

# Opinion

## Free Press Viewpoint



### More than seats need repaired

Was it an honest mistake with good intentions or did the Colby School Board just not do their homework? For the second time in a week, the Colby School Board held a special meeting Wednesday related to the proposed new stadium at Dennen Field. For the past few years, the Colby Booster Club has researched and raised funds to build a new stadium — one to replace the 50-year-old-high-maintenance seats.

The board gave the booster club their blessing to take on the project, but never formally took action until the district's attorney John Gatz intervened last week. Since the money involved with the stadium will eventually fall into district accounts, the stadium must be treated like any other major purchase or project the board handles. Bids are required, just like they are for other school district needs from buses to furnaces.

Before Gatz' explanation, the booster club had already made agreements with CBS Constructors, a McCook, Neb., construction company to take the lead with the 1,033-seat stadium. That agreement vanished as Gatz explained the legalities to have bids.

Colby Board President Tracy Rogers said last week there was nothing intentional about not having the project go to bid.

"We weren't trying to circumvent the system," he said. "That wasn't anyone's intention. We want to make sure we're following all the proper steps. We're lucky we were able to catch it in time."

But what damage has already been done?

Will CBS Constructors still be interested in the project enough to submit a bid? Remember, they thought they already had the job. Now they have been told to take a seat.

The entire project is estimated at \$200,000. What happens on bid opening day and CBS Constructors is not the lowest or best bid? When compared with other bids, will the Colby School Board still approve CBS Constructors at a higher amount knowing what the booster club had already done?

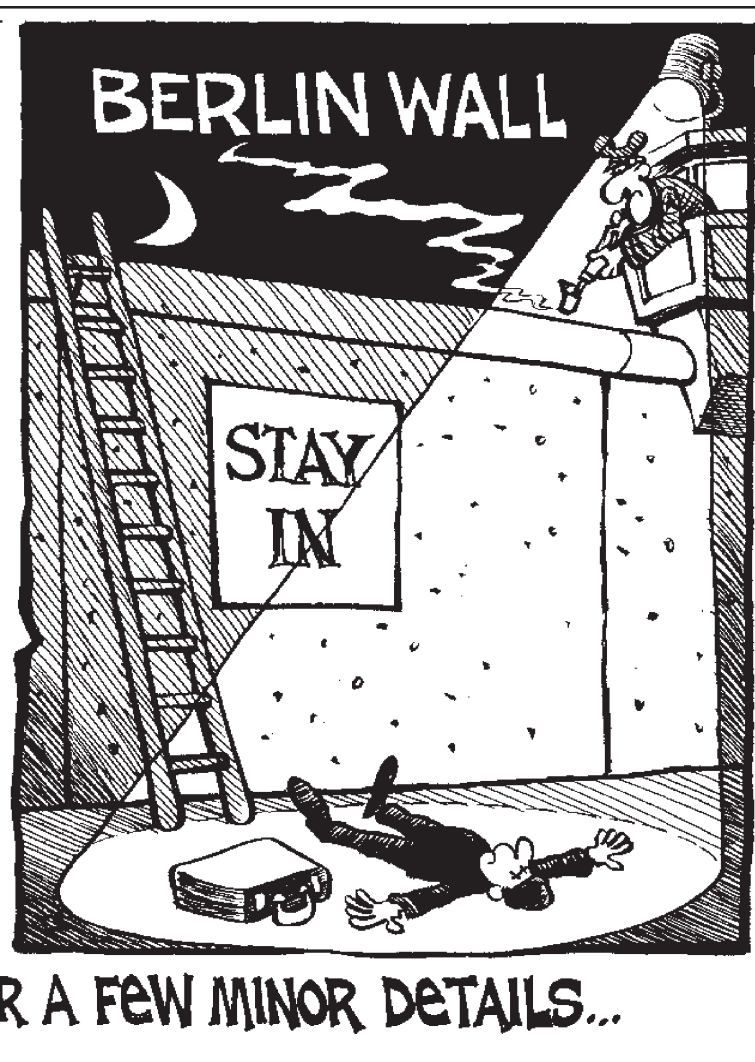
If they do accept CBS Constructors' higher bid, that will be honorable, but costly.

*John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press.*

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@nwks.com](mailto:jvannostrand@nwks.com) or [pdecker@nwks.com](mailto:pdecker@nwks.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

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EXACTLY ALIKE, EXCEPT FOR A FEW MINOR DETAILS...

### Nasty campaign tricks

Having made it through the political ad campaign for state and a volley of representatives and local officials, I thought I'd let you know its 727 days until the last ad for the presidential race.

Oh stop laughing, or maybe crying, but it's true. We weathered the barrage of campaign materials, including some which were illegally put in a bunch of rural Sheridan County mail boxes.

Yep, someone put nasty letters about Vic Bielser in rural mail boxes without having them run through the post office. Talk about gutsy, maybe the correct word is stupid, but use an official United States mail box by anyone other than the United States Postal Service, is not legal.

Yes, despite the fact people put a post box at their residence, or roadside, only properly post-marked materials are to be placed inside those boxes. Nasty letters, and other materials, from Avon books or old Cabela's catalogs, are to be postmarked and delivered by an employee of the United States Postal Service, not someone who just doesn't like a commission candidate in a political race.

Speaking of political races, I wonder if U.S. Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., will run for president in 2008? After last week's stupid comment about service members, I'd sure hope not.

For anyone who missed it, Kerry's oral attack on President Bush's security policy flopped and indirectly attacked service men and women saying they were not well educated.



**Jan Katz Ackerman**

#### • From Where I stand

Excuse me, I spent 20-plus years as a military dependent and personally knew then and know now some of the most intelligent people in America's service branches. Fortunately Kerry apologized for his remark, but the damage was already done and I sure hope he never leads America.

I'm sure there are opinions on both sides of that coin, and as such, it's the veterans which we'll honor on Saturday which can speak out the loudest. Even if they don't agree with me about Kerry, those who have served, or are currently serving in the Armed Forces are due our respect.

Originally called Armistice Day, Nov. 11 is set aside as the nation's legal holiday to honor America's veterans for their patriotism, love for the country and willingness to serve and sacrifice for it.

While I grew up in the Vietnam era, I for one hope Americans never again treat veterans the way they did those returning from Vietnam. They should have been respected for their service.

One of the common factors between the Vietnam conflict and the war in Iraq is no matter whether you supported Vietnam or now support Iraq, it's the troops that need our support first and foremost.

You can argue all day about whether or not America should or should not have been in Vietnam or Iraq, but the truth is that was then and this is now. What's most important is that those of us who are watching the entire operation unfold, need to back our soldiers, and yes, even their commander in chief, 100 percent.

For those of us who didn't "put up," we need to shut up and wave our flag as high as we can hoist it. Don't get me wrong, if you voted you have a voice and can complain, as long as your complaints are directed toward the right people — your state's legislators. Tell them how you feel about being in Iraq, but keep quiet when it comes to a particular service man or woman who is over there. Not only I will appreciate your zipped lip, but so will the loved ones of those who are serving in Iraq who might be standing right next to you in the grocery line.

Speaking of the grocery line, how about buying an extra turkey, bag of potatoes and a few munchies and take them to the one of the homes in your community which houses someone whose loved one is in Iraq. Talk about giving thankfully, that would put a new meaning to our next holiday, Thanksgiving.

— *Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press*

### Food supply is like playing Monopoly

**By Debra Eschmeyer**

Most everyone has been told to not play with his or her food, yet somehow agribusiness is playing Monopoly with our nation's food supply.

When pouring your next glass of milk, consider who decided what the cow ate and who controls the distribution of profits. One would think the farmer and consumer take the lead roles in managing the supply of safe and healthy food. The farmer should control his or her business while mainly battling unpredictable weather-expecting the price he receives for a quality product to be set by a fair and honest marketplace.

Forget it. Lack of competition is wielding just as much force as Mother Nature. Witness the Oct 17 acquisition agreement of the Chicago Board of Trade by the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME)—which would combine the two largest United States futures exchanges.

If you think this and similar mergers don't affect your freedom of choice and the quality of food you eat, think again. Food is not simply a commodity to produce at a larger and larger scale, squeezing the family farmer out, along with the value of safe and healthy food.

The CME is already the world's largest exchange, determining futures and cash prices for products such as cheese, butter, live cattle, timber, and fertilizer. It sets the benchmark prices for farm country. Within seconds, the coarse yelling on the trade floor is translated around the world, affecting farm-gate prices and grocery bills of billions of people.

If this merger goes through, the newly formed CME Group will control America's agriculture and futures markets to the detriment of produc-

ers and consumers and to the glee of agribusiness and traders. They can line their pockets with money generated by destroying family farmers and the consumer value that exists in having diversity in the marketplace.

The new CME Group could still end up with a Go to Jail card, as the U.S. Department of Justice must first give approval to the merger. And the CME does not have a perfect slate. Last July, six U.S. senators, including Clinton, Specter, and Feingold, sent a letter calling on the Government Accountability Office to investigate whether cheese trading on the CME is susceptible to price manipulation. The study was requested in the framework of the upcoming farm bill to evaluate fully the CME. The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) is also currently investigating the nation's largest dairy cooperative, Dairy Farmers of America, for alleged racketeering and manipulation of milk prices through insider trading on the CME.

Family farmers already know from previous paychecks that this is not a good forecast. Because the CME is a private company, it is not subject to necessary transparency and accountability rules. The CME is subject to nominal oversight by the CFTC over the trading of futures, but there is no external oversight for cash trading.

With market consolidation and little to no oversight, competition is becoming defunct. Consumers will pay more for fewer choices; farmers will get paid less—Don't Pass Go, and Don't Collect \$200—that will go to the trader living down on Park Place.

Lack of competition is not new to modern

agriculture. The largest producer and processor of hogs in the United States, Smithfield Foods, Inc. recently announced plans to purchase Premium Standard Farms, the second-largest producer.

On top of owning 20 percent of the nation's hogs, Smithfield would then envelop the ContiGroup, the largest cattle feeding entity in the world, and it controls a 40 percent interest in Premium Standard Farms. Pork or corporate profit for dinner?

In 2002, the late Senator Wellstone joined with Senators Daschle, Harkin, Feingold and Grassley to reinstate competition into the agriculture sector and to rein in the excessive control of a few giants in the livestock industry.

What won in the Senate was negotiated away in the conference with the House. Let's hope that following the election that Congress will listen to the public demanding fair and transparent markets that are critical to our nation's economy and diet.

The CME Group merger would be yet another win for corporate agribusiness players and a loss for consumers and farmers in the game of food system Monopoly.

— *Debra Eschmeyer is the project director of the National Family Farm Coalition, a non-profit that provides a voice for grassroots groups on farm, food, trade and rural economic issues to ensure fair prices for family farmers, safe and healthy food, and vibrant, environmentally sound rural communities here and around the world (www.nffc.net). Distributed by MinutemanMedia.org*

#### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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