

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

For what it's worth

Proving once again that government knows what's best for us, the U.S. Mint has issued regulations against melting down coins to sell the metal for scrap.

"We are taking this action because the nation needs its coinage for commerce," said Director Edmund Moy. "We don't want to see our pennies and nickels melted down so a few individuals can take advantage of the American taxpayer."

Our bet is someone out there already is taking advantage, given the fact that the copper and zinc in a new nickel cost the government 6.9 cents and the metal in a penny is worth 1.12 cents.

Only your government could come up with economics like that: Making coins that it sells for 60 percent of the cost of production. (The Mint says a nickel costs 8.34 cents to make and a penny 1.73 cents.)

A penny isn't worth picking up at today's prices. A nickel is an executive decision.

So why does the Mint keep making money-losing coins? Apparently, because Americans hate change in the system and want to hang onto their coins. There are some alternatives.

The government could just stop making pennies and nickels. The ones in circulation would disappear rather quickly, and we'd make do with dimes, quarters and the new dollar coins.

Maybe the Mint could come up with a \$5 or \$10 coin to ease the burden on our pockets. That'd save the Treasury the cost of printing billions of \$1 bills every year.

That's too sensible, though. Consumers and retailers already know a penny isn't worth counting. That's why stores have a "penny tray": if you're short, just take one.

We already know that a dime today will hardly buy what a penny would get you when most of us were kids. If a dime was the smallest coin we had, people would just make change in dimes. Credit card transactions could still count the penny, but why bother?

Good question.

Tradition, mostly.

Fear that merchants would beat us out of a penny when rounding up prices.

Nothing worth the enormous cost of producing small change each year.

Another plan involves redenominating the dollar: Making \$1 worth \$10 in today's money. Mexico did that a few years back, and it helped stabilize the peso. Of course, they had to trade something like \$1,000 in old pesos in for \$1 new.

Either solution probably is way too sensible for Washington, so we'll continue to drag pennies around — and the government will keep making them — until some smart guy melts them all down.

Oh, did we mention that older pennies, made before 1982, were 95 percent copper? Those, if you can find 'em, are worth 2.13 cents melted down.

What a system.

— *Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including 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@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.

COLBY FREE PRESS
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 \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail with in Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.

Nor'West Newspapers
Haynes Publishing Company

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Blessing in disguise

Got snow?
And more of it?
Yes, as I sit here looking at some six plus inches of white, frozen stuff on my backyard as more wet, white stuff falls from the sky, I realize how very blessed we are right now.

Moisture.
Yippee.

Sure, ranchers can't get to their cattle and live-stock tanks are frozen over. And the Kansas National Guard has airlifted hay to the critters, but look at it this way, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius remembers we are out here. It took back to back snow storms, stranded cattle and motorists to get her attention, but we got it.

With 41 percent of the counties in Kansas being declared a disaster because of downed power poles, not only is the governor paying attention to us, so are a host of power companies and volunteers.

I went for the mail in Hoxie Friday and we had a traffic jam of power trucks sitting by the Midwest Energy building. What a sight. I stopped counting at 10 trucks and didn't count the crew members huddled up in insulated coveralls as they chatted while waiting for orders.

The boss' whistle rang out for the guys to load



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

up.

As he raised his right hand, pointed one finger in the air and used his raised arm to circle his head for crews to follow him, I giggled.

"Load 'em up and move 'em out," I said to one driver.

"Yep, that's about it," he said in reply as if it was a modern-day cattle drive.

Too bad on the other end of the drive are thousands of people who have gone days without power. But the spirit of volunteerism (albeit paid salary for most) was thick in Hoxie that day.

The other aspect to the storm of which we've just endured is the fact that in many ways, life just tends to stop for a while. You eat, drink and sleep snow. Not literally, but you wake up to it and you go to bed with it. Those of us who have

to move it or write about it.

For city, county and state crews who move the stuff around, my hat is off to each and every one of them. Sure, some of them get overtime, but it's more than that which makes me appreciate them. It's their looking out for the other guy attitude that I admire.

For instance, I just love watching neighbors help neighbors shovel, push and pull vehicles and just put up with the sometimes inconvenience of snow. It's that spirit of volunteerism that makes it worth living in the Great North American Desert.

Speaking of desert, hopefully when the snow melts it will find its own level and fill in a few of the cracks left in the ground by the ongoing drought. I wonder how much snow it would take to totally alleviate the drought any way? Wait, that's way too much snow to consider getting.

Anyway, while we can sit and mope and groan about the white fluffy stuff as it piles up around us, the better alternative is to praise God for the blessing it has bestowed on us.

M-O-I-S-T-U-R-E.

Jan Katz Ackerman is reporter for the Colby Free Press

Cut and run



Jay Kelley

• Speaking MyMind

The leaders of the respective houses of Congress are already staking out their territory and setting up the Republicans as the obstructionists. I guess that doesn't surprise me, Sen. Reid and Rep. Pelosi have been doing that for years, now they just have different titles.

Both Reid and Pelosi declared more troops in Iraq was not an option. Instead, they have a plan for a measured withdrawal which sounds suspiciously like "Vietnamization" to me.

Of course, Bush's plan may not be any better.

Personally, I don't think more troops alone is going to solve anything, other than getting more people on both sides killed. There was a time when more troops might have helped, but the numbers were never really the problem.

The American mentality was the problem. No, not the so-called rush to war heralded by foolish liberals (that's kind of redundant, isn't it?) or the faulty (not false) intelligence concerning weapons of mass destruction.

For one thing, it has been conclusively proven Nigeria did, in fact, sell weapons grade uranium to Iraq and that Hussein did, in fact, have a covert weapons program in operation, including more than 500 illegal chemical weapons found since the invasion.

Of course, all that is buried on the back page.

But, those things are not the problem. Once we realized we were not going to be seen as the

heralded liberators by everyone and that there were serious factions within the country which hated us and, in some cases, hated each other, we did not react with the proper force.

George Will said it best, shortly after Baghdad fell, "We must have the monopoly on terror."

In other words, the problem is not the number of troops or the political climate. It is our unwillingness to be the most feared group in the mix. As long as the people of Iraq fear their factions, the insurgents or the terrorists more than they fear us, we cannot and will not gain control regardless of how many troops we send.

As long as we allow a sorry excuse for a Marine officer like John Murtha to make pejorative comments about the Marines at Haditha without any censor, our enemies understand that they can use women and children as human shields and we will do nothing about it.

I don't know if the Marines who were at Haditha are guilty or not, but I know that, thanks to a man who was supposed to protect them, they

cannot get a fair trial and that is absolutely inexcusable. Murtha should be reactivated and court-martialed himself.

As long as we insist on trying to pacify the enemy, we will fail. The only thing which will pacify the people with which we are at war is the complete and utter dissolution of the United States and indeed the western world.

That's why I don't think more troops will help. Regardless of the number of troops we send, we are first of all unwilling — as a people — to do what is necessary to end this conflict.

Second, we are unwilling to incur the losses victory will require. One of the common threads among nations with a history of triumph, both military and civil, is the willingness to sustain seemingly insurmountable losses without losing the will to continue.

That is why Reid and Pelosi are only half-right, as well. If we are no longer willing to do what is necessary and endure the ensuing losses, a measured withdrawal only helps the enemy.

Our choices are twofold: Turn the troops loose and deal with the problem without worrying about public opinion or admit that we don't have the stomach for a fight.

I'm afraid the answer is the latter.

Jay Kelley is a local writer who speaks his mind from time to time. His e-mail is jkelly@st-tel.net.

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

