

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Your country needs you to exercise vote

With the election just a few days away, this is a good time to think about what we have in this country, and why it's important to stay involved in the democratic process.

It's fashionable at election time to criticize our government, our process, the state of our society.

Candidates, whoever they are, whatever they believe, cry for change. That's how they get attention.

Many times, they are right.

Our system could stand a good overhaul. Our government has its faults. Our nation is far from perfect.

For more than 230 years, we've been searching for the American ideal. We haven't reached that state of perfection yet.

But this is a nation founded on principles and ideas that transcend their imperfect implementation.

America is more than the sum of its flaws. It is, first of all, the best and brightest place to live and think and be free in the history of man. And while that's not a modest claim, it's not that hard to back up.

Other nations may have better health care or better schools or a better bureaucracy. It's easy to find those that excel at one thing or another, and sometimes, these can be a shining example for us to measure up to.

But no other nation cherishes quite so much the traditions of free speech, free thought, religious liberty, equality, diversity and economic freedom embodied in the words of Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Mason and a few other forward thinkers of that era in the 18th century.

The ideals that formed the American nation, enshrined in the Constitution and especially in the Bill of Rights, set us apart. Nowhere else would all religions and sects be tolerated. Nowhere else would the idea of the "Melting Pot" mean that anyone who came could become "an American."

It's true, we've seldom lived up to these ideals.

The founders tolerated slavery, subjugated women and minorities, looked the other way at many sins. That does not taint their ideals.

Over the centuries, we've welcomed immigrants and then treated them poorly, from the Irish and the Italians and Poles to the current crop of Hispanics. We gave slaves their freedom, then levied a poll tax and built separate and unequal schools.

The unique thing about America is we keep reinventing our democracy. We change and grow, admit our mistakes and move on. We'll never reach perfection, but what nation has?

Where, if you sought a better place, would you go?

Where would it be possible to demand change — and get it — as it is here?

And now, your country is calling you to help. Your vote is needed next week.

The presidential race is as important as any we've seen. In state and county elections, voters face decisions that will affect many lives for many years.

If you choose not to vote, others will make your decisions for you. But that's not what America is about.

If you want change, or you don't, you have to go to the polls on Tuesday and mark your ballot.

That's how each of us plays our part in this great tradition of striving for a more perfect American. It really works.

See you at the polls. — Steve Haynes

### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansas.com

State award-winning newspaper, General Excellence, Design & Layout, Columns, Editorial Writing, Sports Columns, News, Photography. Official newspaper of Thomas County, Colby, Brewster and Rexford.

Steve Haynes - Publisher  
s.haynes@nwkansas.com

#### NEWS

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter  
a.heintz@nwkansas.com

#### ADVERTISING

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

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales  
hwoofter@nwkansas.com

Stefon Matthews - Graphic Design  
smatthews@nwkansas.com

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk  
jestes@nwkansas.com

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator  
support@nwkansas.com

#### NORWEST PRESS

Jim Bowker - General Manager

Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Elizabeth Brock

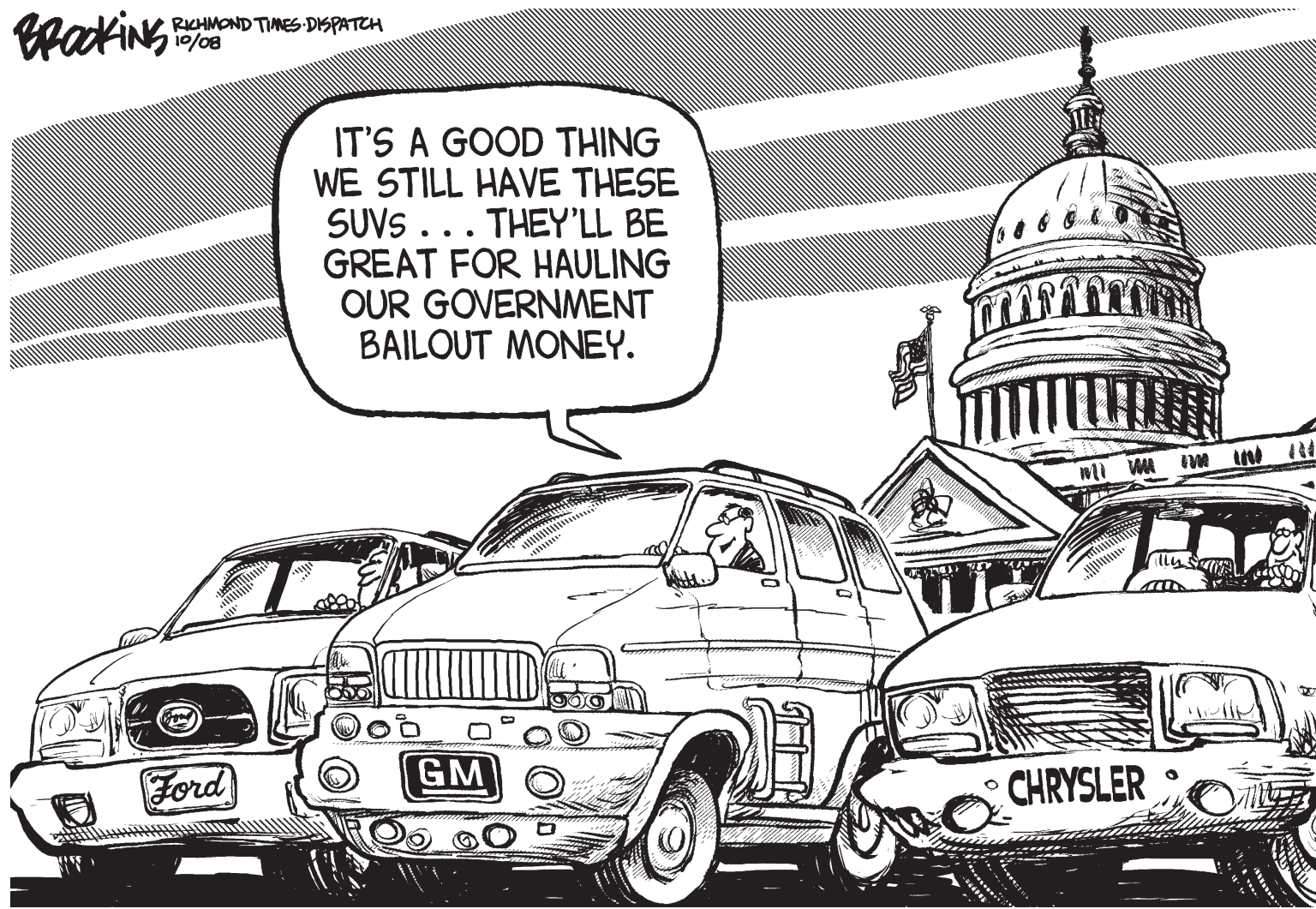
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### Lots of traffic in two-state tour

I spent the weekend driving across a good section of two states, and getting in more traffic than I normally see in a year.

The two-day trek started out fairly easily, with a three-hour drive Friday morning to see my mother in Concordia. Mom was doing fine, and we had lunch and did a little shopping before I headed out about 3 p.m. for my next appointment in Lincoln, Neb.

A couple of months previously, I had signed up to attend the Nebraska Press Association's Hall of Fame dinner. Steve and I are friends with one of the inductees, so I thought, it would be nice to go to the banquet in his honor.

At the time I signed up, I was working under two misconceptions. The first was that Steve would be out of the country on a National Newspaper Association trip, and the second was that our oldest daughter would be in Topeka. She was to go to a meeting and hoped to visit with me, her brother in Lawrence and her grandmother in Concordia.

Steve's trip fell through and so did my daughter's, but I had signed up for the dinner and didn't want to disappoint either my mother, my friends in Nebraska or my son, who was also expecting me.

I had no problem getting to Lincoln. I stopped just outside of town at a gas station and changed from my jeans to a dress and applied my makeup in the car before following the directions I had to the Nebraska Club on



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

13th street.

Dinner was nice, but I needed to get down the road if I was to have lunch in Lawrence the next day. Besides, Lincoln was packed. The Huskers were at home, and every Nebraska fan from several states around was there — really. I ran into a couple on the street from Louisville, Ky., who were there for the game. I was lucky to get into town fairly early and get a spot in the parking garage.

Now all I had to do is get out of town. The guard at the garage gave me directions. As I stammered right, left, left, left, uhh, he smiled and wrote them down: "Turn right out of garage onto 12th. Go to 14th and take a left. Go to Q Street and take a left. Go the 9th street and take a left. Follow 9th, which turns into Highway 2, to 14th. Take a right at 14th-Highway 2. Go to Old Cheney, veer right onto Warwick Blvd. Take Warwick to Highway 77.

Rather unbelievably, and with only one wrong turn, I made it. I was out of all that traffic in Lincoln and headed for Beatrice, Neb.,

where I spent the night.

The next morning, I followed Steve's directions to get to Lawrence. Luckily, I arrived after the game had started — yep, KU had a home game, too.

Lacy and I had a nice lunch, and I waited until the game had been over about an hour before heading out of town. There was still a lot of traffic, but I figured most of it would disappear as the Turnpike turned south in a run for Wichita at Topeka. I was right. Most of the people were headed south or stopping in the capital city.

Soon, though, I noticed a lot of people coming toward me on the other side of I-70. Oh no, I thought, I bet K-State had a home game.

Right again. The traffic was horrific on the other side of the freeway until I passed Manhattan. Then it was bad on my side.

I can't figure out how in one weekend I was able to get into not one but three game traffic patterns. I don't need a global positioning system. I can find my way, with a little help.

I just need a slap up the side of the head next time I decide to go on a two-state road trip.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes@nwkansas.com

### America above easy labels?

I have exercised my right and voted early, and with a week to go to the General Election would encourage everyone else to do the same.

It is probably not a news flash to most people, but I am a Democrat and voted for Barack Obama.

I have been a Democrat all my life, but on a rare occasion I have voted for a Republican or two. In an extremely rare instance, I even changed my party registration to vote in a Republican primary before switching back to where I am more comfortable.

In this election season, I was a Hillary Clinton supporter, and felt she was the best choice for the nomination. When the convention nominated Obama, I was a bit skeptical about his chances to win, and part of that was a feeling that it would be hard for many people in American to elect an African-American even before they would elect a woman to the highest office in our country.

The polls indicate Obama is in good shape, but I don't expect that Kansas will be among the states swinging away from the Republican, conservative base. I do think the increased registrations in the state may improve the percentage of the vote Obama and other Democratic candidates will receive. It would be amazing to see Obama come within 10 percent of winning Kansas on Tuesday.

I grew up in the 1950s and was in sixth grade in 1960 when Richard Nixon lost to John F. Kennedy. At our school, we held a straw poll with people voting for Nixon or Kennedy and allowed each side to campaign for a week before the vote.

I was the Kennedy campaign manger. One of the questions the Nixon people brought up was that Kennedy was a Catholic, suggest-



Tom Betz

• Mountain Time

ing he would bow to any order from Rome. I thought that was outlandish. Nixon won the straw poll, but I was pleased Kennedy won the general election.

I believed our country had grown beyond these stereotypes over the past 40 plus years, and feel Obama should be elected because he is the best leader for the time and not because he is the first African-American candidate.

However, I was amazed to hear over the weekend comments from people talking about "those people" and that we should never have "brought them here." It was even suggested that "those people" should be sent back where they came from.

Being of Cherokee descent myself, I wondered what "these people" think about the American Indians, who were here long before the United States.

I served in the U.S. Navy from 1969 to 1973 with a lot of people from different ethnic backgrounds, including a full-blood Sioux from South Dakota, servicemen from the Philippines, American Samoa and all over the country.

I got to know these people and was glad to call them mates and friends as we served our country during the Vietnam War. I did not serve in Vietnam, as the Navy decided it would be better for me to spend my time in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. On that base, I met

people who had exiled themselves from their homeland because of their beliefs and could not go home.

I hope everyone votes. It does not matter to me whether you are a Republican or Democrat. As you go to vote, you might think of those sixth-grade kids nearly 50 years ago who said we should not elect Kennedy because he was a Catholic.

I believe America is a better country because of the diversity of our people, and that the Melting Pot is an important part of a history that has given us some of the most intelligent leaders in the world.

Tom Betz is editor of The Goodland Star-News and a longtime editor and publisher. He formerly was editor and publisher of the old Lamar Daily News in Colorado.

### 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, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

