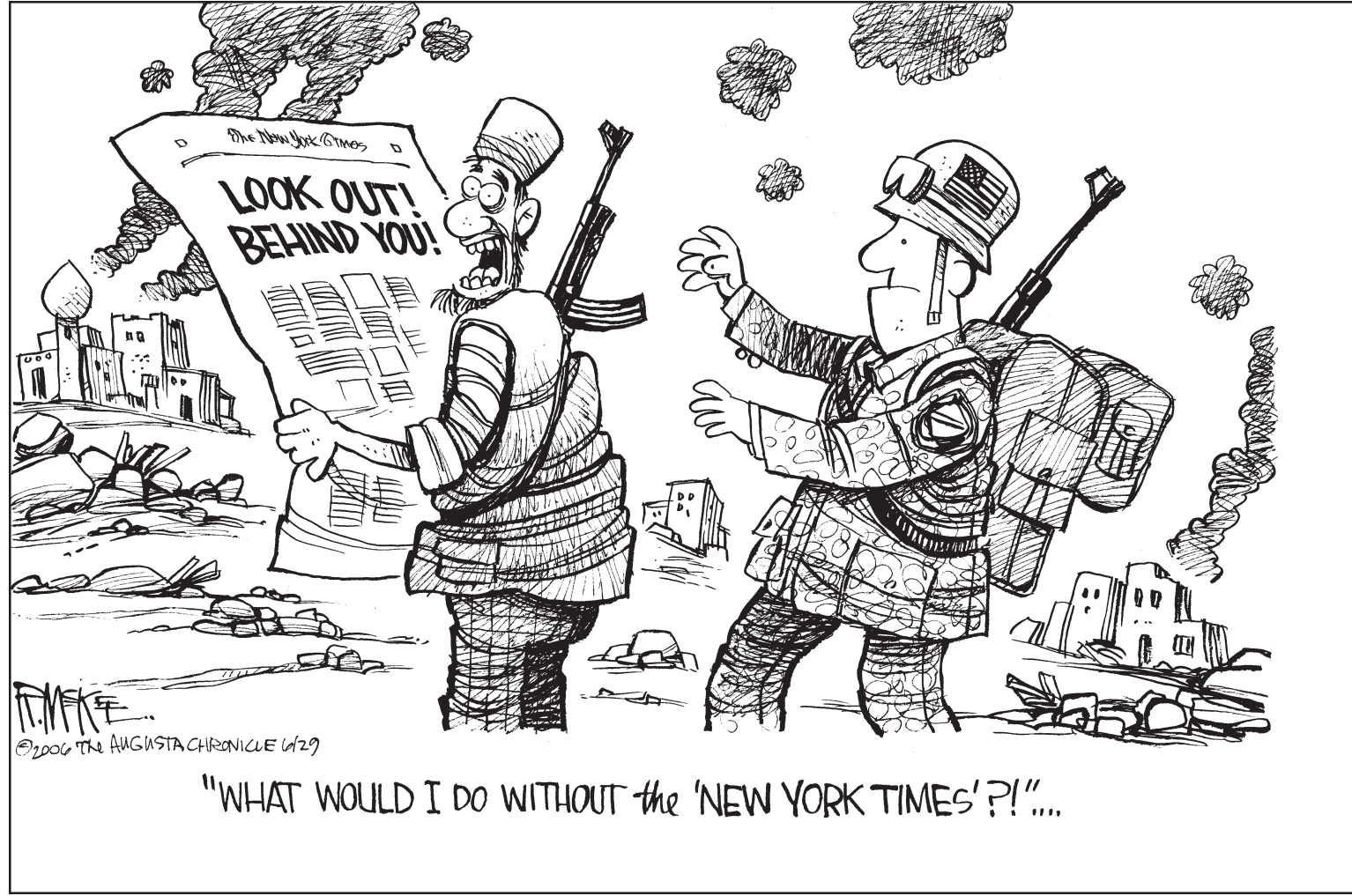
The whole thing might have been avoided had the dispatcher been trained to identify his location to callers. That's not the case in most counties today.

When you call 911 from a mobile phone, you have to ask the dispatcher where he or she is and what county will respond. Dispatchers are trained to probe and find out where an accident or fire is, of course, but it doesn't always work.

Someday, the new satellite technology may make all this past tense, but it could never hurt for dispatchers to identify their location. It could only help.

And it might save a few lives.

— Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.



### Lessons can be learned

I read an interesting article by Alex Epstein, who has been published in major newspapers for his opinions on business and government regulations.

Specifically, the death Wednesday of former Enron Chairman Kenneth Lay, he said, should give businessmen everywhere a reason to pause and think about what they are doing in order to make a profit.

Since many people perceived Lay and other Enron leaders were as eager to make money by bilking investors — the ethical lesson would be in teaching or forcing businessmen to curb their selfish, profit-seeking impulses before they turn criminal.

However, Epstein said Enron did commit fraud, but its fraud was primarily an attempt to cover up tens of billions of dollars already lost — not embezzled — in irrational business decisions.

Enron, he said, began as a truly productive, innovative company in the field of energy, but the company's leaders were not honest with themselves about the nature of their success.

In Epstein's observations he believed Enron executives tried to be 'New Economy' geniuses who could successfully enter any market they wished. The mentality of Enron executives in engineering their bad decisions was that if they felt it should succeed, it would succeed.

They made no distinction between reality as they wished it to be and reality as it is. As they experienced failure after failure, they deluded themselves into believing that any losses would



**Patty Decker**

● **Deep Thoughts**

somehow be overcome with massive profits in the future.

"Enron's problem was not that it was 'too concerned' about profit, but that it believed money does not have to be made: it can be had simply by following one's whims. The solution to prevent future Enrons is not to teach (or force) CEOs to curb their profit-seeking but to teach them the profound virtues money-making requires.

Above all, we must teach them that one cannot profit by evading facts. This is what Enron's executives did not grasp — and the real lesson we should all learn from their fate."

Epstein's opinion got me to thinking about the many corporations I have worked with and something one of the CEOs of a newspaper group said. It was in Chicago and during a convention that one businessman said maybe 30 percent of all corporate decisions made will be correct.

Having not been completely familiar with Enron and its demise, it's difficult to understand all the issues involved.

In the business world, I do understand that corporations need to make profits for their shareholders.

The problem comes in when those profits appear to be out of whack with consumers. Somewhat off the subject, but still relevant are the price hikes on fuel and natural gas.

For example, it seems like every year natural gas companies raise their rates and the average person tries keeping up by insulating their homes or looking at more energy efficient ways to offset those costs by buying new windows, caulking, etc.

The hope is that one day the consumer will be able to get ahead of the game by reducing their costs over time. Unfortunately, that doesn't ever happen since no sooner does the consumer spend thousands of dollars getting more efficient, the rates go up.

Granted, I know everyone needs a profit and the oil companies are continually having to build oil refineries, but what a vicious cycle.

Think about it. Consumers take measures to cut costs while oil companies raise rates to keep profits up and upgrade. The system could work well if employers would offer raises consistent with the increases by these huge corporations — but that's not what happens.

What's the solution with Enron-type corporations or higher prices? I don't know, but if anyone out there can offer their suggestions, I am all ears.

Decker is editor of the Free Press. Her column appears on Fridays.

### Newspaper readers will have to swallow it

By Steve Haynes

Benjamin Disraeli, a 19th century British diplomat and prime minister, once said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies and statistics."

Then there are letters from Postal Service public relations men.

One of those wrote a response last week to our May 31 editorial warning of planned steep increases in postage.

Wrapping himself in the cloak of Founding Father Ben Franklin, our country's first postmaster general and also a noted newspaper publisher, Postal Service Vice President Azeezaly S. Jaffer tried to make light of rate increases planned for newspaper subscribers.

It's pure bunk, backed up by statistics.

If you look past the breezy references to poor old Ben, you'll note that the writer does not deal with the arguments about declining mail volume, diversion of profitable first class traffic to electronic delivery and the death spiral initiated by ever-increasing price increases on the remaining mail.

Because that's all true.

Soon, the service will be delivering mostly what we call junk mail. Soon, it will be hauling a letter you mail to someone across town to Wichita to be sorted at an "efficient" automated

center and hauled back across the state.

The letter does not deal with the horrible service out-of-area readers get, because the Postal Service hasn't done anything about that so far. Higher prices for worse service, that's been the rule.

Then come the statistics. The editorial warned of a coming 24.2 percent increase on newspapers mailed in the county where published.

Why, that's a bargain, he claims. Those rates haven't gone up, they've gone down. The rate would be "only" 9 to 11 cents a paper — which is true.

It's also true that the rate today averages about 8 cents a paper, and 2 cents is a 25 percent increase.

The writer claims a dime to deliver a paper sounds like a bargain. He claims newspapers are getting "Express Mail" service for just pennies.

Except that no one pays Express Mail rates to get a letter across town overnight. That's what we expect from the Postal Service for ordinary mail — next-day delivery in town.

Uh-oh. Does that mean we'll soon have to pay \$14 for Express Mail just to get a letter delivered to a neighbor?

The fact is, newspaper readers are facing an unwarranted 25 percent increase in delivery charges. It'll cost them a buck or two a year. And

they can expect more and more to come.

A dime to deliver a paper might seem like a bargain, but the current rate is a fair price. Publishers sort and deliver papers in walk-sequence order so carriers don't have to "work" them. They just open the bundle and pass them out.

Newspapers, one industry spokesmen points out, don't use much of the postal system's infrastructure — just the carrier:

"Not the blue boxes, not the transportation, not the mail processing plants nor the machines nor air freight nor rail nor most of the rest of the huge infrastructure. Most of this mail does everything but tie the carrier's shoelaces."

Postal delivery is preferred by publishers and readers, but it costs just 5 to 6 cents apiece to hire carriers to deliver the same paper. That's an alternative many publishers will have to consider.

Is a 25 percent increase in costs a bargain, as Mr. Jaffer says?

I don't know anyone who'd buy that statistic. Publishers' experts says the Postal Service doesn't have valid cost data to back up that rate.

Newspaper readers will have to swallow it, though, unless something changes.

And we all better get ready to pay more and more for other postage, too.

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. These are used for verification of the writer only. If, however, you want your address and telephone number to appear with your letter, please ask us to do so when you submit your letter, or include a note with your letter. 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. You can expect your letter to appear in print within 24-48 hours of receipt. Letters to the Free Press allow readers to become engaged in public debate on topics they deem important. Please consider sharing your thoughts with the family of Colby.

#### Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley



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