

Opinion

From other newspapers

The dumbing down of America via TV

From Lawrence Journal-World

Which came first? Couch potatoes who actively seek out “breaking news” of Anna Nicole Smith — or networks force-feeding voyeuristic drivel to America?

Whose fault is it that the breaking news America evidently wants to hear is about rich, stupid, youthful, train-wreck lives, like those led by Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Anna Nicole, etc.?

Why does the first five weeks of “American Idol” give us only the painful sideshows of performers with a severe lack of talent? Is it because that’s what America wants? Or that’s what the advertisers know America wants? Or that’s what the networks want to give us?

Follow the money. Advertisers are looking for ways to stay in front of viewers and networks try to give advertisers vehicles to reach those people by serving viewers the equivalent of television junk food.

What started out as an effort to give viewers a little light news as a break from the serious nature of the world has turned around 180 degrees.

It appears that giving viewers a concoction of 90 percent brain-numbing fluff sprinkled with an occasional story of importance now is the norm.

It makes you want to stick your head out the window and shout “I’m mad as hell and I’m not going to take it anymore.”

When will we realize how television is dumbing down America? Programming that used to be targeted toward society’s lowest common denominator now has infected the American mainstream. Imagine what this will turn into 20 years down the road. The “idiot box” will turn into a visual lobotomy.

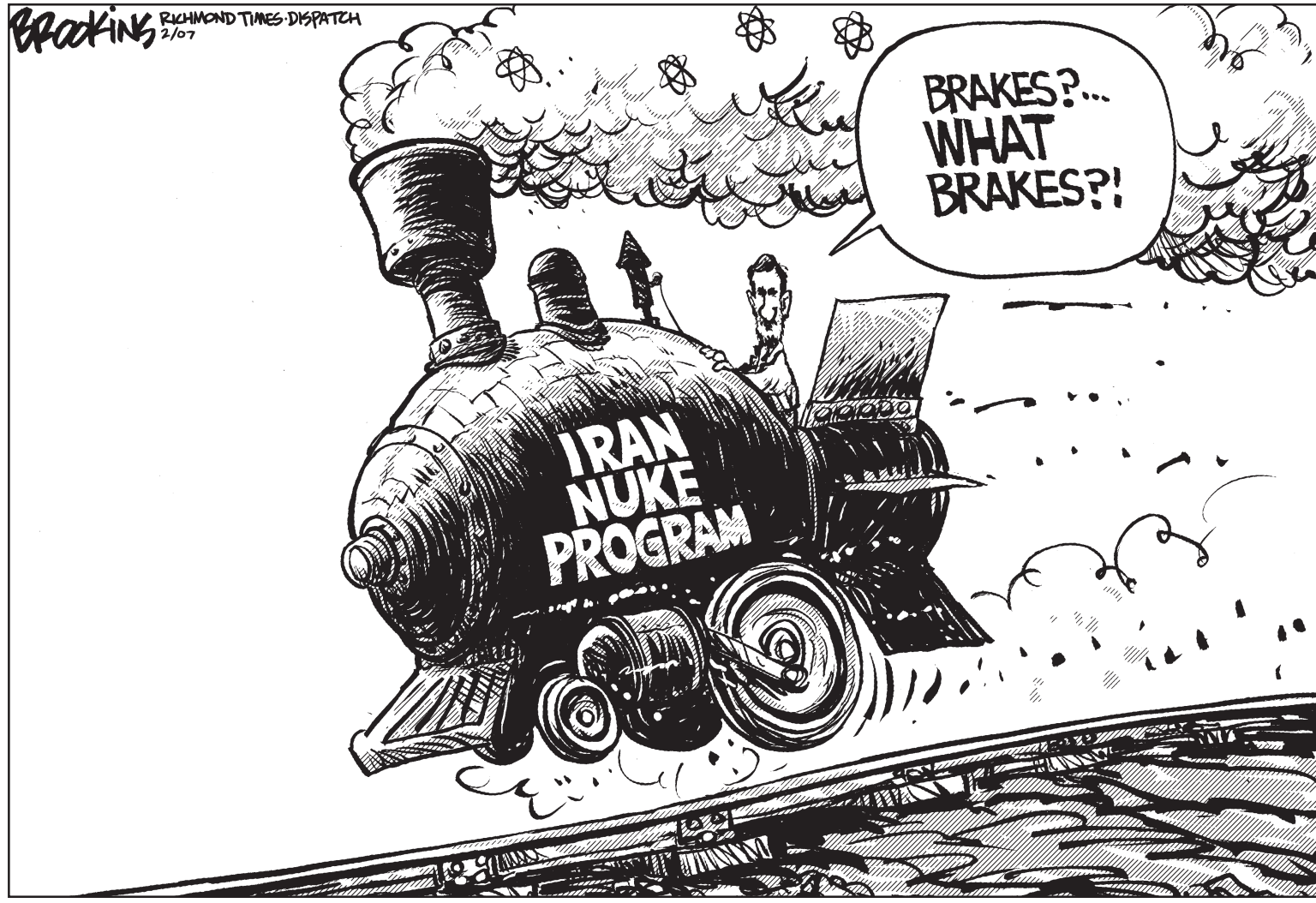
Many things are addictive; most addictions can be beat with hard work. Pray, wish and hope that America kicks this habit before it’s too late.

Besides, we have two years of political advertisements to endure/look forward to.

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.

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Urban wildlife?



Tisha Cox

• Off The Beaten Path

During a recent trip to Denver, we had a couple of encounters that had nothing to do with humans.

I had taken a couple of days off for a concert and while driving around to a few favorite places, wildlife happened to pop up in a couple of unusual places.

The night following the concert, we hit probably the biggest Wal-Mart in the city. The store is at the corner of Colfax and Wadsworth. The area has been heavily re-developed over the past six years with the new store and many smaller shops and restaurants.

A huge parking lot and landscaping separates the other buildings from the store.

Anyway, we walked out to the car, enjoying the gently falling snow.

As we reached the car, I heard my sister gasp, and looked to see her standing still, watching something moving cross the parking lot.

I saw what stopped her in her tracks. A young fox loped across the lot, completely fearless-indifferent to the sounds of traffic and the two humans watching.

When he saw us, he didn’t turn and run, or even flinch. He flicked an ear and kept going on his way.

A little later, at Denver West, coming back from Morrison, the snow was coming down hard.

As I took the turn from Golden Road onto Colfax, I saw something walking along the ridgeline alongside the road.

I slowed down and spied a coyote. He too merely noticed our presence and kept going.

In Morrison, we saw a couple of mule deer does grazing in the snow.

One was on the flat side of Morrison Road on

the right; the other grazing between the shoulder on the left and the wall of stone that is Dinosaur Ridge.

Our first wildlife encounter was while driving south on Kipling.

Just past a stoplight, a skunk ran out in front of the car, hopped the curb then jumped up and climbed over a small cement barrier. (Yes, skunks can jump. Not gracefully like a cat, but it’s a jump nonetheless.)

Smaller wildlife are often seen in the city, but I had never encountered so many in the course of a few hours before.

When I lived in Golden a few years back, elk were a fairly common sight.

Depending on the time of year, the animals would cross the highway (Highway 93) when coming down from or heading back to the foothills. They still are seen around the community there, and grazing on their four-year-old golf course.

I even saw a bear in town once—a yearling that had ventured into civilization while looking for food.

That turned into an afternoon of sitting in a lot across the street from where the bear was treed

while waiting for the Colorado Division of Wildlife to decide what would be done. Eventually, the bear was shot with rubber buckshot and went back into the foothills.

It all makes the occasional fox, raccoon or skunk seen in Colby seem out of the ordinary.

People know foxes live near or at the edge of town, and sometimes someone catches a glimpse.

Knowing and seeing are two different things. As communities grow and spread, conflicts with wildlife are inevitable.

Colby is fortunate in that the wildlife occasionally encountered here is small, although I have heard of people having deer in their yards before, but they move on.

Competition for resources is fierce, with only so much land and water to go around. In some cases, wildlife has lost out, but that is beginning to change.

At least here, through the efforts of the federal Conservation Reserve Program, and Pheasants Forever, conservation practices are proving a benefit to wildlife and man alike.

However, as much as I enjoy seeing wildlife, it was a shock to see so many up close in the city. I lived there two years, and have been there many times before and after and never saw so many.

We were lucky to see the wild so close, and without fear.

And that is a precious gift indeed.

Tisha Cox is a general assignment reporter/photographer for the Free Press. Her column appears on Mondays. tcx@nwkansas.com.

Consolidation — sign of the times

By John Schlageck

Kansas Farm Bureau

The relationship farmers have with their federal government is a vital component of their overall business plan and consequently, integral to their eventual success. Farmers enrolled in the federal government crop and conservation programs need good, solid working relationships with their government. It’s the way they do business.

Anytime something happens that disrupts the normal, time-honored pattern of conducting business, farmers get a little concerned. That’s just human nature.

Consolidation of the USDA’s Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources & Conservation Service is here. In Kansas, this means 11 offices will likely be closed.

In mid-February, the Farm Service Agency announced its intent to close 11 county FSA offices in Alma (Wabaunsee County), Cottonwood Falls (Chase), Coldwater (Comanche), Elkhart (Morton), Gove (Gove), Howard (Elk), Junction City (Geary), Leavenworth (Leavenworth), Medicine Lodge (Barber), Olathe (Johnson) and Yates Center (Woodson). One day later, the Natural Resources & Conservation Service announced plans to consolidate in the exact same 11 offices.

Farmers utilize the services of both of these USDA sub-agencies as a regular part of doing business. They work with FSA on federal crop programs and NRCS on conservation efforts. For farmers in the 11 affected counties, it may

well mean a longer drive and more time away from the farm.

As difficult as this may be, it could have been much worse. At the start of this process, FSA announced plans to close 29 offices across Kansas. Later, NRCS trotted out a plan to board up 26 of its shops. As soon as these bombshells hit, Farm Bureau rolled up its sleeves and went to work.

“Our frustration from the beginning was that government approached this problem from the standpoint of, ‘what’s easiest for us?’ rather than ‘what’s best for the farmer?’” said Terry Holdren, KFB National Director of Governmental Relations. “Had we not pushed this, I’m not convinced FSA and NRCS would have ever gotten in the same room to even have this discussion.”

When the FSA consolidation debate began about a year and a half ago, farmers and ranchers who belong to Farm Bureau in Kansas began asking logical, common-sense questions about how to best implement these tough changes with a minimal impact on their farming businesses, their rural communities and their livelihoods.

Farmers and ranchers have always supported streamlining and efficiency in government. In this case can anyone reasonably argue that separate government offices in 105 counties in Kansas — many with declining populations — is efficient?

If indeed, as the government claims, these efforts will achieve savings through improved administrative efficiencies while providing

high-quality, professional service — who can argue with that?

Now that the other shoe has dropped, could it be that some are now thinking, “but don’t close my FSA office!”

Another key aspect of these changes is FSA and NRCS must shift to state-of-the-art, user-friendly technology.

Nearly every farmer in Kansas can share at least one horror story about outdated computer technology while working with his or her county office.

Consolidation is here. Without question, losing offices in 11 Kansas counties will be painful. And even though it seems the horse has long since left the barn, the barn door is not completely closed.

Public hearings in the affected communities are occurring right now. If it’s in your backyard and you don’t like it, show up and express your views. Not only is it your right, it’s your duty. It also works.

There’s precedent in other states for changing the decisions of the government through public input.

Margaret Mead said it: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Editor’s note: John Schlageck has been writing about farming and ranching in Kansas for more than 25 years. He is the managing editor of “Kansas Living,” a quarterly magazine dedicated to agriculture and rural life in Kansas.

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