

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint

Thinking inside the box

Today traditionally starts the Christmas shopping season. The season will come to a close one month and one day from now as living rooms across the country will have piles of wrapping paper and empty boxes. It's likely some of those gifts will have come out of shoeboxes. If the gift itself is not new shoes, some gift will have fit perfectly in a shoebox.

Rather than throw out the box or recycle it — keep the box. No matter how small the gift was in the shoebox this year, it could hold something even bigger.

Samaritan's Purse is asking people across the country to fill shoeboxes with age and gender-appropriate gifts for kids 2-4, 5-9 and 10-14 years old. After the boxes are collected, they are shipped around the world to kids who need those gifts.

Samritan's Purse and the gift-filled shoeboxes are projects of Franklin Graham, son of the legendary Christian evangelist Billy Graham.

The excitement you will have opening the shoebox to get your gift will probably pale in comparison to the excitement of those kids when they open the same shoebox and see what you put inside. Some of the kids who receive the shoeboxes have no idea what shoeboxes are intended for.

It does not have to just be toys either. Some kids don't have a toothbrush. Some kids dream of having a small pad of paper and pen.

And it's OK to include a short letter about yourself so the recipient knows more about you. It makes the gift more personal, just like how you knew who gave the shoebox to you in the first place. Samaritan's purse suggests including \$7 for shipping costs.

Samaritan's Purse is trying to generate more awareness in North-west Kansas for the shoeboxes. Drop off locations this year were in Hoxie and Norton. Samaritan's Purse is already working on next year's location in our part of the state. Brewster is a possibility.

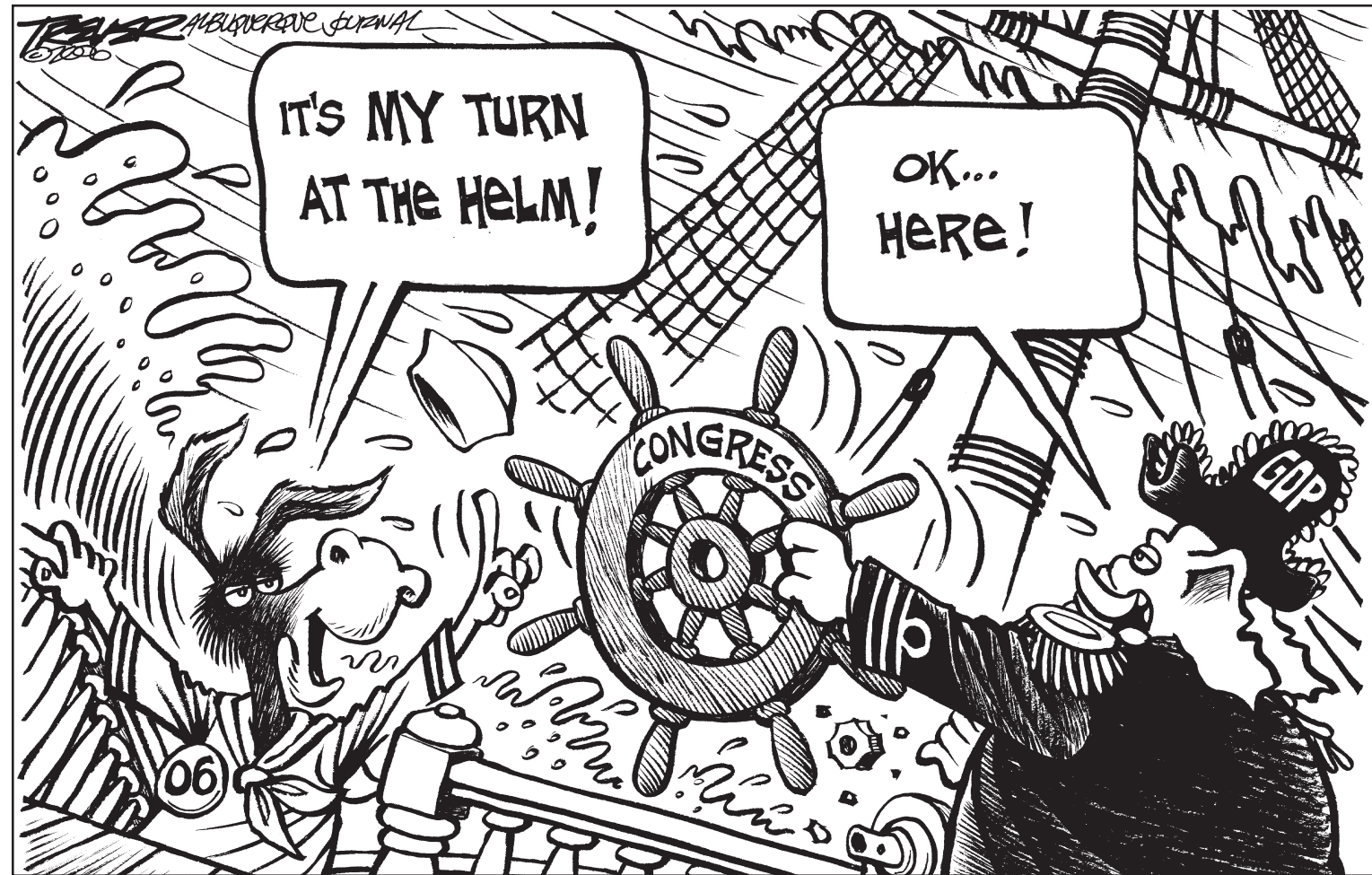
For more information, or to mail a gift-filled shoebox now, contact:

Operation Christmas Child
Samaritan's Purse
801 Bamboo Road, P.O. Box 3000, Boone, NC 28607
Phone: 828-262-1980; www.samaritanpurse.org
— 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@nwkansan.com or pdecker@nwkansan.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

Where to write, call

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- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorriso
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Making holiday adjustments

I know the Thanksgiving holiday is over, but being thankful for what we have is always a good thing.

Although, this year was a bit different than most in that I was alone for most of the day until about 4 p.m. when my husband, Randy, got home from an out-of-town trip.

Most years we go to Champaign and visit my older brother and his family, but that didn't happen this year. Even when we weren't able to make the Illinois trek, at least our immediate family was together. But, as I said, this year was different.

Our oldest daughter, Tracy, lives in Germany now so she wasn't here. One of our sons lives in Denver and he couldn't make it and our other son, a sophomore at Benedictine College came home briefly before heading out to Sheridan, Wyo. to help a friend. That's a story in itself, but for another time. Suffice to say, it was one of those Thanksgivings that allowed me a lot of time to reflect on past holidays.

While strolling down Memory Lane, reminiscing about other Thanksgivings and onto Christmas holidays, I got to thinking about when I was a youngster and my parents took us on trips.

In those days, we probably should have been counting our blessings a lot more than even today.

The reason I say that is because my father, although a wonderful man in many ways, was not the most safety conscious when it came to trips. Unlike most people, my father wasn't a fanatic about keeping the car tuned up, checking the oil, the tires or doing any other routine maintenance prior to trips.

As children, we were trusting, though. We were just excited about the prospect of going to



Patty Decker

• Deep Thoughts

my grandparent's farm for Thanksgiving or any other holiday that came our way.

I remember this one time we packed up the 1964 Bonneville convertible (which in those days was a fairly new car) and in the dead of winter we headed out to visit my grandparents in Troy. At that time, we lived in Springfield, Ill., and it was about a 350-mile trip from door-to-door, took about seven hours and was two-lane all the way on Highway 36.

For those old enough to remember, that particular highway was a main artery connecting the country from east to west (prior to the interstates being built). It also had a bad reputation for head-on collisions. As children, it was probably a very good thing that we were unaware of these facts because if we had put it all together — bald tires, treacherous highway, traveling at night, etc., we might not have wanted to go.

Being naive, though, we just couldn't wait to hop in the car — no matter what the hour or apparent dangers. Arriving in Troy on this particular excursion, everything went well and other than one of my cousins pulling up his chair and then dropping it on my big toe, the Thanksgiving dinner and holiday was uneventful.

However, the ride home was a bit more than any of us bargained for.

No sooner had we passed St. Joseph, Mo., which was about 30 miles from Troy, the heater in the Bonneville went out. It wouldn't have been so bad if we were traveling in October, but this was a cold night in November and convertibles at that time left a lot to be desired.

So as the cold, winter air howled through the convertible roof, all of us started grabbing blankets, coats and whatever else we could find to keep ourselves warm.

My father could barely see out of the windshield because when the heater went, so did the defroster, which meant low to zero visibility. As my dad tried to remain calm, continually wiping the inside of the windshield off with his forearm, my mother was panicking.

As for the rest of us in the backseat, we just saw it as an adventure.

At the time, the situation wasn't funny, but looking back now — it's times like those that put a smile on my face when I remember my parents and their own ways of doing things. Actually, all I have left is memories of them and there's not a day that goes by I don't miss them and their strange, but loving peculiarities.

As for memories regarding this Thanksgiving, I know when I look back it will be filled with good thoughts that each and every one of my family members — our children, our children's grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and many good friends — were all well.

As the Christmas season begins, I plan to enjoy every moment with my family and friends and pray it's a happy time and creates wonderful memories for others as well.

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

Not a good idea

By Steve Haynes

Talk about the bad old days. Congressman Charles Rangel, the New York Democrat poised to take over the House Ways and Means Committee, can't wait to start a draft.

He claims it will keep the country from jumping into foreign misadventures on shaky pretense cooked up by politicians.

Sure, Chuck. That's what kept us from spending billions to send millions of men to Vietnam in the 1960s to lose a war and hundreds of thousands of lives.

It worked then. Oh, wait. We had a draft then, something about the Cold War threat.

That was a draftee army we sent to Vietnam to lose and die while an earlier version of Donald Rumsfeld tried to micro manage the war.

It was a lousy Army then, Chuck, and it got worse as the draft filled its ranks with people who neither knew how to be soldiers nor much cared. Drugs, violence, poor leadership, no direction

at the top. It was a mess.

The burden fell not on the rich, who finagled to keep their sons out of combat, as always, but on the poor, the middle class, the minorities, the same people it always falls on. The draft didn't help then.

The draft didn't keep Congress from passing the bogus Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or from appropriating all those millions to fight that war.

Sure, there were good people in combat then. Also a lot of losers who had no business at the front lines.

A conscript Army seems like a good idea some days, egalitarian and democratic. As a fighting force, though, it's a difficult proposition. The Romans found that out. The Russian Army was, many days, a paper tiger, a hollow machine run by conscripts who cared little and knew less.

Even in World War II, it took years of effort and training for the U.S. (or the Russians) to mold a draftee force into a fighting machine. And then, people cared about the war.

Today's Army is different, prouder, better

trained, more sophisticated, peopled by men and women — active duty and reserve — who know their job, think it's important and don't mind doing it. Talk to some of them.

Many say it's the finest army in the world. We won't argue.

A year or two of mandatory public service may sound like a fine and noble idea, but to many, it's involuntary servitude, something Americans rebel at.

There's plenty wrong in Washington: Congress is a scandal, no matter who runs it. The administration is out of touch. Regulations and pork-barrel spending multiply while our rights are trampled.

The Republicans failed to lead us anywhere but to Abramoff's for dinner. Now it's the Democrats' turn.

But a draft? Not a good idea.

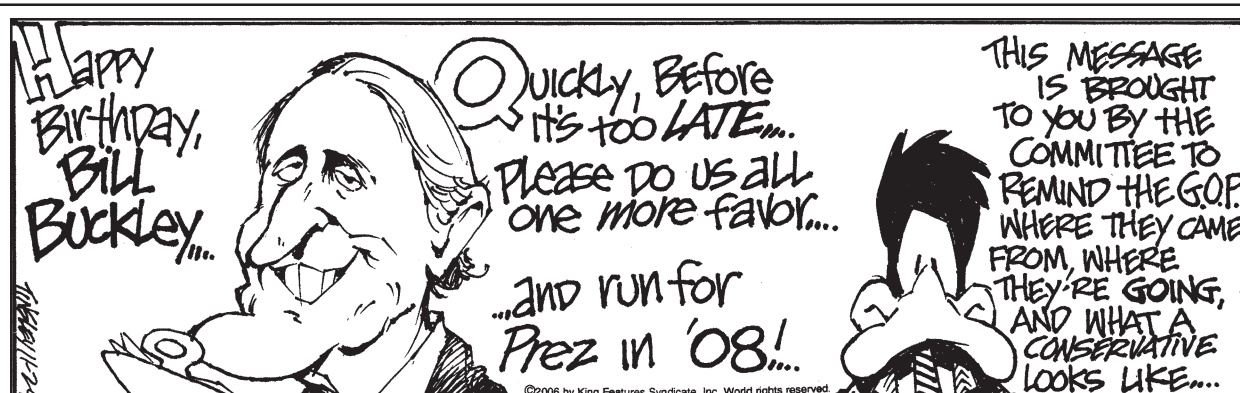
Unless they will take Congressman Rangel. — Steve Haynes is owner of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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