

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Let 'em sue us

Criminal, that's what it is.

Small towns across America are losing their polling places, even the right to hold city elections in their towns.

You'd think there'd be an outcry, but hardly anyone seems to care.

This outrage starts with the Helping America Vote Act, which Congress passed four years ago to remedy what were seen as flaws in state election processes after the Florida debacle six years ago.

"No more hanging chads," was the battle cry.

Congress being Congress, and Washington being Washington, someone slipped in a requirement for voting machines to help handicapped voters. It made little difference that no one had particularly seen that as a problem.

And no one anticipated what would happen to small-town voters.

Since these machines are expensive — \$4,500 each, plus about \$3,500 a year for programming and upkeep — no one wants to buy more than they have to. The solution, blessed by state and county officials all over, has been to go to one or a few polling places in most counties.

That way, you only need one machine to comply with the law.

The result is that towns like Kanorado no longer have voting in town. People will to drive to the county seat on election day.

It's just one more nail in the coffin of rural America. And no one in Washington or Topeka — or even at the county courthouse — seems much to care.

The logic of all this is incredible. No one knows how many voters need help with a paper ballot, but we're willing to wager it's fewer than the number who will be disenfranchised by closing their local polling places.

One official pointed out that most of those who will be affected are elderly and many do not drive on the highway. They apparently do not count in Congress.

The handicapped have pressure groups in Washington, though, powerful lobbies who Congressmen cannot ignore. Small towns have few champions.

Blame? There is plenty to go around.

Our representatives in Congress allowed this foolish law to go through.

State and county officials wrung their hands, seeing what would happen, but meekly offered no protest to Washington.

City officials right here ignored the debate until the machines were ordered and the primary election planned.

Some counties took the expensive route and ordered more machines, but given the expense, that's not an ideal solution.

What should have happened?

Four years ago, people should have set up a howl.

State officials, led by the governor and secretary of state, should have led the protest. The state Legislature could have jumped in.

It's not that the needs of handicapped voters, whatever those are, should be ignored. But it should be enough to have one machine at one poll where they can go. Home voting by mail or early machine voting might help.

Then go ahead and open the rural polls, no machines and no requirements for accessibility. It won't help a handicapped citizen to provide easy access to a polling place in the county seat if they can't get there. It certainly won't help the rest of the voters.

And then our officials need to have the courage to say, "We're tired of having Washington try to make our decisions for us. We're tired of 'one-size-fits-all' laws. We're tired of what's killing rural America."

Start a movement for common sense.

Then have our election — and let 'em sue us. — *Steve Haynes*

Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers

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*.

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout Excellence, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography.

Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

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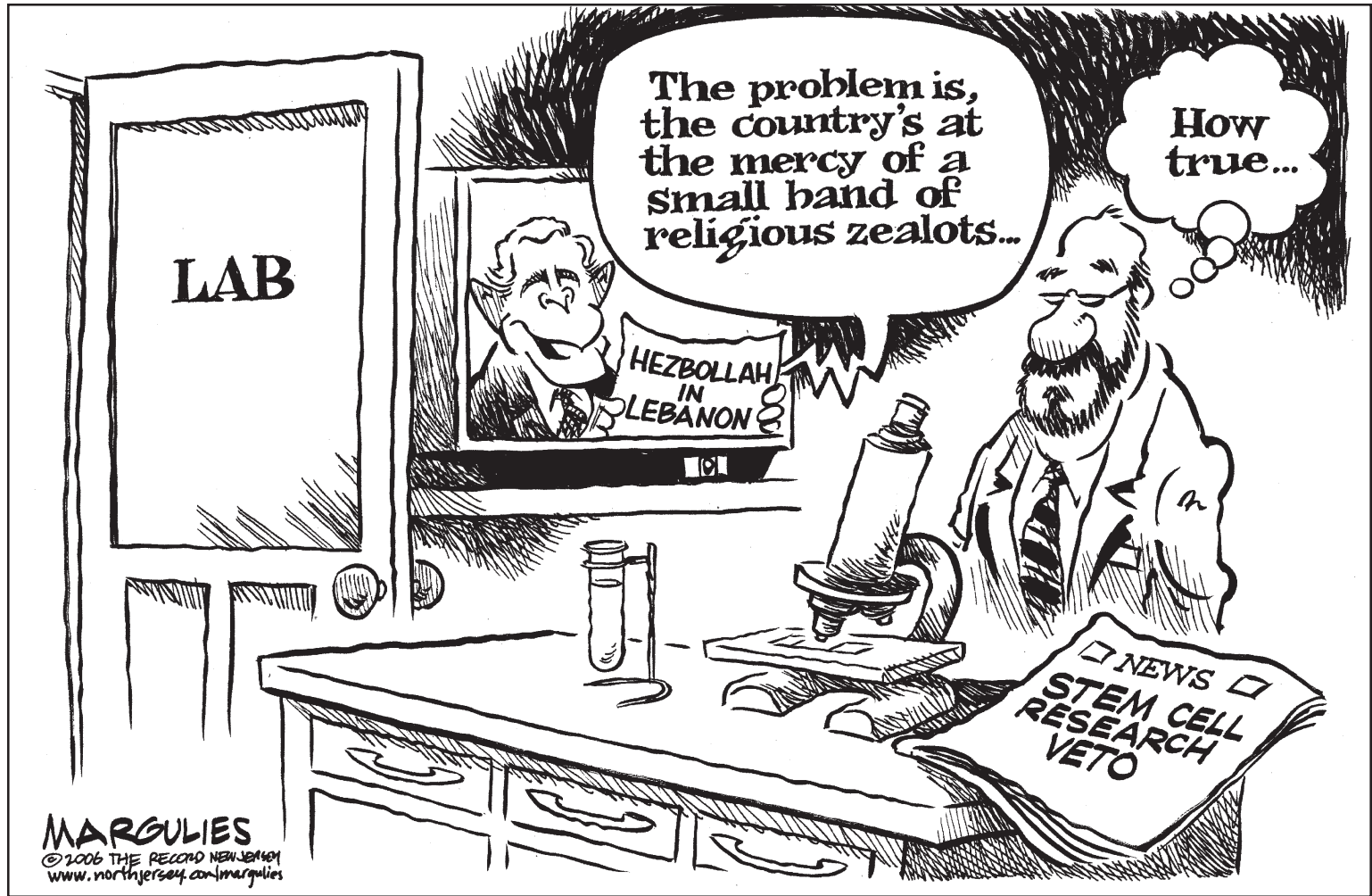
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the day observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Haynes Publishing Co., 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE is paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to The Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth, Colby, Kan., 67701. THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news credited to it or not otherwise herein. Member Kansas Press Association, Inland Press Association and National Newspaper Association. **SUBSCRIPTION RATES:** In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$38, 8 months \$53, 12 months \$70. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$50, 8 months \$62, 12 months \$78. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$57, 8 months \$67, 12 months \$81. All other states, \$81, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company



We all need to do our part

Water is on my mind a lot these days with temperatures hovering around 100 and the humidity sometimes almost as high.

A big reason for my interest in water, though, is twofold. Husband Randy and I have been doing a lot of landscaping around our house. We have planted a variety of maiden grasses, bamboo and other hearty vegetation that can withstand the heat in the high plains.

In fact, we are even considering planting buffalo grass next year as another way to conserve water. But, that's still in the planning stages. The second part is water is, of course, because I want to be able to maintain my yard, flowers, small garden and plants on my own.

It's important for everyone to be a responsible citizen. If so, we get to keep control of when and how much water we use.

For those who haven't read what's happening in other Kansas locations, it's not a pretty picture. For example, in Salina residents cannot water their lawns at all. I had to re-read the list of water restrictions to make sure I interpreted that correctly. From what I understand it's difficult to compare Salina's water situation with ours.

Still, how awful would that be not to water our lawns? It's not only a chore, but can be relaxing after a long day at work. Consequently, I hope others in Colby will consider conservation efforts now rather than have the city dictate to us when we will water.

Many articles have been written about the best times to water lawns and the worst times. I water before 10 a.m. and then after 7 p.m. To water at 2 p.m. is ridiculous due to evaporation.

I also spoke with Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong who offered some information regarding the water source for Colby.

She told me we get our water from the deep wells in the Ogallala Aquifer.



Patty Decker

● Deep Thoughts

In a Water Conservation Plan developed by the city of Colby many years ago (and approved by Kansas Department of Health and Environment, Bureau of Water) we have three stages for water use:

Stage 1 — (Water Watch) - three days of consecutive water use exceeding 3.5 million gallons per day;

Stage 2 — (Water Warning) — three days of consecutive water use exceeding 4 million gallons per day;

Stage 3 (Water Emergency) — three days of consecutive water use exceeding 4.5 million gallons per day.

Armstrong said Wednesday we have not experienced three consecutive days of water use exceeding 3.5 million gallons per day. And the good news is we are holding our own a lot better than even last year. After doing a little research on my own, I discovered we hit the Water Watch stage July 21. So here we are, a week later and still avoiding any city intervention and I think it's been a lot hotter.

Another fact our city manager said was that we have 747,709,332 gallons of water rights. In 2005, the total amount of water pumped was 589,843,500 gallons of which 199,718,400 gallons was from the water treatment facility on East Fourth Street.

Again, I think we all deserve a huge pat on the

back for our efforts with water usage.

A friend sent me the following list of items related to "You know you are in Kansas in July when . . ." and here they are:

- You know you are in Kansas in July when . . .
- The birds have to use potholders to pull worms out of the ground.
- The trees are whistling for the dogs.
- The best parking place is determined by shade instead of distance.
- Hot water now comes out of both taps.
- You can make sun tea instantly.
- You learn that a seat belt buckle makes a pretty good branding iron.
- The temperature drops below 95 and you feel a little chilly.
- You discover that in July it only takes 2 fingers to steer your car.
- You discover that you can get sunburned through your car window.
- You actually burn your hand opening the car door.
- You break into a sweat the instant you step outside at 7:30 a.m.
- Your biggest bicycle wreck fear is, "What if I get knocked out and end up lying on the pavement and cook to death?"
- You realize that asphalt has a liquid state.
- The potatoes cook underground, so all you have to do is pull one out and add butter, salt and pepper.
- Farmers are feeding their chickens crushed ice to keep them from laying boiled eggs.
- The cows are giving evaporated milk.

We are sure a sturdy lot living here on the High Plains, enjoy the weather the best you can and stay cool!

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

Your turn

We thank God for Hildyard

Richard and Gloria Pabst Oakley

We feel that we need to start this letter with "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone." King James Version (John 8-7).

This letter is in regards to Dr. Hildyard and his medical license being revoked.

We thank Dr. Hildyard for saving Richard's life. He wasted no time in helping us to consult with a specialist in Denver after a CAT Scan, he ordered to be taken, exposed a brain tumor. He was truly concerned and very compassionate with us in conversation about the tumor on Monday evening, June 12.

He informed us he would make us an appoint-

ment in Denver with a neurosurgeon and on Wednesday we were in Aurora for further consultation with a neurosurgeon. Surgery followed a week later on Thursday and the tumor was removed. Richard's ICU nurse in Aurora South Medical Center, Aurora, Colo., visited with me and shaking her head commented, "Whoever Richard's primary caregiver was...his doctor...needs to be commended on his medical expertise on how he found, diagnosed and acted quickly on this tumor. He did an excellent job." She also stated that a lot of times this kind of tumor goes unnoticed on so many patients until more severe symptoms occur and usually it's too late.

We were fortunate to have Dr. Hildyard who

took further procedures to find out what was causing a slight headache behind the eye and forehead.

We thank God he did!

It is hard to find a good medical doctor to set up practice in rural northwest Kansas. To try and "dig up dirt" just to curb one's appetite "to get even" is wrong.

Thomas County and the surrounding counties should feel fortunate to have a doctor of his expertise and knowledge. Dr. Hildyard was exceedingly professional, compassionate, and extremely concerned.

He is a competent and trustworthy physician. We are very grateful that he has been a part of our lives and health.

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 Free Press readers. Thank you.

Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley

