

Opinion

Free Press Viewpoint

Another full plate for legislators

From the Lawrence Journal-World

With the holidays behind them, state legislators now will be turning their attention to the 2007 session, which opens Monday.

At this time last year, lawmakers had a school finance case pending in the Kansas Supreme Court and justices awaiting a "suitable" funding package for the state's K-12 schools. Although lawmakers still must fulfill funding for the multiyear plan they approved last year, that issue probably won't dominate this year's session as it did the last.

That doesn't mean, however, that the Legislature's plate won't be full.

The Kansas Board of Regents will be pushing hard to obtain funding for much-needed repairs on the state's university campuses. Both the governor and incoming House Speaker Melvin Neufeld have said they will place high priority on funding for those repairs, but it's uncertain how much money they want to dedicate to that purpose or how it will be spent.

At least one state senator has floated the possibility of using revenue from increased casino gambling to pay for university repairs.

Transportation also is likely to be on the Legislature's agenda. The state's current \$13 billion plan will run out in 2008. Last summer, the Kansas Department of Transportation released a study that said the state's interstate highway system was in need of \$515 million in the next 10 years to widen sections of the road in Kansas City and Wichita. The fact that the 864 miles of interstate highways in Kansas represents less than 1 percent of the roads maintained by KDOT offers a preview of the kind of expenditures that might be called for.

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*.

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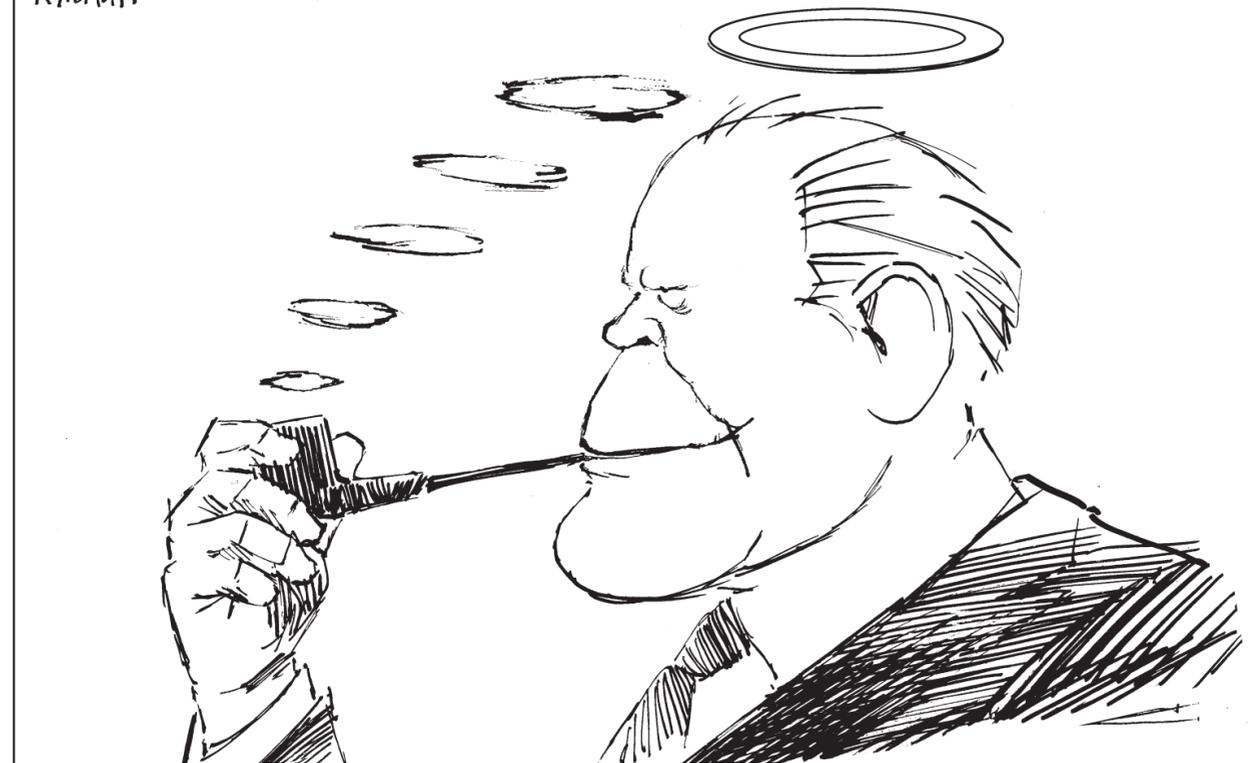
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REXBABIN THE SACRAMENTO BEE



When push comes to shove

A push.
A shove.
A tow.
A snowblower.
A good gesture.

Since Sunday morning there has been a lot of the above used. Today, those things are still being done. We knew the snow was coming but realized just how much fell when we were all pushing, shoving, towing and using snowblowers to dig out.

What I have liked most about it is the generosity of fellow Thomas County residents during all of this. Knowing of the city's four-wheel drive or chain rule was in effect over the weekend, I walked from my house to the Colby Fire Department after hearing the roof collapsed.

Sure, Colby fire officials were concerned over the building and the two trucks still trapped inside.

But I could tell a sense of relief the fire department personnel knowing they had a plan B.

Fortunately, the National Guard Armory people said the five firetrucks removed from the building could be kept at their facility.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong on Tuesday was appreciative of the relationship the city has with the armory in such situations. The city needs a place to keep the firetrucks and the armory wants the town to have a safe place for



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

the firetrucks should they ever be needed, especially in situations like this.

That generosity trickles down to the neighborhoods too. Sunday and Monday I began shoveling my driveway at home. The challenge with all of us is when our driveways meet the street. I'm sure there is a path wide enough for one car on each of the minor streets but the problem is digging, or driving, through the pile of snow along the path. The pile blocks the driveway access and, if packed down enough, can be a back-breaker to shovel.

After I thought I had cleared enough snow to drive through, I first attempted to drive our van out onto the street. I didn't make it. After a few minutes of my own shoveling and worthless driving, a few people drove by and noticed my predicament. With a few more hands to push and another shovel, the van was out in moment. I felt like I had to at least get those people a cup of

coffee. But as soon as the job was done, they were back in their own vehicle and down the street. I did say thank you. I can only assume those kind of situations have happened throughout town.

Late Monday, after checking the Free Press office, I was walking back to my house. I was enjoying the exercise. I needed it knowing how much holiday food I have ate since Christmas Eve. I was halfway between the office and my house when a rumble of a pickup came up behind me. The driver stopped, rolled down the window and asked if I needed a ride.

Politely accepted and during the short ride, the man was telling me the stories he has heard of people helping others clearing snow and getting people from place to place. He, too, was out helping his relatives.

I decided to walk to work Tuesday. Just a couple of blocks from home, another person stopped and asked if I needed a ride. I accepted that ride too and realized I was not the only person the driver had offered a ride too.

Maneuvering through our 20 inches of snow will be frustrating and annoying for another week or so. But what will make it easier is if we can all find a minute or two to be someone else's plan B.

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

The work is cut out for them

Who is directing the palliative care plan for our president's remaining two years on the job?

It seems to me that he has been watching reruns of a fairy tale video wherein all the characters live happily ever after. Never mind there is no correlation of the theme with the reality of real life. When not immersed in the video, he has had his head in a barrel that echoes back only what he shouts into it.

This administration has been in a Panglossian stupor for six years as our national resources, credibility and allies have slowly evaporated. He is blindly expecting a favorable outcome or naively dwelling on hopeful aspects of a failed policy. It is almost as if he has been trusting the childish oath of crossing one's fingers and hoping to die and he is hoping that will prove his sincerity and success.

Harsh criticism? Perhaps, but it is hard not to draw those conclusions.

Who are we fighting? Terrorists? Are they terrorists, insurgents or freedom fighters? Or, if we are not fighting, who are we managing or coaching? How do we measure our success or failure?

We keep hearing the echo — insurgents — freedom — democracy — mission — security — we are winning — stay the course — God is on our

Ken Poland

• Ken's World

side — etc. — etc.

Finally, we are noticing a little softening of that echo and a little indication that maybe the fairy tale video has begun to fade and allow a few scenes or glimpses of reality. All is not well and perhaps God is not smiling down upon the mess we find ourselves in.

It is a reality that we have more military personnel in Iraq than the supposed Iraqi government has in the field, and we are talking about putting in more.

It is a reality that there is more sectarian violence and conflict in their society than before the overthrow of Saddam. It is a reality that their public utility infrastructure and local police protection is in shambles. It is a reality that they have no central government that the people support or respect. A picture that comes to mind is the decapitated chicken that is flapping and flop-

ping in reflexive actions. (Some of us still remember the process it took to put fried chicken on the table.)

A recent news report described an operation in which 800 British troops with the assistance of 600 Iraqi troops battled a local government supported prison complex. The Iraqis want us to turn over military control to them when both our forces and theirs, together, are unable to quell the violence. We now are talking of increasing the size of our forces and expecting to have the Iraqi government and forces strengthened and trained to start taking over within six months to a year. You had better cross your fingers and hope not to die before that ever happens.

We've been their nearly four years and we still can't identify clearly who the insurgents are. We expect our men and women to stay calm and rational when they cannot identify friend or foe. We expect them to perform their duties without bias and lynch mob reaction. All the while, their higher ups in the chain of command have been trying to convince the public that we can't treat those people or prisoners like real human beings.

This congress and the next administration has their work cut out for them.

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

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



The New Congress:

"I RESOLVE TO RAISE MIDDLE-CLASS TAXES... IN FACT, I'LL RAISE 'EM PLENTY!"



'CAUSE FOLKS WHO VOTE FOR ME... ARE SO RICH, THEY DON'T CARE... OR SO POOR THAT THEY'RE NOT PAYING ANY!"