

# Opinion

## A Kansas Viewpoint



### Letting people know

**From the Goodland Star-News**  
Public notices go in newspapers because that is the best independent means to deliver information about local government to a wide audience at a reasonable cost.  
City and county officials want to take control of the information process, telling the public and the Legislature they can save money by using the Internet, so public notices will be an issue during the upcoming legislative session.  
Spring Hill Mayor Mark Squire asked Sen. Karin Brownlee last month to eliminate requirements that cities publish public notices in newspapers. Squire told Brownlee at a Spring Hill City Council meeting Nov. 30 that publishing notices in the newspaper was "needlessly costing city government money."

Squire said he would like the city to be able to instead publish public notices on its own website.  
"This is a real simple way to give funding back to the public," he said, "a real way to keep money in our coffers."

Truth is, the cost of most legal notices any city or county publishes are not paid by taxpayers, but rather by the people who are seeking a zoning change, utility franchise or industrial revenue bonds for economic development. Delinquent taxpayers and others pay the cost of notices affecting them.

The city does pay for the ordinances that raise utility rates or make changes in the city code that have a potential penalty. Other public notices a city pays for are to publish the budget and to let people know what the city money has been spent on, including the salaries of the people paid by the city.

What Mayor Squire failed to mention is that it costs money to publishing notices on a website. Web pages have to be built, hosted, maintained and — most important, but nearly impossible — guarded against hackers. Not all Kansas cities even have one, and huge numbers of Kansans don't have any way to look at one.

Public notices in the newspaper let people know what is happening in their city or county, and what the government is deciding through hearings on zoning, nuisance violations and actions that people want the city to take for franchises for cable television, telephone and other utilities.

Many newspapers, including *The Goodland Star-News*, have been publishing public notices on the Internet already, and at no extra cost to taxpayers.

Public notices are among the higher readership items in any poll — usually, more than half the readers report they keep track of them. If notices were left to the search engines on the Internet, hidden away in the back of city and county computers, readership would plunge.

Depriving the citizens of the broad reach public notices in the newspaper to save a few pennies is not going to improve the public's opinion of local government, but it would serve the interest of officials who seek to hide more of the public's business behind closed doors. It would make it more difficult for citizens to know what is happening with their money.

"Our founding fathers ... supported having a newspaper looking over their shoulder," said Richard Gannon, governmental affairs director for the Kansas Press Association. "You can't have the government providing these services. You have to have a third party."

Newspapers have been and will continue to be the fabric that holds a community together. They keep citizens involved and informed about what their government is doing. The impersonal web may be World Wide, but it does not reflect the soul of a community the way a newspaper does. — *Tom Betz*



### Time is of the essence

**Rats.**  
Sometimes the best made plans are messed up by the unexpected.

A couple of weeks ago, we said we would run a listing of area churches' Christmas Eve services. Traditionally, we had several churches purchase an ad highlighting their services and that ran Wednesday. But last week's snowstorm delayed Wednesday's paper. We then included Wednesday's paper with Thursday's Free Press — but thought it would be silly to have the list twice in the same day.

Our apologies.  
(It was great to see the snow anyway. More is forecast later this week.)

We here at the Free Press had had another challenge when it comes to scheduling. If you haven't noticed, we have had a majority of Colby High and Colby college wrestling pictures so far this season. It's not that we don't want basketball pictures in the paper, it's just the scheduling.

Colby High wrestling has just two meets at home in January. With as many homes meets as they had in December, we wanted to take the opportunity to get as many wrestling pictures now, because they will be few and far between later.

Colby Cinema had the right timing.



#### John Van Nostrand

##### • Line in the Dust

They had "The Nativity" movie last weekend. It is a fantastic film. The movie gives some depth, personality and dialogue among the characters involved with the birth of Jesus Christ.

It must have been tough to create all of that from the Biblical story that has little communication and interaction between the characters. Giving those people some personality on film can also create some controversy. I thought the writers and producers did a fine job.

With Monday New Year's Day holiday, it's time for everyone to ask (ad nauseam) about new year resolutions. Although they are honorable in principle, the timing of two of them is terrible.

A former publisher of mine once told me to consider the pressure of some of the most popular resolutions.  
Losing weight: Since late November, people

have been to Thanksgiving Day dinner, a variety of holiday parties between their work and their kids' school, Christmas Day dinner and the junk-food galore at New Year's Eve parties. (Pickle wraps are food for the devil.)

People like that who say they want to start losing weight on Jan. 1 are starting at their worst time. I think it should be a gradual transition. That way, those people get some time to put the holidays, and the depression of eating so much, behind them.

Saving money/spending habits: This is similar to the losing weight resolution. Again, since November, if not earlier, people have spent money on all that food, decorations and gifts related to the holidays. Knowing some of those bills will be in the mailbox in weeks, it puts people in a tenuous situation. The twist is not repeating the same story next year.

Banks sometimes offer certain savings account intended for the holidays. People deposit X amount every month so they will have holiday money come next November. Those bills still need paid — but start also saving some money each month for holidays 2007. That means making some sacrifices.

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

### What is our responsibility?

Will the Democrats deliver us from — — — ? You name it. What is the greatest threat we face? Will the Democrats deliver — — — ?

Again, you name it. What would you most like to see happen in our nation or around the world?

The Democrats won't deliver much of anything if they begin by thinking their very narrow margin of victory is a mandate to unravel every piece of cloth (program) that the Republican majority and administration has woven into our fabric, in the last six years. Neither did that victory give them a blank check to do whatever they want. A continuation of the polemic partisanship of the past few years will stymie any healing that must begin, if we are hoping to unite our society. If the new majority attempts to ram their agenda through by sheer force of partisan power we will have a continuation of back door and secret alliances.

This election did not indicate a groundswell or upheaval that demands a slide to the extreme left. Neither does it indicate a full and complete rejection of all that the right holds dear. We are very narrowly and evenly divided. And, that means a moderate position for government that allows more freedom for individual choice and responsibility. We don't need "big brother" government to dictate our ethics and morals based on spiritual mandate of any particular religion.

#### Ken Poland

##### • Ken's World

We need a government that sets standards and enforces rules that build and protect relationships between all peoples, regardless of their political or religious affiliations.

An immediate withdrawal from Iraq may not be the only answer to that situation. Indiscriminate and total roll back of all the tax legislation of the past six years may not be prudent. Reversing all the deregulation of manufacturing and service industries may not correct any perceived harm that has come about through the easing of regulations. Moving to the extreme left in the judicial system appointments to counteract the move to the extreme right that has been the goal for the past six years will not guarantee justice in our court system. Conducting "witch hunts" and vindictive punishment will not right the wrongs of the past. However, a close look at all those issues is in order.

How will the Republicans handle them-

selves? As the minority, with enough votes to stall progress in committees, will they be looking for opportunity to frustrate the legislative process? Will they be more concerned with the next election cycle and the presidential race than they are with efficient and timely legislation? Will they be lying in wait to pounce on any evidence of ethical or moral character that can be used to discredit the victors?

What about you and me, the voting public? What is our responsibility? Will we drop our partisan loyalty and demand open and free debate on all legislative issues, regardless of party origination?

Will we be able to look beyond ourselves and encourage our legislators to act in the best interest of not only our nation but all of mankind around the world? Will we be persistent and vigilant in demanding moral and ethical behavior of all our government officials, both elected and appointed?

Will we be willing to work within our own religious organizations to deal with the spiritual issues and allow our civil servants to work with and protect the freedom of all by passing legislation that does not discriminate nor show favor toward any race or religion?

*Ken Poland occasionally contributes to 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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**Mallard Fillmore**  
• Bruce Tinsley

**2007 NEW-YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS**

The G.O.P.: I RESOLVE TO GROW A NEW BACKBONE.... AND TO STOP BEING "CENTRIST" AND SMARMY....

FOR PRES, MAYBE PENCE... OR... HOW LONG'S IT BEEN SINCE... ANYONE'S SPOTTED DICK ARMEY?!