

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Kansas should pay

From The Garden City Telegram

After a number of failed efforts, Congress got it right in raising the federal minimum wage.

President Bush last year signed into law an increase that took the federal minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to the current \$5.85, the nation's first minimum wage increase in nearly a decade. The legislation included increases to \$6.55 this coming July and \$7.25 in July 2009.

Before the recent increase, the minimum wage was raised just eight times in more than six decades. The wage's purchasing power had dropped some 20 percent since 1997. ...

Kansas has the embarrassing distinction of being the only state in the nation with a minimum wage below the federal level. The pitiful \$2.65 minimum wage here applies to work not covered by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act — mostly service or agricultural jobs held by some 19,000 workers.

An effort by House Democrats to boost the state's minimum wage and put it on track with the federal wage stalled Thursday. House Republicans scuttled the proposal, which was tied to a labor bill, by voting to send the bill back to committee.

Opponents consider an increase too much of a burden for employers, saying a higher wage would force them to lay off workers.

But that thinking ignores the fact that reasonable, living wages help land and retain good workers. Unreasonably low wages, on the other hand, drive up the need for taxpayer support for the working poor. That's anything but business friendly.

Kansas should show it values a day's work. All work matters, and the state's minimum wage should reflect as much.

Legislators who oppose the wage hike need to consider Kansas' poorest workers by bringing the state's minimum wage in line with the federal wage.

And, in doing so, prove Kansas would rather be family friendly than Scrooge-like when it comes to workers' wages.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-4774

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorriso@ink.org

web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol, 300 SW 10th St., Rm. 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, 785/296-7399 ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

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 jvanostrand@nwkansas.com or pdecker@nwkansas.com. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the *Free Press*.



Small town, big interests

For those people who think there is nothing to do in Colby, I don't buy it.

We have some wonderful community service clubs and groups from Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis and the list goes on. To learn more about some of those groups, read our family page (always on page 4). Some of those groups submit their meeting minutes. Shakespeare and art club do that. We thank those groups who do that. It adds more to our family page.

Most of the time, when those groups meet, they have a program during their meeting. A club member invites someone to explain or demonstrate something interesting. Some of the clubs members themselves occasionally do the same thing. No matter who it is, or what club it is, the show has some level of interest.

It's great to know who are in these groups and what they do for the town or people they serve.

I've been a member of Colby Rotary since I've lived here. Since then, I have occasionally turned the weekly Rotary meeting's program into a neat feature story.

We don't emphasize it as much as we need to, but those groups are encouraged to inform us of their meeting programs. If those groups don't mind, we would love to help spread the publicity and importance of those groups. I've heard those groups have talked about things from the strategically located defibrillators in town (that was a while ago) to the cultural impact Normal Rockwell had.

We know there is more to tell.



John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust

If those groups want more publicity, give us a call, but please give us some time to prepare. We can't drop everything when told about an event 15 minutes in advance. Give us a week or two.

Those groups should be thanked for what they do for our spot on the map. Kiwanis had its 34th annual Easter Egg hunt March 15 at Fike Park. Colby Lions Club is trying to give Colby something to do on the Fourth of July and it's standing room only for the Lions Clubs in Gem and Colby when they have their annual dinners.

Very sobering to see what has happened in our country over the years.

Correct me if I'm wrong here, but it was probably 50 years ago when the one-room country schoolhouses were still being used. Those schools, rich in history, were the foundation for our education as neighboring families did what had to be done for the kids to receive an education.

Now, the state of California wants to end

that very same ideal. A California court of appeal ruling Feb. 28 prohibits families from homeschooling their children.

The law states if parents do not have the right credentials to teach their children at home, they could be prosecuted. Some estimate there are about 166,000 homeschool students in California. (Odd how potential parents don't need credentials to produce children.)

Like with every other court ruling, an appeal is underway. The director of public schools in California supports homeschooling.

Parents' rights should not be held to this kind of standard. There are ways to measure a kids academic achievements at home, but to have this kind of blanket law is overdone. Homeschooling is done across the country, including Northwest Kansas.

On a much bigger scale, the United Nations has been discussing policy that could be interpreted as way for member countries to ban homeschooling. More than that, the policy could give, who we call minors, the right to take their parents to court for ordering them to do simple, daily routines around the house.

If you can, stay tuned to this one, especially what happens in November.

Kathy Arendt is our new circulation manager and classified ad director. She started this week.

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

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John Van Nostrand - Publisher
jvanostrand@nwkansas.com

NEWS

Patty Decker - Editor
pdecker@nwkansas.com

Joe Falkoff - General Assignment/Sports Reporter
jfalkoff@nwkansas.com

Jan Ackerman - General Assignment
jkackerman@gmail.com

ADVERTISING

Crystal Rucker - Advertising Sales/Director
crystalr@nwkansas.com

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Sales
j.stewart@nwkansas.com

Hannah Pyle - Advertising Sales
hpyle@nwkansas.com

Avery Schultz - Advertising Composition
aschultz@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Jeanette Applegate - Bookkeeping, Ad Building
japplegate@nwkansas.com

Kathy Arendt - Circulation, Classifieds
karendt@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Becky Foster, Jim Jackson, Kris McCool, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Cheryl Holub, and Amanda Campbell
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Your turn

The IRS needs your help

By Michael Devine

Internal Revenue Service

Starting in May, economic stimulus payments of up to \$600 for individuals (\$1,200 for married couples) will be issued by the IRS based on 2007 tax returns. Parents also get \$300 for each eligible child.

Most people only have to file their 2007 individual income tax return to receive their payment.

We'll do the rest.

But the IRS needs help reaching millions of people who are usually exempt from filing. People who have at least \$3,000 from wages or certain benefits from Social Security, Railroad Retirement and Veterans Affairs may be eligible for a stimulus payment this year. IRS

A special mailing will reach an estimated 140,000 recipients of Social Security and Veterans' benefits in Kansas, but there are still

many low-wage workers who could qualify for the payments.

If you know a senior citizen, a veteran, or a neighbor with low-income, please reach out and urge them to file a tax return this year so that they will get their payments along with the rest of us.

For more information, visit the IRS web site at www.irs.gov and click on Rebate Questions.

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

