

Opinion



A Kansas Viewpoint

Don't forget

By Kathleen Sebelius

Kansas Governor

Monday marks Memorial Day. It is a solemn day when we remember the courage and sacrifice of each man and woman who has given their life to further the liberty of all people in this country and throughout the nation. Every day that we live with peace and freedom at home is a day made possible by these brave soldiers and airmen.

One hundred and forty years ago, in 1868, our nation held the first Memorial Day to honor those who died in the Civil War. The principles at the heart of that war are those on which this very state is founded — freedom, justice and equality for all people.

My father and father-in-law fought in World War II, as did my four uncles. My mother's older brother, Don, did not survive the war, so our family knows the sorrow and sacrifice of losing a loved one in service.

In our past battles as well as in our current conflict, Kansans pay a heavy toll, as have members of our military family stationed at Ft. Riley. Families and friends of those who gave their lives in these conflicts will join us at a ceremony at Fort Riley in remembrance of their loved ones.

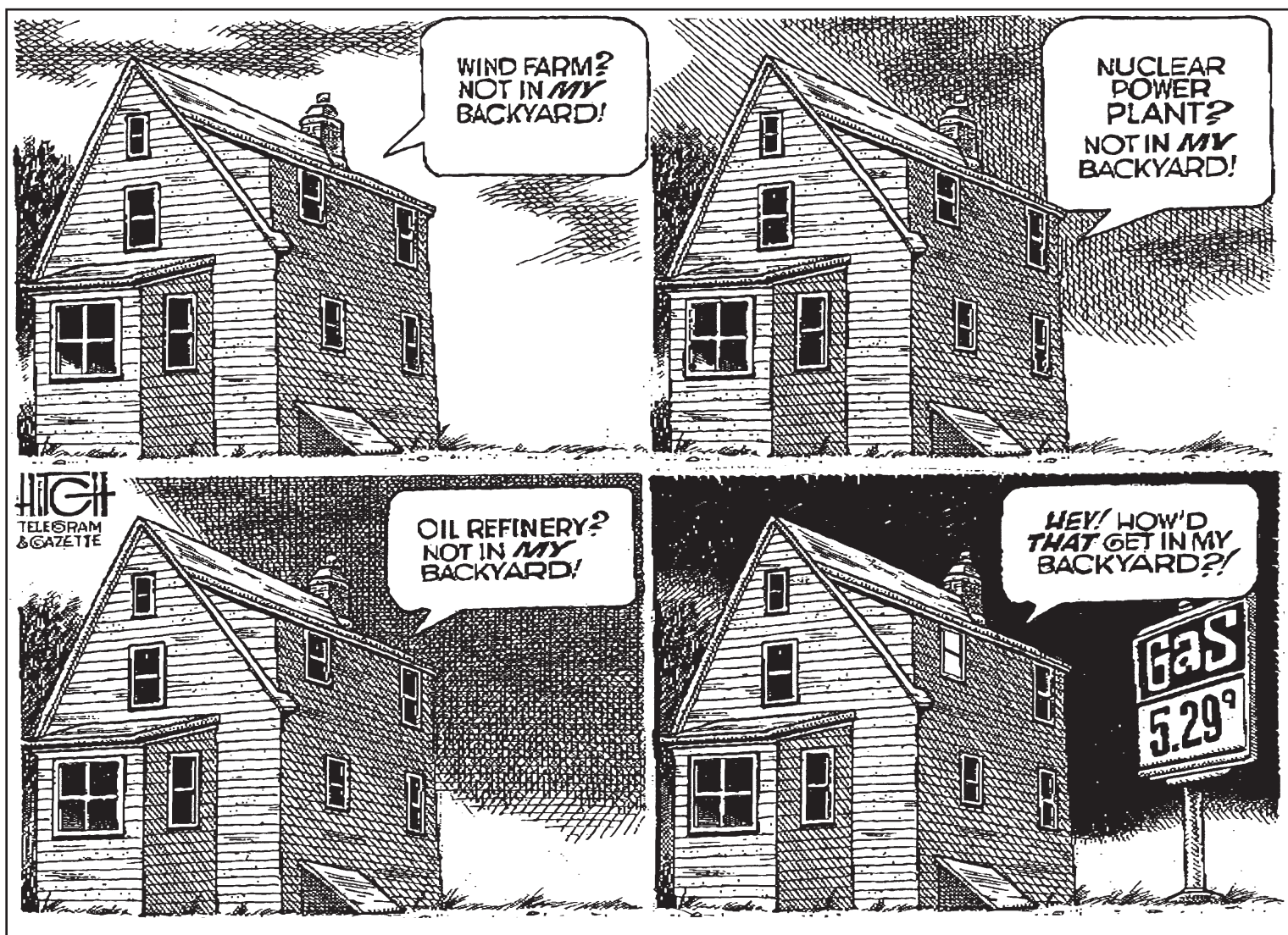
It is for them that we set aside this day to reflect, to honor and to express our thanks.

We stand behind our military men and women and their families.

We honor them in our thoughts, our prayers and our actions.

We pledge to support them while they serve and should they make the ultimate sacrifice, to comfort and care for those they leave behind.

We are united in our determination to honor their service and the family's sacrifice on Memorial Day and every day.



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. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature. Unsigned letters cannot be published.

Where to write, call

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- 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: jmorrison@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

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Not for me



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

There isn't enough money on the table to make me want to run for public office.

While I've joked about the topic, that's as far as it goes, especially after watching public officials for the past 15 years wax and wane over budgets, disgruntled employees and the ever unpleasable John Q. Public of the world.

Thomas County Commissioners make \$12,259.80 per year, plus an additional \$100 per month for fuel to attend meetings in and outside the county, for a grand total of \$13,459.80.

Commissioners Ken Christiansen and Byron Sowers are on the county's health insurance plan, and both contribute to the Kansas Employees Retirement System (KPEERS). Commissioner Paul Steele takes the county's dental insurance, but opted not to participate in KPEERS.

Even with those perks, it's not enough money to make me want to sit in the hot seat on a weekly basis.

I've watched as these three commissioners worry about making sure the roads are safe for not only taxpayers, but tourists as well. I've watched them take the heat for allowing the fairgrounds to be home to recreational vehicles while there is a business in town doing a similar function. And I've watched these three guys take their medicine for having committed a violation of the Kansas Open Meetings Act, and they've done it all with the taxpayers first and foremost on their mind.

Christiansen recently joked that before being elected to office four years ago he didn't have a gray hair on his head, and that Steele, four years ago, had a full head of hair. While a good joke, it is one which could almost be true.

I'd have to have an unlisted phone number if I ran for public office because I'm such a die hard believer that constituents need to come before the meeting table with gripes and complaints, not call me at home.

Oh sure, I get my fair share of phone calls as a reporter, but I for sure wouldn't take calls at home if I was a commissioner. People would get tired of hearing me say, "I'm only one of a three-person board, so come to the meeting so all of us can hear what you have to say."

There would be no county business conducted outside the meeting room that is unless it was while inspecting a county road, right-of-way, land, etc. There would be no county business conducted at church or at the coffee shop, so see, it's best I'm not in public office.

I'm not saying the Thomas County commissioners are guilty of these actions, I'm just saying I wouldn't let John Q. Public call me at home or visit with me on the street.

It's bad enough to attend church and have someone come up to me and talk about something I wrote in an article. My standard line is, "I'm not on duty today." My place of worship is not my workplace. And a simple, "Thank You" suffices for compliments paid at church, but I rush out the door if I even get a hint of someone wanting to talk about articles or the

confines of this column.

So, despite it being company policy that I can't run for public office, goes back to the old adage that we at the Colby Free Press report the news, not make the news, I won't be running for office.

Speaking of public office, I visited with a friend recently who is unhappy about a contested race (no, I'm not going to divulge where the race is taking place) but he had an interesting take on one of the contestants. My friend was talking about a public employee who is running for office.

"He commits felony theft each and every month," my friend said of the contestant. "What are you talking about?" I asked. "Yes, the guy commits felony theft each time he cashes his paycheck," he joked about someone he believes is lazy on the job.

While I don't know who my friend is voting for, I certainly know who is not getting his vote come the Aug. 5 primary.

I, for one, will be thrilled when the November elections are over. I'm sick of the commercials. Unfortunately the hard-core ones between Democrats and Republicans have not even started.

I think I'll hide out until November. Hide in my sewing room or at the desk in front of the computer writing a book or working on family histories, both hobbies of mine.

Well, while I won't speak to who I'm voting for, other than the high cost of fuel and the devaluation of the dollar, I'm a pretty happy camper when it comes to being an American.

God Bless America and all her taxpayers.

— Jan Katz Ackerman is a reporter for the Colby Free Press

It doesn't have to be this way



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

As graduates filed across the stage during the weekend, how many of them have been encouraged to learn and study and return to Colby, or even to some part of rural Kansas, to help make this a better place?

Graduates collected thousands of dollars in scholarships from colleges, civic groups, businesses and the like. Most of that money was earned here, by people who spent their lives building a business, a farming operation, a life on the plains.

Early on, we knew we wanted the best for our children. We wanted them to have the best education possible before they went on to whatever they would do in life.

At first, a great many of them did come back. In the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, it was expected that children would continue a family business or farm.

All that changed with the end of World War II. The so-called Greatest Generation came home from war wanting other things — a better life in the city being first among those.

And since then, fewer and fewer of our graduates have come home to run businesses, to keep farms going, to make life better for rural America.

And we raise money each year to pay them to go. We send our own children off to a university with little hope they will come back, even though this is a good life.

We help raise money for other people's children to do the same. At the twilight of our lives, those who have made some money often leave a chunk of it for scholarships. It's a wonderful thing, a noble cause.

But in the end, we are financing the flight of our youth to life in the city. We're paying them to flee the plains and the life our grandfathers built.

To some extent, that's just life in America today. Rural areas have been losing population. Opportunities are fewer and farther between.

But it doesn't have to be that way. The culture of small-town life changed before, and it could change again.

Why do we have to give kids scholarships so they can get a good job in the city?

Why not encourage them, with our money, to learn how to make a living and grow a business or a professional practice here, at home,

where life is safe and relatively simple?

We are not talking about coercing anyone. Youths should be free to make their own decisions, and some always have — and always will — chose city life. There are things you can only do in New York or Los Angeles or Washington, after all.

But we could encourage them to value small-town life and we could give them money to study for a career in rural America.

It's our money, after all. We can give it however we like.

The day should come when every scholarship raised here, or in any rural town, encourages somehow not just a good education, but a desire to contribute to a better life in Colby, in rural Kansas, in small-town America.

No law, no rule of life, no moral imperative forces us to keep spending as we always have spent, with no thought for where these kids will end up.

If we continue as we are, we are pounding nails in the coffin of rural life. We can change that. We should change that.

We should encourage our lifestyle, cherish its values and pass them on. Not pay kids to make a life in the crowded, crime-ridden cities and sprawling suburbs.

So why don't we?

— Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

