

Opinion



Other Viewpoints

Property tax freeze 'unconstitutional'

It's an interesting intellectual exercise to debate Proposition K, a proposal to cap property valuation increases.

But it has little practical value, because enacting it would require amending the Kansas Constitution, and the chances of that happening are slim to none.

Proponents of Proposition K offered their case in a House hearing recently. They argued that capping property valuation increases at 2 percent a year would make the tax system simpler, more predictable and more transparent — all worthy goals.

But opponents pointed out that such a system could, over time, significantly benefit wealthier, growing neighborhoods while disadvantaging homeowners in poorer areas. ...

A practical problem with Proposition K is that it is unconstitutional.

The state's constitution dictates that real property must be assessed uniformly and equally based on market values. It classifies property into various groups that are assessed at specified percentages of market value.

Under Proposition K, assessments would not be based on market value and, over time, would become unequal, because not all property appreciates at the same rate.

Thus, in order to enact Proposition K, the state would need to amend the constitution, which requires a two-thirds vote from both chambers of the Legislature and then a majority approval by voters. Given the concerns about how Proposition K would work and how it could benefit some property owners at the expense of others, that's unlikely to happen....

If voters are upset about rising tax bills, they can elect local officials who will hold the line on spending and possibly lower levy rates to compensate for rising property values....

Everybody loves to hate property taxes. And given the subjectivity of appraisals, it's admirable that lawmakers are considering whether there are ways to make the system better. But Proposition K's many flaws make it a nonstarter.

— *The Wichita Eagle, via The Associated Press*

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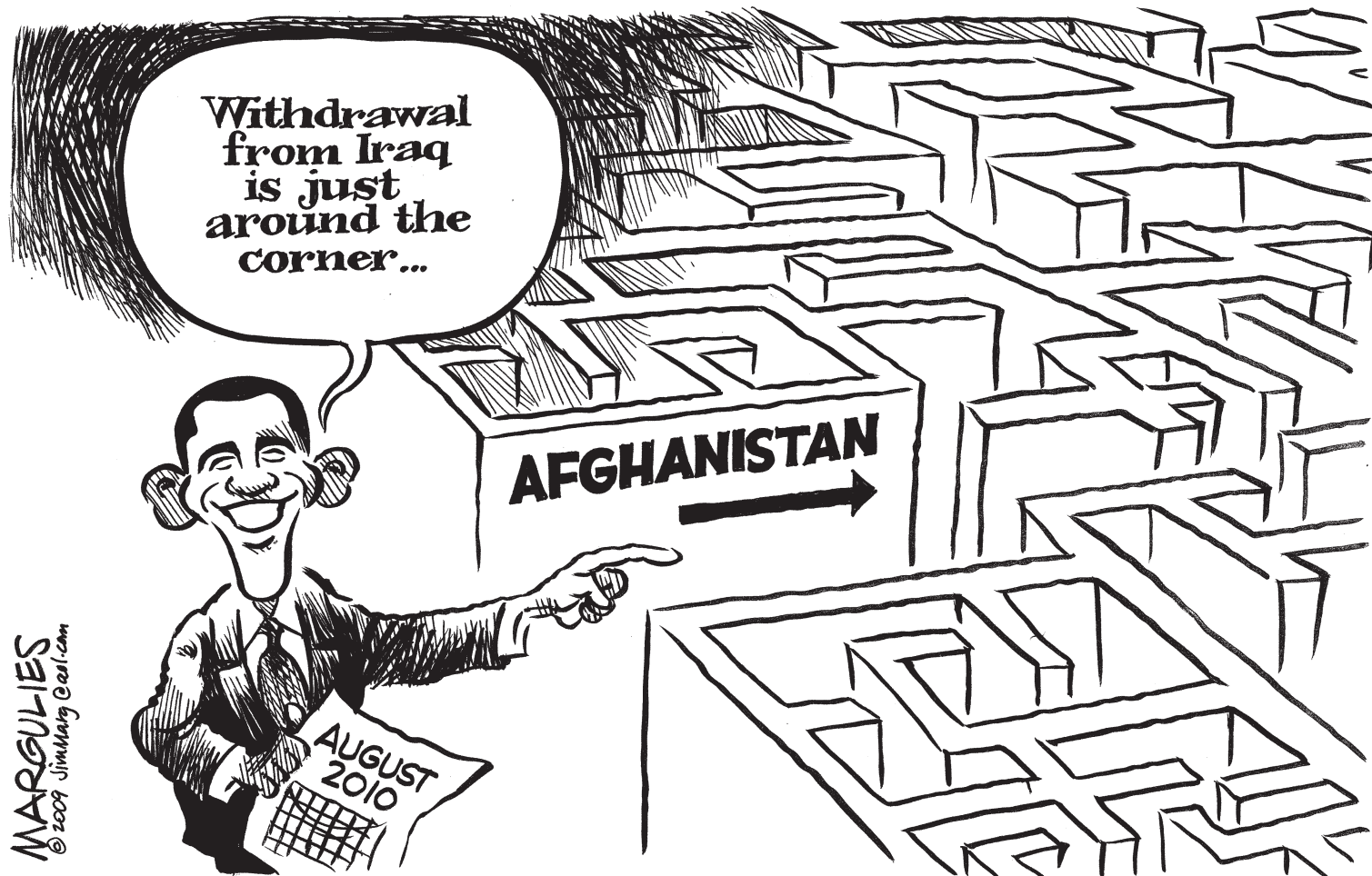
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Death of a friend always sad

It's never easy, being present for the death of an old friend.

But last week, it seemed as if all of Colorado was mourning the 150-year-old *Rocky Mountain News* after the E.W. Scripps Co. announced Thursday the paper would close the next day.

People snapped up copies of the final issue, which featured a commemoration of the paper's history and a reproduction of the first front page on the cover.

By late morning, there hardly was one to be found in vending boxes or newsstands. Hundreds of subscribers complained they were missing the copy from their yards.

While the combination of business operations with *The Denver Post* eight years ago was supposed to save Denver's two big newspapers, in truth, *The Rocky* had been on life support for years.

In the great years of the newspaper wars, both had pushed themselves to the very top of American journalism, winning Pulitzer prizes and other awards. In an era when few American cities still had two newspapers, Denver had two great papers.

The war had ended after Scripps blinked and cut *The Rocky* back to six metro counties. The company claimed that would be a better value for advertisers, but everyone knew better. It was only a matter of time.

Post owner William Dean Singleton made Scripps pay millions for a 50 percent stake in the new joint agency after the company certified to the Justice Department that *The News*



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

was a "failing newspaper." All operations except the newsrooms were combined and the papers built a new office tower and a new printing plant.

Later, many would wonder what would have happened had the companies kept the millions invested in the plant — especially since both had relatively modern presses — but at the time it seemed like the thing to do.

In the face of an Internet assault on classified revenue, and a deep recession, though, even the partial merger couldn't save the two-paper town. Last year, Scripps reported when it put *The News* up for sale, it lost \$22 million, which implied *The Post* lost a similar amount.

No one could say things would get better. No one wanted to risk the \$200 million ante to find out.

And so, with a day's notice, Scripps pulled the plug. Everyone — *News* employees and *The Post* included — was shocked at the speed of the move.

"We had plans for two weeks, a month, we were ready," one veteran *Post* man said, "but a day? No."

Nonetheless, *The Post* covered the closing

with major stories on Friday and had a Saturday edition on the presses that night. *The News* has been the only paper on Saturday, but a newly enlarged *Post* staff put out a paper using ads sold for the *Rocky*.

A grave Dean Singleton avoided any gloating, admitting that it will take a fight to save even one big metro paper in an era when small, community-based papers are healthy and big ones find the going tough. He pledged, in interviews and in private, to win — again.

John Temple, editor and publisher of *The News*, managed to bear up through three days of emotional goodbyes and supervising the final edition. Friends said he had aged years in the last few months as he tried first to save his paper, then do what he could for his people.

He spoke Friday to the Colorado Press Association convention, arriving and leaving to long standing ovations. He said he thought the paper's 210,000 subscribers would miss it.

"The Joint Operating Agreement allowed for eight years of two papers in Denver," he said. It grew until 2006.

"I think it had to end with one newspaper."

By Saturday, when he came to the associations' awards to gather in one final set of plaques, he appeared more relaxed. The editors gave him — and *The Rocky Mountain News* — one more ovation as he moved back to his seat.

Steve Haynes is editor and publisher of the Colby Free Press and president of Nor'West Newspapers. In his spare time, whenever that is, he like to ride and watch trains.

Mentors can change lives

Being a mentor through Big Brothers Big Sisters has been described by those who have filled the role of mentor as a magical experience for each person involved in the program, whether they are a "little" or a "big".

Most everyone can look back on their life and remember that a certain person who was their source of encouragement as a child, when they needed it most.

Being a Big Brother or Big Sister is about taking a little time to share simple moments with a child who needs a special someone to look up to and trust.

Many people in our community can trace their road to success back to that special person who mentored them with patience, trust in their abilities, and words of encouragement.

Diane Stithem, director for the Thomas County Big Brothers Big Sisters program, says mentoring made a difference in the life of businessman Richard Epp, who was willing to share his experience. Epp wrote:

Other Opinions

• Diane Stithem
Big Brothers, Big Sisters

The one person who has directly attributed to my success as a broadcaster and salesman, is Kay Melia.

In 1972, Kay hired me as sports director for KLOE Radio and TV in Goodland. I had just graduated from Colby Community College with a degree in radio and television.

I had no experience in either commercial radio or television, but sent him a tape of a fabricated basketball broadcast.

Kay Melia took a chance on me and taught me the business. He believed I could learn all

I needed to know and trusted that I would use that knowledge to be the best I could be. He encouraged me through many challenges. He was always fair, sometimes more than fair.

Several times when we had a death in the family, he gave me a week off with no loss of pay. He taught me that people matter. Eventually, Kay gave me the opportunity to move into area for both radio and television.

Through his mentoring and leadership and his expectation of professionalism, I have worked in Kansas, Nebraska and Illinois. I've also worked for Kansas Gov. Mike Hayden as his press secretary from 1987 to 1991.

Kay Melia's mentoring in my early years has led me and my wife Judy to have our own marketing and broadcasting business for the past 15 years. I truly believe I would not be where I am today if it were not for Kay Melia and his support and belief in me.

For information about becoming a mentor, call Stithem at 460-0125.

Reader wants Bee in the paper

To the Editor:
I am somewhat disappointed in your coverage of the Thomas County Spelling Bee. I have noticed announcements in the paper regarding pending spelling bees, yet the county spelling bee winner, who goes onto regionals, received no coverage.

This event took place on Feb. 17. Do you not suppose that it would have meant something to this student to have seen his photo in the paper and receive recognition?

Or as it seems to be more and more appar-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

ent, that events involving Brewster students receive less recognition and are less important

than the rest of the county schools?
Peggy Ohlrogge, Brewster

Editor's Note: We have been waiting for results from both the Colby and county bees. Information for the county bee finally came Friday.

We expect to have the rest of the results and run a story soon. It's certainly not our intention to slight Brewster; we have to depend on the school or someone involved to report many events. — *Steve Haynes*

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

