

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Thanks, teams

Congratulations to both Colby and Oakley girls basketball teams for winning their respective state championships Saturday in their classification.

What those teams did on the court goes beyond the shots, free throws and fancy passes. Maybe this is what it takes for western Kansas to get more attention, and respect, from the east side of the state.

In the book that listed all the state tournament teams available at all the state tournament sites, each classification had a map of the state showing where each school is located. Colby, in 4A, was the only school west of Salina in the girls bracket. Colby was all by itself. All the others crowded eastern Kansas.

Before the tournament, Colby Eagle Lissa Mazanec said she was curious to see how the team will respond playing teams they are not familiar with. Growing up with the likes of Goodland and Oberlin every year, those players grow up together on the court.

For years, if not decades, there has always been the discussion and debate over the coffee cups how western Kansas schools can't compete with eastern Kansas counterparts. That has happened in the past, but with what happened last weekend, those discussions should not last as long.

Colby defeated Augusta, which could be called a east-side suburb of Wichita. Oakley got by Minneapolis, located north of Salina. Scott City boys lost the 3A title to Wichita Collegiate. We can play with eastern Kansas.

Colby, Oakley and Goodland are probably places for people from eastern Kansas only to fill up the tank and stomach on the way to the mountains or other places out West. Others think storms are the only thing that happen around here. But maybe, just maybe, winning state high school basketball titles will persuade eastern Kansas people to want to learn more about our part of the state.

Colby girls have all the tools to return next year to win another title.

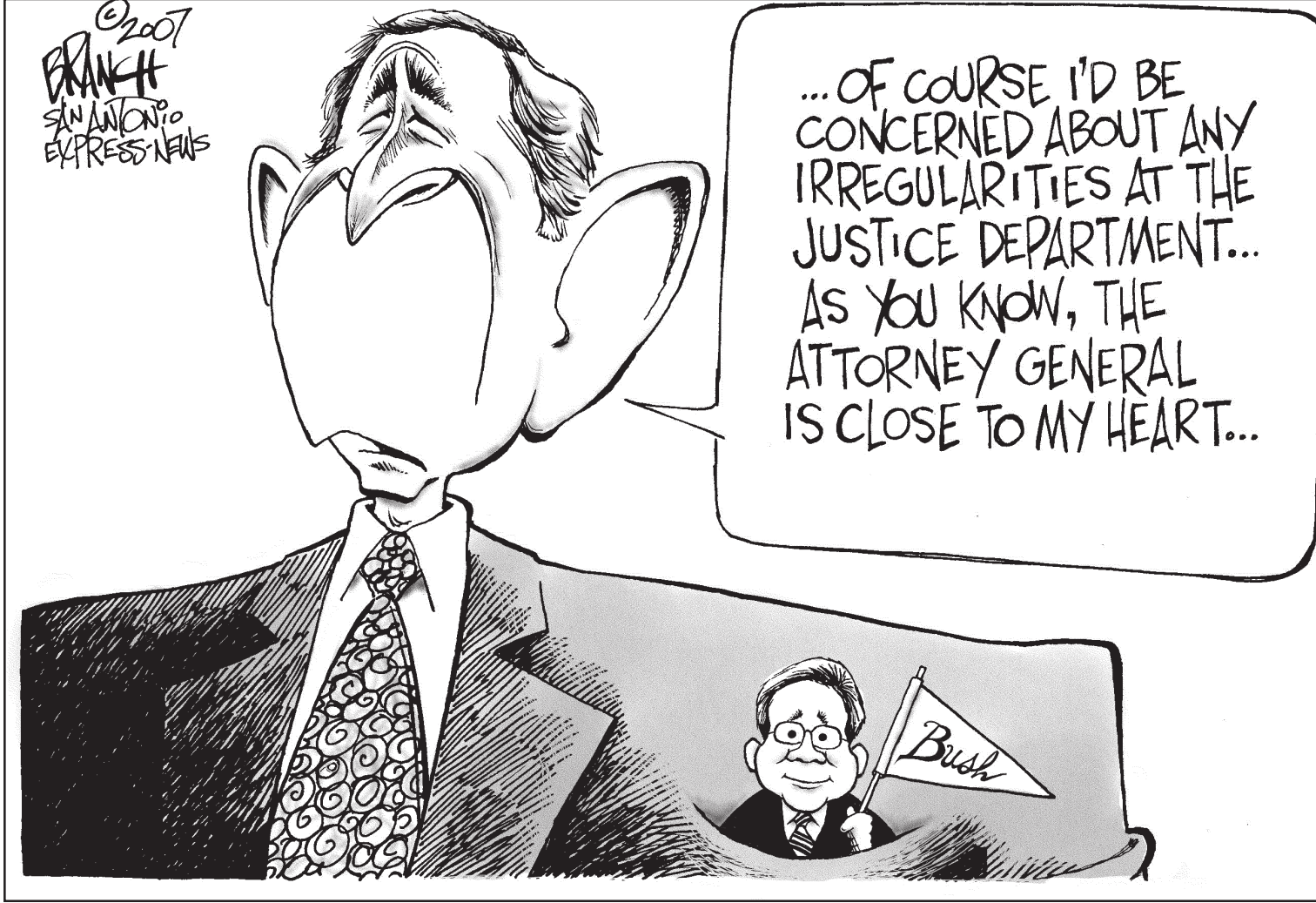
Not only can our kids play basketball, but we have a good quality of life, all the necessities and easy commutes.

Thanks, girls, and all the other players from western Kansas schools, who represented our part of the state.

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](mailto:jvannostrand@nwkansas.com) or [pdecker@nwkansas.com](mailto:pdecker@nwkansas.com).

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### Inspiring what a few words can do

A young boy in a family I know was the recent victim of a sexual offender. The suspect, who has yet to be formally charged, is related to the boy. Another family member walked in on the incident.

That kind of story has been told countless times across the country.

The past few years sexual offenders have been the fad criminal — if I can put it that way. Since the accusations surrounding Michael Jackson years ago, sexual offense crimes and stories have multiplied. In correlation to that, state legislatures have been approving various laws and regulations related to containing convicted sexual offenders.

Having sexual offenders register their place of residence either with the local law enforcement and or with the state is the most popular law. Some states have even gone so far as to prohibit sexual offenders from living near schools, daycare providers and other kid-popular places. In some rural areas, that equates to sexual offenders not allowed to live within some small town's limits.

I struggle with those laws. I have no problem punishing convicted sex offenders but sexual offense crimes seem to be singled out more than any other crime.

A first-time convicted sexual offender may have been the victim of revenge. The person may have had an intimate relationship with a minor and the minor gets back at the person after the relationship turned sour. Not all sexual offenders are from that kind of situation.

It's easy for me to explain all of this because I have not had any connection with a sexual offense, or offender, that hit close to home. At some social gatherings where the issue came up, I have



#### John Van Nostrand

##### • Line in the Dust

explained my stance and I have received the same response multiple times.

"But John, you have young children, what would you think if that happened to your kids? You wouldn't want the person to live near you, right?"

I am just as concerned about what is happening to the sex offenders after the court cases.

During his campaign last year, Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline mentioned his strategy on sexual offenders during a stop in Colby. I asked him what the state is doing in terms of counseling and rehabilitating sexual offenders compared to the increasing jail sentences and continually having the spotlight on them.

Kline, with his own young daughter in tow, said little, if any, can be done for such criminals and must be treated the way the laws have allowed.

Sounds like we already gave up on them.

At that point, I could not stop thinking about the story of William Neal Moore. More than 30 years ago, he was at the end of his rope. Moore grew up in poverty and committed minor crimes. After his military service, Moore ran out of money and his marriage came to an end.

He got drunk and broke into the home of an

elderly man known to have stacks of cash. The man shot his rifle at Moore, but Moore's bullet from his pistol killed the man. Moore fled with a few thousand dollars.

Moore was found and arrested the following morning. He admitted to the crimes and was sentenced to death. The state of Georgia was planning to end Moore's life in May 1984.

During his then 16-year sentence, two people from a church had met with Moore and told him about the love of Jesus Christ and other fundamental Christian ideals. That's all Moore needed to hear — that someone, somewhere, loved him — for him to change.

Moore met with other inmates and shared what he had been told. Bibles were distributed. Studies were held. Churches were sending people in need of help to Moore. Moore's life was changing.

The powers that be behind Georgia's death row were changing too. The state saw Moore become a new man and erased his death penalty, just hours before he was to be electrocuted. The state switched his sentence to life in prison but eventually released him from prison.

The victim's family forgave Moore and started a friendship with him. Moore became an ordained minister and had a church in Georgia.

Sex-offense victims need help and counseling. Sex offenders need more than a form to complete to tell the cops where they are living. Sex offenders need to hear what Moore heard behind bars.

It's up to the person to decide what to do afterward.

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

### Your turn

## Property-tax relief is long overdue

#### Morris L. Reeves Dodge City

I am writing to express the plight of the community college property tax payers and how over the past 35 to 40 years the community college property tax payers have become the forgotten stakeholders in the politics of higher education in Kansas.

The 19 community colleges located in 18 counties represent the only division of Kansas higher education that is supported to any significant degree by property taxes. The only exceptions are Wichita State University which receives via a contract with the county government a 1.5 mill levy and Washburn University which derives a portion of its revenue from local sales tax and a 3.313 mill levy for capitol outlay and special liabilities.

When most of the Kansas community colleges were formed in the 60s and 70s and the voters approved the formation of the colleges I am sure there were assurances that they would not tax themselves excessively.

Forexample in 1970 the average mill levy for community college operations was 5.29 mills.

In 1975 the average mill levy edged up to 7.81 mills. By 1981 the average rose to 11.86 mills and it nearly doubled in the next 10 years to 21.31 mills in 1991. The average mill levy continued to climb to its all time high of 25.91 mills last year and we may find it higher this year when the Board of Regents releases the data.

I am sure that at no point in time did the legislature and governor decide to cut the state apportionment for community colleges simply to cause the mill levy to move upward, but rather, it was a matter of conflicting priorities and the fact that colleges had the option of raising funds from the mill levy which has caused the mill levy creep upward over the years.

Unfortunately, the mill levy burden is not evenly distributed among the 18 counties. Last year the low was in Johnson County at 8.96 mills while the high was in Pratt County at 40.774 mills. Assessed values also vary significantly from a low in Doniphan County of \$65,515,538 to a high in Johnson County of \$7,170,254,143, representing a ratio of approximately 109 to 1.

There is no equalization formula built into the statute governing the distribution of state aid to

the colleges even though it was recommended in both NORAD studies on higher education funding and governance commissioned by the Board of Regents, consequently, the wealthier colleges receive the same state aid per student as does those with limited assessed valuation.

Senate Bill 345 placed community colleges under the supervision of the Board of Regents in 2001. It also eliminated the assessment of "out of county tuition" for those students from other counties in Kansas. This leaves 87 counties in Kansas which levy no property taxes for the support of Kansas Community Colleges.

Local property tax payers in those counties hosting the state universities and the vocational/technical schools and colleges are not required to pay for either the institutions operational costs nor for the upkeep of their facilities.

The burden on the community college property taxpayer is at or near the crisis point and it is time the legislature and the Board of Regents step up to the plate and provide property taxpayer relief which is long over due.

#### Mallard Fillmore

##### • Bruce Tinsley



**COLBY FREE PRESS**  
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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.

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