

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

MySpace is only the beginning

By Attorney General Paul Morrison

My office recently obtained the names of registered sex offenders living in Kansas who use the social networking Web site MySpace.com.

We're thoroughly investigating these names and will punish any offender using these sites in violation of their probation or parole.

The information from MySpace is an important step in the right direction. But it is only the beginning of our fight to keep kids safe. We will continue to gather more information from this and other social networking sites.

Websites like MySpace have become a tool for sexual predators and are increasingly unsafe for our kids. These sites allow children to post and view inappropriate and suggestive material, and allow predators to track their information online, all without most parents' knowledge.

The freedom of the internet can become a parent's worst nightmare unless sites like MySpace help to protect underage users from inappropriate conduct and content. As attorney general, I will keep my promise to push sites like MySpace to verify online identities and age and require parental permission for children.

This year, we passed important legislation that increased the amount of information sex offenders provide with their registration. Now, law enforcement can better track these dangerous criminals on the Internet through their e-mail addresses and online identities.

My office is also partnering with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation in an effort to be proactive and investigate Internet predators. With these additional resources, we can make our children safer online.

Unfortunately, the anonymity of the Internet makes it nearly impossible to verify the identity of everyone online.

As a parent myself, I urge everyone to monitor their children's activities. Steps as simple as moving the computer to a shared area, restricting Internet surfing to times when an adult is present and talking about potential threats can go a long way in protecting the safety of your child.

We're making progress in the fight to crack down on sex offenders online. The Attorney General's Office will continue to work with law enforcement, Web site providers and parents to provide more tools and education to make the Internet a safer place for our families.

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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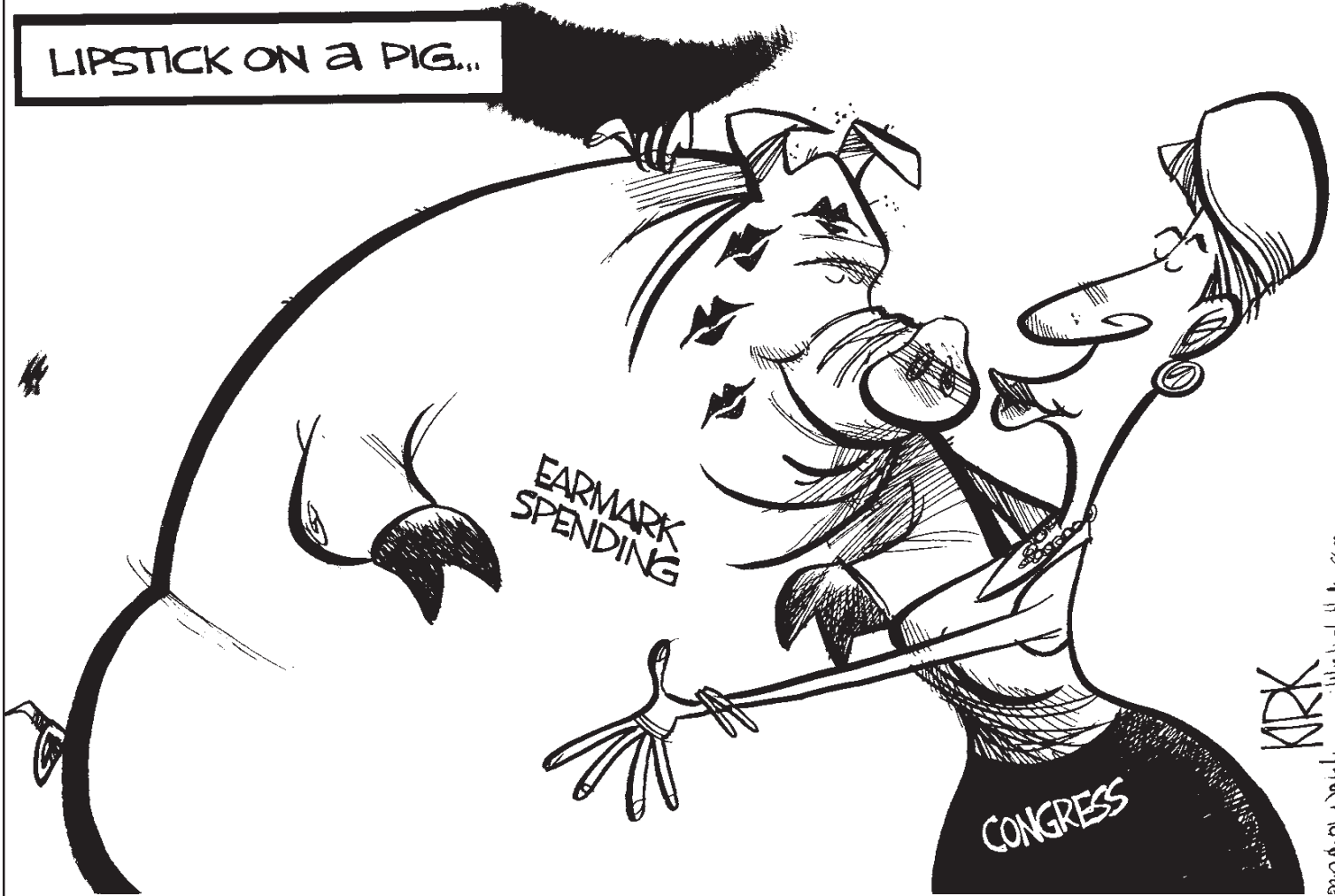
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Day after day, cause after cause

It wouldn't be a summer for me without hearing the hum of a window box fan, "ch-ch-ch-ch" sound of lawn sprinklers and the crack of a baseball off a bat.

It also wouldn't be summer without at least one person bicycling through Colby on some sort of coast-to-coast ride for a cause or charity.

Colby's own Mark Schultz, who has established a career in the Christian music industry, is one of those people.

In early May, he left Newport Beach, Calif., on his way to Portsmouth, N.H., for support of orphans and widows. He plans to be in New Hampshire July 11. Schultz was also adopted, another motivation for the reason for his ride.

According to his schedule, he is in Abilene today. He has put on occasional concerts along his route.

I've written several stories over the years about those who ride bikes from coast to coast for causes. From the outside, it seems crazy for someone to want to torture themselves on a bike day after day. Those people have to ask more out of their muscles when the strong wind slaps them in the face. They look over their shoulder and see the dark, ominous thunderhead creeping up on them. Easily, an entire summer would be lost riding a bicycle across the country.

But maybe it takes such an event for people to realize the compassion and interest they have in the cause. A few years ago, one story I wrote was



John Van Nostrand

- Line in the Dust

about a man who rode a riding lawn mower across the country in support of American military veterans.

Of all the places he rode through was Iowa. That's a tough place to ride a lawn mower because in 1994 Alvin Sraight rode his from his northwest Iowa home to his brother's house in Wisconsin.

Alvin, 73 at the time, rode his lawn mower 240 miles to see his 80-year-old brother who was recovering from a stroke. Alvin had no other way to get their because of his limited finances.

I remember the man in my story said once he crossed into Iowa he heard a myriad of comments from people passing him related to Alvin. Some thought it was funny to make a reference to Straight. He shrugged off the laughs and kept riding.

About five years after Alvin's ride, a movie was made about his journey. After watching it a third time, I understood Alvin's subtle reason for

doing what he did. In the film, Alvin said the relationship he had with his brother was broken years ago for a variety of reasons. But once he heard about his brother's sudden stroke, he knew he had to make amends, life is to short to carry a grudge, especially with family.

Which is why he couldn't take a bus to Wisconsin, find someone to drive him there or even fly. That would not make the trip long enough to give him time to acknowledge his feelings about his brother and whatever happened that caused the friction.

More importantly, it wouldn't give him time to give up his pride and arrogance to admit he was part of the problem. Alvin died two years after his ride.

Helping causes has become so passive these days. A farmer friend, who once donated some of his land and crop to a cause, said it's easy to write a check, put it in an envelope and mail it to where it needs to go. That's why he became more involved in the charity and actually gave up more than just a entry line in his checkbook.

You've got to respect those people who ride a bicycle across the America to raise awareness or funds for MS, cancer, war veterans and the list goes on. Like Alvin, we sometimes need time to understand what we are doing.

— John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Your turn

Words do create hatred and violence

By Robert T. Stephan
Chair of Governor Kathleen Sebelius' Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board

Everyone is probably familiar with the Don Imus' statement regarding members of the women's Rutgers basketball team. Rap songs may not get as much public attention, but, more often than not, their lyrics demean and degrade women.

Before I go any further let it be clear that I detest such language and am critical of those who use it. It is my earnest desire that every well meaning American will say it is time to turn the corner and to show respect for women. Domestic violence exists both emotionally and physically and it needs to stop.

Imus' comments created a firestorm and showed what free speech is all about—money. I would be willing to bet that if Sprint Nextel, Staples, General Motors and Proctor & Gamble had not pulled their advertising he would still be on the air.

To reduce women to second class citizens results in disrespect for them and ultimately in increased violence. True, words do not kill, but repeated often enough they desensitize a citizenry and make the objects of divisive state-

ments fair game.

The despicable statements in hip-hop lyrics make millions for rappers and the corporations that sponsor them.

The hue and cry that allowing rappers to desecrate women is all about free speech would be enough to make you laugh if it were not so tragic. There is a great deal of discussion right now about the misogynistic and denigrating lyrics of rappers, but these rap lyrics will continue as long as advertisers and corporations make a profit.

The sad part of it all is that the public pays money to hear one person diminish another. Look at Howard Stern and his abuse of women and yet he makes many millions of dollars. Not exactly a positive commentary on a so-called civilized society.

Just to show how the present attention and concern is going no where, you only have to look at a recent meeting called by hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons' Hip Hop Summit Action Network. The meeting was held at the New York home of Lyor Cohen, chairman and chief executive of U.S. music at Warner Music Group. The organizers billed the gathering as a forum "to discuss issues challenging the industry in the wake of controversy surrounding hip-hop and

the First Amendment."

Public statements after the meeting indicated lots of excuses but no resolution that would lessen the violence and sex advocated by rappers. No specific initiatives were agreed upon and no future meetings scheduled. It's just business as usual.

Among other things, spokesmen at the meeting stated that "poets" always come under fire for their unsanitized descriptions of the world - that these rappers speak from their heart — and of course concern for first amendment rights.

Frankly, it is my opinion that the right being protected is the right to make a fortune by disgracing women of all races, creeds and color.

The big question is how we can stop this invitation to carnage. The answer is simple — women, men and responsible secular and religious organizations should organize and boycott those whose actions increase the likelihood of violence. Only when the money dries up will they stop considering women second class citizens and deserving of abuse.

If you are a victim of domestic violence or know someone who is, you can call 1-888-END ABUSE (1-888-363-2287) to find resources to assist.

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. 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

