

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



# Ridiculous for Americans

From The Winfield Daily Courier

Kansans should think twice before trying to make English the state's official language.

Sen. Jim Barnett, the Republican nominee for governor, wants to do this. Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, the Democratic incumbent, is apparently going along.

The ill of official English is the signal it sends. That signal is one of defensiveness, exclusiveness, prejudice and anger. "Adapt to our culture or go home" is the message to immigrants, "and do it overnight."

This is a ridiculous position for Americans.

We are an immigrant people. Where would our nation be without the non-English speaking immigrants who helped build it? Even more to the point: What good do we think it would do to make English the state's official language?

No one is more eager to learn English than an immigrant making his or her way.

Enclaves of non-English speaking immigrants are a way of life in New York City, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles. Some of our greatest writers in English have emerged from those enclaves.

The foreign-born are the fastest growing group in our country's population. They are coming to the heartland in increasing numbers.

We have to wonder why folks in rural Kansas would not want to welcome some of these immigrants, to stem the decline of our population. Unless, of course, we would prefer to vent our anger and prejudices at having to adjust to newcomers, even as they are busy adjusting to us.

### 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.

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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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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

## TRIPLE THREAT



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## Cosmic conundrum

The past couple of weeks, I've been keeping track of the news that Pluto might lose its status as the ninth planet in our solar system.

Not really a big deal?

Well, a bunch of astronomers decided last week they needed to redefine what a planet is, so Pluto loses its planetary designation.

Pluto has now been downgraded to a "dwarf planet."

By no means is Pluto the smallest body in the solar system. It has three of its own moons, if one can call them that. The largest is Charon, followed by Nix and Hydra. The two smaller moons were discovered last year with the Hubble Telescope, and officially named this year.

Pluto was discovered in 1930 by astronomer Claude Tombaugh. Tombaugh was born in Illinois, but grew up in Burdett, Kan. Pluto was discovered at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Ariz. (Incidentally, I have been to both Burdett and Flagstaff.)

I think the whole issue is nothing more than a nitpick on the part of a bunch of scientists.

If they're going to reclassify Pluto, does that mean they're going to come up with new definitions for the other planets and moons in the solar system?

Up until last week, there were nine planets. Now there are eight, with a dwarf planet at the edge.

A refresher — the planets in the solar system are Mercury, Venus, our own Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.

If they scientists wanted to get really nitpicky, I think they could debate changing the definition of solar system. On a technicality, Jupiter and Saturn could be considered mini solar systems



### Tisha Cox

#### • Off The Beaten Path

because both planets are gas giants each with numerous moons.

And both have moons that are bigger than newly-christened dwarf planet Pluto.

I think most people don't care if the definition of what a planet was changed, but that is the heart of the issue. Up until now, there was no real definitive definition of what a planet is.

After the International Astronomical Union vote last week, there are now three categories for bodies in the solar system: planets, dwarf planets and small solar system bodies.

Planets are now defined as "a celestial body that: (a) is in orbit around the sun, (b) has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it assumes a hydrostatic equilibrium (nearly round) shape, and (c) has cleared the neighborhood around its orbit."

In other words, if it's massive, round and has its own orbit around the sun, it's a planet.

According to the spacetoday.org Web site, there are more than 140 moons in the solar system. Some are bigger than Pluto, and two are larger than the planet Mercury, the planet closest to the sun.

Ganymede is the largest in Sol's system at a diameter of 3,280 miles; Saturn's Titan is sec-

ond largest with a diameter of 3,200 miles. Earth's moon is also one of the larger planetary satellites in the solar system, so the proper definition of planet starts to get a little muddy when bringing the moons into it.

Every planet in the system but two have moons. Mercury and Venus are without moons, but the rest have them, although Mars two "moons" are really nothing more than captured asteroids.

The dust has yet to settle on the Plutonian planetary debate, but I think the scientists are missing the point. Why quibble about a technicality when they could instead consider the reason they got into astronomy in the first place.

It probably wasn't to sit around and argue about definitions, and I certainly hope it was because at some point in their lives, some of them walked outside and took a glance up at the night sky and were struck with wonder.

Awe-inspiring doesn't begin to cover it. Here in western Kansas, we've been blessed with flat ground, open skies and plenty of starry, starry nights. And that kind of makes me wonder why there isn't an observatory here.

But back to my point — maybe instead of dicking over the details, they, and everyone else need to remember the joy of staring up at the night sky.

Nothing I can think of is a better reminder that Earth is less than a flyspeck in one of millions of galaxies spread across the universe, and there is still so much we don't know.

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## Changing the diet

How long can you stay in the hospital without showing some improvement or progress for what ails you?

The cost of health care is stretching our economy to the point of collapse for many of us. Insurance companies demand accountability and refuse to pay unless the provider can show progress. They require verifiable tests before major surgeries or untested treatments.

A few years ago, I was all prepped and ready for a pace maker. The doctor came in and said, "We can't do it yet. We have no tapes verifying what someone detected by visual observation and counting your pulse rate by holding your wrist. Neither do we have hard copy printouts of blood pressure fluctuations. We can't proceed on the information we have."

I spent three days in the hospital, while they tried duplicating or authenticating what some one told them my heart was doing. She knew I didn't have the resources to pay for the treatments and that the insurance company would balk on paying. The technicians who ordered my pace maker apparently didn't check far enough or thorough enough. That was nearly ten years ago and I still don't have a pace maker. When the doctor nor the hospital could show progress, they released me and I came home. I made a few adjustments in my lifestyle and diet. And now nearly 10 years later, I seem to be doing OK, at least my heart is still ticking.

### Ken Poland

#### • Ken's World

Did we have verifiable proof that justified the invasion of Iraq? How long have we been in Iraq? Have we made any real improvement or progress? Who is paying the bill?

We went into Iraq as a result of faulty observations. We found no current or usable weapons of mass destruction. We removed Saddam Hussein hoping it would shut down the terrorists. We've decided establishing a democracy is why we are there. Iraq is not even close to having a free functioning government and the prospects are slim that they ever will. There is no evidence showing progress or improvement for the Iraqi people on the streets. We couldn't confiscate weapons that didn't exist. The removal of Saddam Hussein has made no difference in the number of people joining the ranks of the terrorists. The people on the streets have less dependable electricity, less security from assault, and no truly functional government. The oil production which was supposed to pay for rebuilding is hardly paying its own way. The sectarian schism is getting wider and wider.

Who is paying the bill? Are the bureaucrats

and politicians who recommended the action paying? The greatest cost is loss of lives, both military and civilian. The billions of dollars spent are gone and we have very little to show for them. Our volunteer military personnel are no longer truly volunteer. Many are being held beyond their enlistment periods. There is very little evidence that the bureaucrats and politicians are encouraging their sons and daughters to volunteer for duty in Iraq. It is not them on the operating table and they are not paying the bill.

Instead of protecting our access to oil and any other natural resources we want, by deploying our military prowess, perhaps we need to curtail our consumptive lifestyle and share those resources with the world.

Instead of forcing our form of government and our religion on the world, perhaps we need to demonstrate God's love, even if the world doesn't deserve it. After all, God loved us before we loved him and our Christian faith says He gave his son for us and we will never be able to repay him with our good works. We preach the Sermon on the Mount found in the gospel of Matthew, on Sunday, then go out on Monday and say it won't or doesn't work. How do we know it doesn't work? Have we honestly tried it?

Maybe we need to just come home and change our lifestyle and diet.

Ken Poland lives in Gem and contributes to the *Colby Free Press*

### Mallard Fillmore

#### • Bruce Tinsley



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