

Opinion



Free Press Viewpoint

Citizens need the protection

From The Salina Journal

There are not many ways for the public to learn about waste, mismanagement and corruption in government and public agencies. The best sources for this information often are inside employees who have direct knowledge of the shenanigans.

But those employees often fear they will lose their jobs if they are found reporting problems. They must be able to trust that their anonymity will be protected, especially when they are talking to the press.

However, these employees — and the reporters they talk to — lack sufficient protection in Kansas. Reporters can be jailed if they do not reveal their sources — even if their stories are accurate. That pressure discourages sources from talking.

Thirty-five states have passed so-called “shield laws,” which give reporters protection from having to reveal their sources. It is the best way to protect those who come forward with tips and information on government wrongdoings.

Such a shield law is under consideration in the Kansas Legislature, ..., lawmakers are not anxious to give reporters this protection. That is a mistake.

When you get to the bottom of it, shield laws are not about protecting reporters and their sources. They are about protecting private citizens from government misdeeds.

... Citizens must have ways to learn about misconduct in government and there must be protections for insiders who choose to reveal it, and for the reporters who bring that information to light. A shield law would provide that safeguard. It should be attracting more attention in the Legislature and it should be made law.

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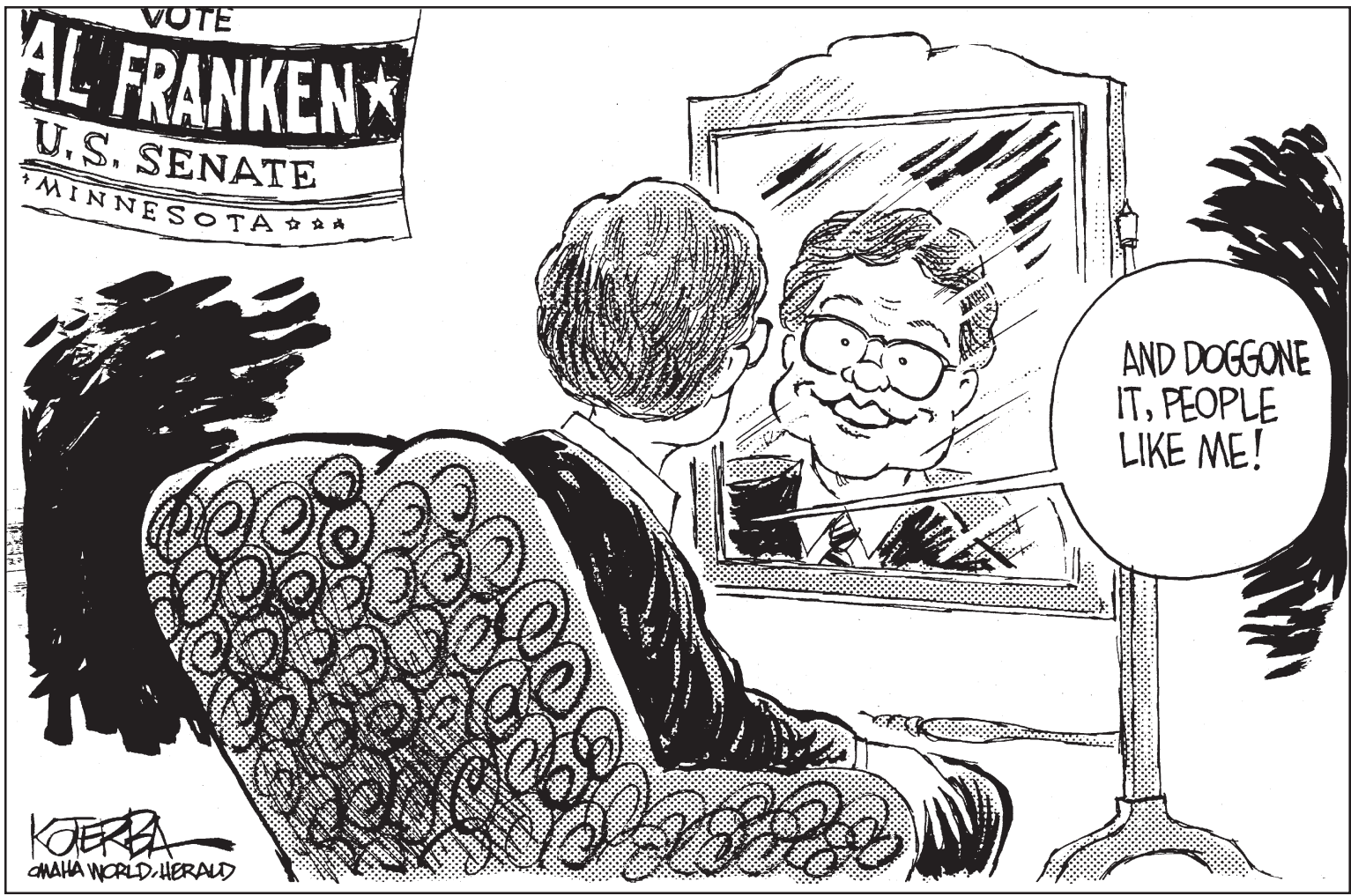
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Demand reasons to vote for someone

Ken Poland

● Ken's World

let the talk show pundits, editors, and op-ed contributors chronicle all the faults of the slate of candidates?

We are most likely looking at the most costly political campaigns in our history. However, money does not buy truth, nor does it guarantee proper ethics and morals. The privilege of public service should not be dependent upon the highest bidder.

It costs more money to shake hands and kiss babies than it used to. The days of standing on the back end of a rail car and addressing a crowd over the hissing release of unused steam from the boilers, and then hurrying on to the next

whistle stop are long gone. Jet planes, advance crews of stage hands and choreographers to prepare the backdrops and assemble supportive crowds cost more than the engineer, fireman and brakeman for the locomotive. Makeup artists and speech writers don't work for nothing, either. The candidate's own press corps is more reliable than hoping for a fair report from the local press.

Are we able to ignore the bells and whistles, veneered autobiographies, partisan or sectarian labels? If we don't look beyond the facade of modern campaign politics, we will be doing no better than rolling dice to select our leaders. Demand that your candidates and political organizations conduct positive campaigns that address the issues they are willing to stand on and that you can honestly say you trust and support. Demand that they present a platform that allows you to vote for someone instead of against someone.

Ken Poland lives in Thomas County and occasionally contributes to the Colby Free Press.

Minimum wage hike is good for business

By Holly Sklar

The minimum wage is headed for a raise — back to the 1950s. That's right, even after rising from \$5.15 now to \$7.25 in 2009, the federal minimum wage will still be lower than it was in 1956, when it was \$7.41 in today's dollars.

The minimum wage was enacted in 1938 through the Fair Labor Standards Act, designed to eliminate “labor conditions detrimental to the maintenance of the minimum standard of living necessary for health, efficiency and general well-being of workers.”

It was never meant to be the minimum level that the nation's worst employers want to pay. That would be as absurd as setting environmental policies to accommodate the worst polluters. Business lobbyists, who'd abolish the minimum wage if they could, have held it hostage for ten years — the longest period ever without a raise. Now they want to collect a ransom of tax breaks to let it go.

Since its last raise in 1997, the minimum wage has fallen 20 percent, adjusted for inflation, while domestic corporate profits are up 74 percent, retail profits are up 55 percent, and business has reaped \$312 billion in tax breaks. “I'm sick of all the talk about business needing tax relief as compensation for a higher minimum wage,” says Steve Zorn, managing partner of Castle Village Farm of Florida.

“We don't need relief. Workers are the ones who need relief. We've gotten plenty of tax breaks for business and certainly don't need to pile more onto minimum wage legislation that won't hurt business to begin with.”

Minimum wage critics predictably forecast dire consequences with every raise, and are just

as predictably wrong. After the last federal hikes in 1996 and 1997, the nation experienced dramatically stronger job growth, and lower inflation and poverty rates. States that have raised their minimum wages above \$5.15 have had better employment and small business trends than states that have not. Minimum wage raises aren't put under mattresses — or in offshore tax havens. They are recycled back into the economy.

“Overall most low-wage workers pump every dollar of their paychecks directly into the local economy by spending their money in their neighborhood stores, local pharmacies and corner markets,” notes Dan Gardner, commissioner of Labor and Industries for Oregon, which has the nation's second-highest minimum at \$7.80.

“Higher wages benefit business by increasing consumer purchasing power, reducing costly employee turnover, raising productivity, and improving product quality, customer satisfaction and company reputation,” says a statement supporting higher minimum wage. It was signed by the CEOs of Costco, the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Majority, the Eileen Fisher apparel company and more than 500 business owners across the nation — from the Four Seasons Restaurant in New York City and Dixie Rod & Custom in Alabama to the Mercury Cafe in Colorado and Broetje Orchards in Washington. And from Candle Enterprises in Minnesota and Vintage Vinyl in Missouri to North Georgia Woodworks and Small Biz Survival in Oklahoma.

“Trying to save money by shortchanging my employees would be like skimping on ingredients,” explains statement signer Kirsten Poole,

co-owner of Kirsten's Cafe and Dish Caterers in Silver Spring, MD. “I'd lose more than I saved because of declining quality, service, reputation and customer base. You can't build a healthy business or a healthy economy on a miserly minimum wage.”

U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce CEO Margot Dorfman says, “When businesses don't pay a living wage, all society pays. We pay through poverty and needless disease, disability and death from inadequate health care. We pay as women struggle to put food on the table. We pay as businesses and communities suffer economic decline.”

Successful businesses like Kirsten's Cafe and Seventh Generation, the nation's leading brand of non-toxic household products, know that miserly wages are toxic to our families, communities and economy.

If employers can't stay in business without keeping their employees in poverty, there's something wrong with their business models.

Even at \$7.25 an hour, the minimum wage would still be two bucks short of the \$9.27 value it had in 1968, nearly four decades ago.

As the business owners' statement says, “We cannot build a strong 21st century economy when more and more hardworking Americans struggle to make ends meet.”

Holly Sklar is senior policy advisor for Business for Shared Prosperity (www.businessforafairminimumwage.org) and co-author of “A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business and Our Future.” Distributed by MinutemanMedia.org

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Mallard Fillmore

● Bruce Tinsley

