

Opinion



**Free Press
Viewpoint**

Good news

By Lieutenant Governor Mark Parkinson

There is a popular misconception that ethanol is to blame – a misconception that was created and promoted through a political attack campaign in Washington D.C. Recently, Sen. Chuck Grassley of Iowa (Reference website: grassley.senate.gov/public) told his Senate colleagues that “this anti-ethanol campaign is not a coincidence. It turns out that a \$300,000, six-month retainer of a beltway public relations firm is behind the negative campaign, hired by the Grocery Manufacturers Association.”

With these attacks exposed, it is time to set the record straight: Ethanol is not to blame for rising food costs.

First and foremost, the corn used for ethanol is not the same corn that people eat.

Second, the price of corn has only a minimal impact on the grocery price of food. The best example is cornflakes. (Reference website: gourmetspot.com/know/cornflakes). Less than 5 percent of its price tag reflects the cost of corn – that’s less than a nickel of every dollar. The remaining 95 percent is due in large part to packaging, shipping and marketing.

There are two reasons food costs are going up. First is the same reason all costs are going up – gas prices are out of control.

It takes gasoline and diesel to farm and transport crops. It takes petroleum products – plastic – to package food.

When oil goes up – everything goes up. The second reason food prices are up (Reference website: whitehouse.gov/news/releases) is because of global demand. Global food prices are up 43 percent since 2007 – growing demand in emerging markets accounts for nearly 18 percent of the increase and weather-related disasters in Australia, China and many Eastern European countries have had a tremendous impact.

Wheat (up 146 percent since 2007) and rice (up 29 percent since 2007) account for much of the world’s food consumption of grains – leading to increased US exports of rice due to (Reference website: www.ers.usda.gov/Publications) exportable supplies across Asia, strong global demand, and recently announced export bans or restrictions in several key rice-producing nations.

If anything, (See website: www.marketwatch.com/news/story/govt-officials-ethanol-helps) ethanol helps keep costs down.

Ethanol makes up a portion of this nation’s fuel. If we were to suddenly stop making ethanol, gas prices could increase by as much as thirty-five cents.

Could ethanol be more efficient? Absolutely, and I’m proud to say that Kansas is at the forefront of developing this technology.

See website: www.cjonline.com/stories/061508/kan – New technology will enable Kansas ethanol plants to produce food, fuel and feed.

And (See website: www.ens-newswire.com/ens/aug2007/2007-08) Kansas is home to the most significant breakthrough in ethanol technology to date: Cellulosic ethanol. This ethanol won’t be made from corn, but from things like switchgrass, corn stover, wheat straw and forage sorghums.

Ethanol is here to stay and this is good news for all of us.

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

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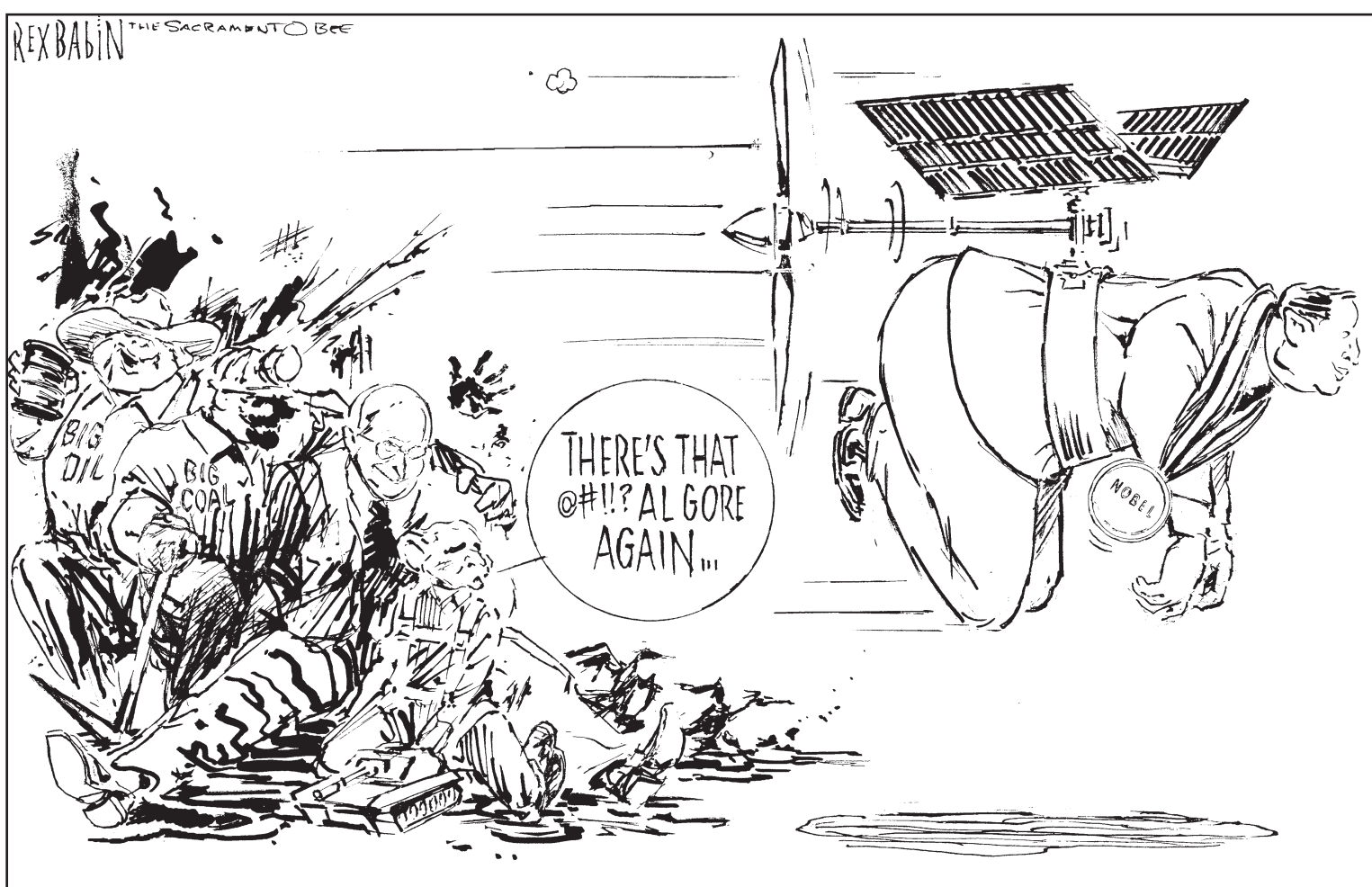
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This option is looking better



**John
Van Nostrand**

• Line in the Dust

On the spur of the moment, and knowing I was the best choice at the time, I took my mom to Iowa last week. I was headed that direction anyway. Her father had fallen and broke his hip requiring an ambulance ride for surgery at a Des Moines hospital 70 miles away. He’s recovering.

Although the condition of her father was priority, I did ask her how she planned to get back home, some 500 miles away. She knew I wasn’t an option. She said she would take the train back, as the closest stop to her house is only 45 miles away — easy and close enough for either my father or one of my siblings to pick her up at the station.

The only problem is, she hasn’t found an available seat on an Amtrak train, yet. On the days she would like to return home, the west-bound trains are booked. The first available seat is much later than she wanted.

It’s not a big surprise that Amtrak trains have had more riders lately. The bad news stories about the airline industry could easily cover all the runways at the airports. The rising cost of fuel has forced the airlines to raise their ticket prices and, the real anger, start charging more for all kinds of luggage.

Taking the train is not a bad alternative, as long as you have a flexible schedule. Considering my mom’s distance home, a train ticket is comparable to the cost of gasoline for her car for the same trip. The train ride may take a little longer, but you are not putting miles and wear-and-tear on your car.

I’ve ridden Amtrak before. I know it has its

critics, but I enjoy it. You get much more leg room than a coach-class airplane seat. Luggage weight is not a concern. Food and snacks are available.

But the scheduling is critical. The Amtrak train that crosses the middle of the country use other railroad company’s tracks. Those coal and freight trains have priority. It’s not unusual for an Amtrak train to stop on a siding, only to let a coal train pass. That can slow down the trip. Of course, if the coal trains are late to their destinations, Amtrak will be even more behind.

Amtrak’s critics do have points, but the complaints are, in principle, no different than the airlines problems. Weather is becoming more of a concern for airlines, which causes more flight delays and cancellations. And we’ve all heard the gripes about \$4 gasoline and the financial strain of driving on vacations.

Amtrak, which receives federal funding, always gets mentioned by some Congressman and his thoughts of just scrapping the whole program because of the expense. I don’t think that is a good idea. First of all, it’s not fair.

All forms of transportation have some sort of federal money involved and I’m sure you can find some statistic to show how inefficiently spent the money is on whatever mode of transportation.

It would take bajillions of dollars to expand Amtrak’s services. If it had its own set of rails, I can only speculate its on-time rate would improve greatly. But, other than the expense, it would take a long, long time for land acquisition and construction.

Railroads helped expand and grow this country more than 100 years ago, and the trains are still around today, despite the massive trucking industry.

But I hope passenger trains will be available across the country in the next 100 years.

Because somebody’s mom might have to make an emergency trip.

We welcome two new people to the Free Press this week. Steven Matthews started work in advertising. He will be doing ad design and other graphic-art related work for the paper.

We also brought back last summer’s intern reporter Michelle Myers. Knowing it will take some time to find a new, permanent reporter, we asked Michelle if she would be willing to work until we either find a permanent reporter or she goes back to college in Portland, Ore.

She said yes, no matter what happens first.

We do have several people asking about the reporter job.

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

Life on Whidbey

By Janis Schulte
Former Colby College instructor

Editor’s note: After 19 years in Colby, Janis moved to Greenbank, Wash. to live with her mother and brother on his 20 acres at Whidbey Island. She is keeping a daily journal of her new life in hopes her friends in the area will enjoy her adventures, too.

Life on John’s 20 acres here on Whidbey Island is so completely different than life in Colby that it’s hard to explain.

I’ve stepped from instructor on the plains to writer in the woods. (Well, to be honest, my profession at the moment is mover—unpacking endless boxes and trying to figure out where to put things in Mom’s antique-filled house.)

Until I get the chance to get a digital-camera-computer lesson from John, let me try some snapshots in words. (That’s how I always described the descriptive essay to my students.) Even a simple daily task such as laundry has its own unique twist—there are not many people who can talk about being stalked by a cougar as they go to do their wash.

We do all the laundry in John’s basement laundry room. Mom and I step out of our

house, whether in sunshine or drizzle, and start on the short trek across the yard to John’s.

First, we’re greeted by Gunner, a large ambiguous mix of a dog with a golden retriever’s golden but short fur and—well, I just don’t know my dog breeds enough to go further with that description.

He’s on a very long lead chain and is a friendly, rambunctious soul. Mom has trained him to pick up a large stick (or two-by-four or block of wood) if he wants to be petted—that saves us the slobbers and the jumping up he likes to do.

Then we come to the perimeter fence for Talina, John’s cougar that he raised from a kitten. We walk the path to John’s back door. The first thing I notice when we open the door is the acrid smell of cougar pee. (It’s one of those things exotic pet owners have to learn to live with.) Then I look for Talina, who is usually on the perch in the indoor portion of her cage.

Talina watches intently as I walk past her cage to the wrought-iron spiral staircase. Up leads to John’s loft bedroom/home office; down leads to the basement.

There are two doors at the bottom of the staircase, and I use the right hand one, which

takes me into the laundry and storage area. (The left hand one leads to the bobcat pen and freezers for the raw meat cat food.)

I look up to see if John’s ancient bobcat is walking through the caged walkway that leads from his indoor pen to his outdoor pen.

By now my nose has acclimated somewhat to the pungent wildcat odors. Once I get the washer and dryer going, I retrace my steps up the spiral staircase and into John’s living room.

As I walk through his house and out the back door, Talina often follows silently via her caged walkway. Outside, she crouches to pounce and almost always startles me as she bounds up to the 12-foot-tall fence on my left. She is a beautiful animal: 80 pounds of female feline power (minus the claws). I close the perimeter cage door behind me and greet Gunner once again.

Ahead of me across the driveway is the place I now call home: a darling one-level ranch log-cabin-style home. Behind it—and every direction I turn—is the deep evergreen woods. But that’s a snapshot for another day.

Schulte’s column will appear on Wednesdays.

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. 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.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce
Tinsley

