

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Eyes on the skies

By Steve Haynes

Recent storms show the value of modern weather radar, the storm spotter network and the entire warning system which protects Kansas from tornadoes.

Loss of life has been minimal compared to the damage, and the populated areas struck, by some severe twisters. The loss of even one person is tragic, as the family of Crystal Bishop, a young woman with relatives here, would tell you.

But it's impossible to estimate the lives which might have been lost without the work of so many people who watch and track storms, and the technology which makes it all possible.

The 1942 storm which struck Oberlin, for instance, killed 15 people at farm homes though it did not touch the town. It struck at night, with little warning. There were no spotters, no radio station, no radar.

In contrast, the Greensburg tornado last year, actually a smaller storm, killed only 11 though it leveled the town. Spotters gave the town time to get to shelter, though not everyone made it.

Doppler weather radar allows forecasters to issue timely warnings today, where in 1948 radar was primitive and not used for weather observation. Newer radar sometimes can spot storms capable of dropping a tornado before spotters see one.

This year and last in Kansas, spotters gave towns warning before storms struck. That accounts for a lot of the lives saved, for in just a few minutes, most of us can scurry to safety.

Spotters, mostly volunteers, include firefighters, weather enthusiasts, off-duty forecasters and even professional storm chasers with training to identify dangerous clouds. They are worth their weight in gold, and the more in the field, the better.

Law officers often join the spotters, and they, too, help spot storms before they strike.

The National Weather Service has put a lot of effort into growing the spotter corps, with beginner and advanced classes each year before the tornado season opens.

Nearly every town has a tornado siren these days, and local officials take this system seriously. Most have worked well when storms appear.

Sirens should be tested throughout the year, because tornadoes appear in Kansas as late as Thanksgiving and as early as February, they're not common in the winter, but we need to be ready to blow the sirens whenever a storm strikes. It costs little to test them, even at Christmas.

The take-cover should be reserved for killer winds, not hail. Dispatchers have to sound the alert often enough when no storm actually appears. It's not good to have people too used to the sirens, or they won't take them seriously.

The storm alert system, fallible as it is, is saving lots of lives. We can't know how many, but the figures suggest it's dozens every year, if not hundreds.

Here's a round of thanks to everyone — spotters, forecasters, firemen, police and sheriffs, storm chasers and citizens — who keep us safe when weather threatens.

Keep it up, guys. — Steve Haynes, president of Nor'West Newspapers including the Colby Free Press.

#### 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.

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) or [ns@nwkansas.com](mailto:ns@nwkansas.com). Opinions do not necessarily reflect the Free Press.

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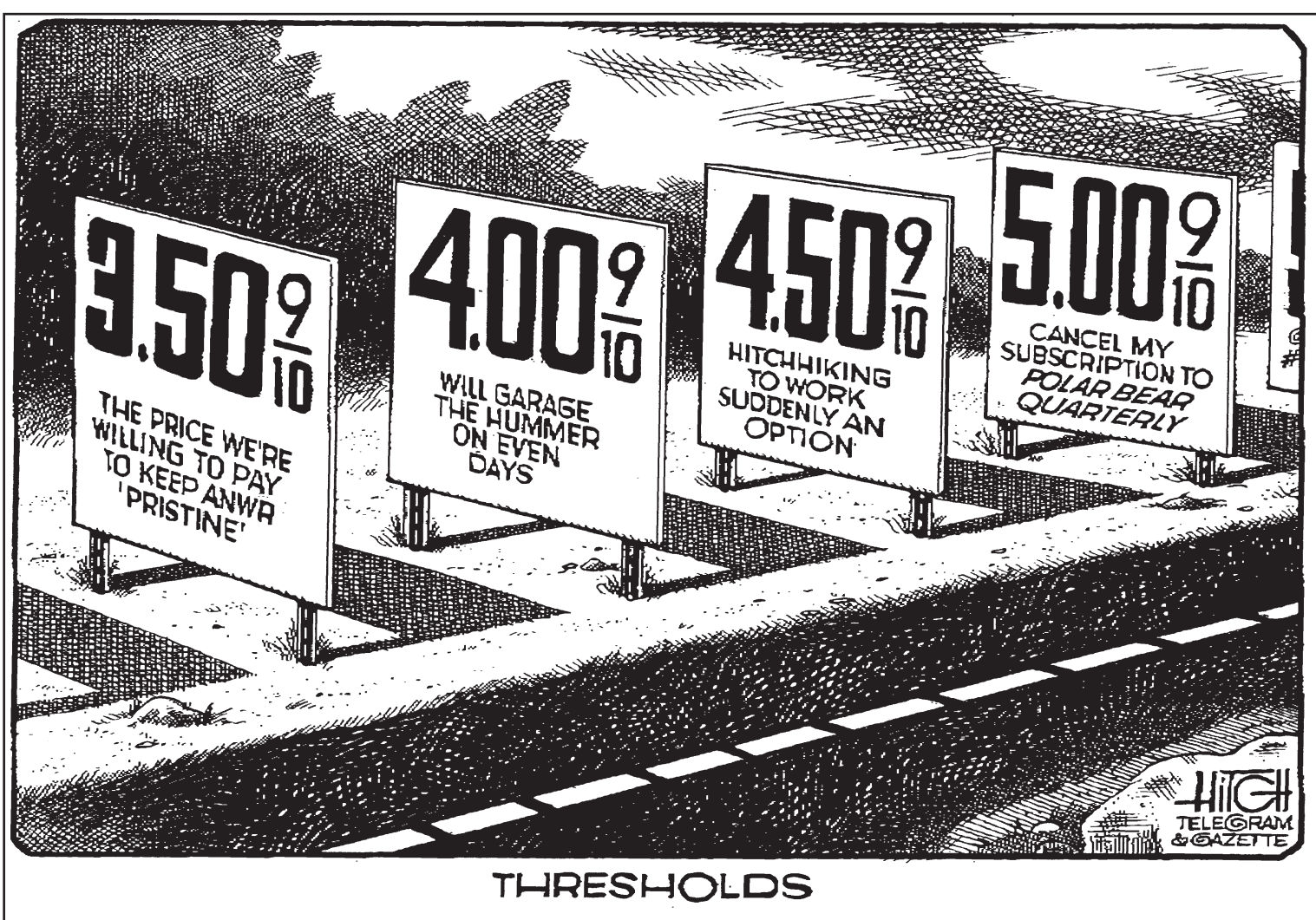
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THRESHOLDS

### It's more than a wall



**Jan Katz Ackerman**

• From Where I stand

An event that many will remember for years took place when the Moving Wall was on display from June 12-16 at the fairgrounds in Hoxie.

The wall is a replica of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D. C. and drew a crowd of about 800 during an opening ceremony last Thursday.

I was there, and once again, having seen the wall at other locations, was spellbound by the onlookers as they looked for names of loved ones on the wall.

The Moving Wall lists more than 58,000 names of men and women who died during the Vietnam war. Oh, the stories that could be told by those men and women, had they lived to return home. Stories about how much they loved their families, the jobs, their homes, but even more importantly, how much they loved America.

They loved America so much they laid down their lives for their country.

As I watched the pomp and circumstance of the honor guards as they hung the American and Prisoner of War and Missing in Action flags, I remembered similar flag ceremonies I'd seen as a military dependent while at Fort Sill, Okla., and in Munich and Nuremberg, Germany.

With precision, men and women trained to conduct flag raising ceremonies, honorably raise flags to remind us how much the United States' freedom relies on those who protect it.

Sure, some folks go into the military without a complete understanding of all that's asked of

them, but I'd bet once they understand, most would do it again without hesitation.

But during the opening ceremony, something bigger than honoring the men and women who have died for America came to mind.

I'm free. Free to move about my country without checkpoints where I have to stop and tell an armed guard where I'm going to and coming from. And I'm free to worship in public without the fear of being arrested for my faith.

There, standing and watching the ceremony, my faith as a Christian was enhanced a hundredfold.

Just like those men and women who laid down their lives for my freedom, Jesus Christ laid down his life so I didn't have to suffer the pangs of hell.

Despite my freedom, a sadness came over me after talking to a friend of mine about the ceremony. Despite having opened with an invocation, had songs such as "God Bless America" and "God Bless the USA" sung, and a benediction and taps played to close it, the ceremony was missing one thing.

I failed to hear a comparison that soldiers

lay down their lives for the freedom of a nation and our temporal life, while Jesus Christ laid down his life for all nations and our eternal life.

All people have access to a free eternity by the fact that Christ's shed blood washes us daily of our sins. That doesn't mean we can go out and knowingly sin and expect to be free, but it means we didn't have to do anything for our salvation.

There are those who would, and have, argued my point and say we have to do something to be assured salvation, but that's not what the Bible says. It says if we believe Christ is our savior we are assured salvation.

It's a gift. God gave us his son to die on the cross for us.

We didn't do anything. Sure, if we are Christian we do good things as an outpouring of our love for God, his son and his Holy Spirit, but we can't earn salvation.

The speakers at the ceremony danced around the topic that God was present by talking about him and praying to him, but they didn't take the bold step before a captive audience and tell how Christ died for all to assure salvation by belief in him.

I don't understand why taking a leap of faith to tell others about Jesus is so often overlooked. If we have the opportunity to talk about Jesus and don't, when the day of his second coming occurs, will he tell us we did a good job or tell us he never knew us?

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

### Don't forget us, candidates

Sen. John McCain's plans to have town hall meetings with Sen. Barack Obama has some merit.

Some merit. We phrase it that way because we wonder what kind of towns they are talking about.

Shortly after Sen. McCain issued an invite to Sen. Obama to travel together and stage 10 town hall meetings between now and August's Democratic Party's convention in Denver, guess what town was the first to offer its facilities: New York City, courtesy Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. ABC-TV jumped in to be the network to carry the town hall meeting live.

Town and New York City don't quite go together.

We would hope Senators McCain and Obama, if they can agree on arrangements, would bring their town hall meetings to towns in rural America. Norton would be a good place to stage one of those.

Our dictionary defines town as "larger than a village but smaller than a city." That pretty much describes us, and it certainly doesn't describe the likes of New York City. It would be interesting to learn how they will choose the audiences for these town hall meetings — if they materialize. And if they hit a snag on stage, who will be the

referee?

The experts tell us that town hall meetings will definitely favor Sen. McCain. Maybe so. Perhaps they can alternate between town hall style and rally style, which would, of course, favor Sen. Obama.

Whatever they choose, I hope they choose Small Town, America. We are also voters, and if the general election will be as tight as early predictions indicate, it just might be a Norton, Kansas that makes the difference.

OK, so our chances are none. But it doesn't hurt to toss our hat in the ring.

— Tom Dreiling, publisher Norton Telegram.

### Are gasoline prices changing habits?

By Lawrence Journal-World

You know there's been a basic shift in our thinking when the news that the price of gasoline will rise to about \$4.15 a gallon and stay there for a year or more is greeted with a certain amount of relief.

The price prediction recently announced by the U.S. Department of Energy would have been a little hard to swallow six months ago when the average price of gasoline was about a dollar less, but now it almost seems like a reprieve. In fact, to many Americans, the prediction seems almost too good to be true. Even the news story reporting the figure pointed out that the energy department's predictions often turn out to be optimistic.

It make many of us think twice about making an extra trip, especially to an out-of-town destination. It also conjures up some sober contemplation of how dependent Americans have become on highly available and relatively inexpensive transportation. ...

We haven't worried about our friends and families being flung around the globe because we always knew that an airplane flight could bring us together. ...

Grapes from Chile in the middle of the winter? No problem.

As long as grapes are in season somewhere on Earth, they are in our supermarkets. A seafood lover stuck in Kansas? It costs a little more, but today's catch on the east or west

coast can be on your plate tonight. There are people still living today who remember when oranges were such a rarity in Kansas that they found them only in their Christmas stockings. The world has certainly changed.

And it seems to be changing again. Perhaps higher gasoline prices are only temporary, but that seems unlikely.

Perhaps that good old Yankee ingenuity will find new ways to easily move products and people around the globe.

Or maybe the cost and availability of transportation are about to force Americans to stay a little closer to home, with both their travel plans and their purchasing habits.

It's a sobering thought.

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

