# pinion



## Other **Viewpoints**

## Governor's choice could set a course

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' expected departure for the mean streets of the nation's capital leaves Kansas with a hole in its government. When Lt. Gov. Mark Parkinson moves into the governor's office, the state will be without a lieutenant governor. It will be up to Parkinson to appoint his own replace-

Although many fine people have held the office, the presence or absence of a lieutenant governor has seldom been of much interest to the people of Kansas. ...

In spite of that, Parkinson's choice could set a new course for Kansas politics for the next 10 years.

The departure of Sebelius will remove the state's best-known and most popular Democrat from Kansas politics. Parkinson will replace her in office, but he cannot replace her as a party leader. He could become a leader over the next two years, but he has already said that he will not be a candidate for governor in 2010. That means that his choice for lieutenant governor has a fair shot at being the party's candidate for governor in two years.

The Kansas City Star has been playing with a list on its politics Web site, but the list seems to be made up of people many Kansans have never heard of — State Sen. Laura Kelly of Topeka, former State Rep. Ed McKechnie of Pittsburg and State Rep. Raj Goyle of Wichita. Others on the list are from the far past — former U.S. Rep. Jim Slattery, former Gov. John Carlin and former Regent Jill Docking. ...

Surprisingly, a name not on the list is that of Chris Biggs, the Kansas securities commissioner. Biggs has made only one run for statewide office — he challenged Phill Kline for attorney general and lost, but not by much. If Biggs had had more financial support from the state party, he might have won.

Biggs made a lot of friends during his campaign for attorney general. He is smart and likable and plays guitar well enough to have come in third three years running in the National Flat Pick Championship at Winfield.

Parkinson should keep Biggs in mind when he is making his choice for the state's next lieutenant governor.

- The Emporia Gazette via the Associated Press

#### 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 Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 128-S., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 or ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

#### COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. Colby, Kan. 67701 (USPS 120-920)

(785) 462-3963 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

**NEWS** 

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor

Marj Brown, Vera Sloan - Society Editors

#### **ADVERTISING**

Jasmine Stewart - Advertising Manager

Heather Woofter - Advertising Sales

Tyler Zolinski - Graphic Design

Jessica Estes - Classified Ad Desk estes @ nwkansas.com

**BUSINESS OFFICE** 

Tammy Withers - Office Manager

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator support @ nwkansas.com

#### **NOR'WEST PRESS**

Jim Bowker - General Manager Richard Westfahl, Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris,

James Ornelas, Barbara Ornelas, Tasha Shores, Daniel Spillman

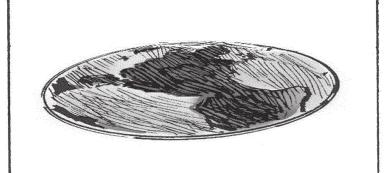
THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

PERIODICALS POSTAGE paid at Colby, Kan. 67701, and at additional mailing offices POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Colby Free Press, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby,

THE BUSINESS OFFICE at 155 W. Fifth is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, closed Saturday and Sunday. MEMBER OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, which is exclusively entitled to the use for publication of all news herein. Member Kansas Press Association and National Newspaper Association

SUBSCRIPTION RATES: In Colby by carrier: 4 months \$40, 8 months \$56, 12 months \$74. By mail within Colby and the nine-county region of Thomas, Sheridan, Decatur, Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace, Logan and Gove counties: 4 months \$53, 8 months \$65, 12 months \$82. Other Kansas counties: 4 months \$60, 8 months \$70, 12 months \$85. All other states, \$85, 12 months.







# Does everyone have a story?

You could take Jim Sheeler for an undertaker in his plain black suit, all three buttons buttoned down, if it weren't for the face.

Sheeler looks like a college kid, not the winner of a Pulitzer Prize or one of the most brilliant reporters in the country.

Who else could have turned the obituary beat into a Pulitzer? At most newspapers, reporters run from obituaries like dogs fleeing a bath.

Reporters, especially young reporters, crave action. They see the obit desk as a dead end. They disdain the beat as they once disdained the police state, but then a few years ago a Miami woman, Edna Buchanan, turned the police beat into a Pulitzer, and that into a lucrative career as a crime novelist.

Where others saw tedium, Jim Sheeler just saw stories, story after fascinating story. He started at a little weekly in Boulder, Colo., expanding the spare obits turned in by funeral homes into beautiful little features about someone's life. Pretty soon, he said, people were calling asking him to write obits.

He carried his craft on to The Denver Post and then to the late, and much lamented, Rocky Mountain News, where he did other stories. It was another obit, though, that propelled him on the road to fame.

The editors sent him out to cover the death who already knew the grave diggers at Fort guidelines: Logan National Cemetery, went out in search



#### Steve Haynes

 Along the Sappa

of another story no one else saw.

Soon, he had burrowed into the Marine Corps burial detail that served families in the Denver region. He followed the Marines as they helped bury their fallen comrades, getting to know the families of the men, the Marine detail and their commander, Maj. Steve Beck.

The result was a beautifully written, moving series of stories on these fallen Marines that won the Pulitzer for feature writing in 2006 (along with a companion Pulitzer for feature photography). Sheeler now has turned that into a book, "Final Salute." He had left his job and begun teaching at the University of Colorado before the Rocky folded last month.

The two brought the count to four Pulitzers harvested by the 150-year-old newspaper in the eight years before it died.

Now sharing his insight into news with students and professionals, Sheeler told how he got such a remarkable insight into the lives of a Marine from suburban Denver, the first  $\,$  and grief of these people - and how he finds native son of that state to fall in Iraq. Sheeler, stories where others fear to look Some of his

• Everyone has a story.

- Often, they leave you a gift a quote, some writing, something about their life.
- Treat people as you would your own family. Be human.
- People will give you the gift of their story. • Keep your eyes and ears open for details, surroundings, little incidents.
- One secret just being there and listening when you can be that fly on the wall. That's where it's at.
- It's just a matter of being there you don't have to ask questions.

Sheeler said he stays in touch with all the families he covered during his project. They invite him to their gatherings, include him in their trials and triumphs. Sometimes, he gets choked up talking about them. At one point, he played a video on the project.

"This is the point where I usually have trouble talking," he said as he pushed the button. "If you don't cry at some of these things,

And the war? His view may come through in the stories, he said, but he doesn't talk about

"I have my opinion," Sheeler said, "but I don't tell people. I don't think I'm smart enough to tell someone else what to think."

And that makes him pretty smart, compared

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.

# How the stimulus package will affect us

Stimulus Update: Wednesday, Chris Whatley with the Council of State Governments appeared before the Senate Ways and Means Committee to review the impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (the federal stimulus bill) on Kansas. Whatley reviewed the background of the bill, money opportunities and legislative priorities resulting from passage of the bill.

Kansas is eligible for more than \$1.27 billion in federal money through fiscal year 2011, he said, and more could result through competitive grants. Altogether, up to \$1.75 billion is available to the state.

Kansas will receive over \$483 million, through 2010, in flexible funding to supplement current state spending for Medicaid and education. Of that, 90 percent will go to Medicaid and the rest for schools.

To supplement current state money, Kansas may get over \$1.27 billion for transportation, education and other formula-based programs. Additional money is available for unemployment and energy efficiency, but both come with strings attached.

Included in the stimulus bill are the provisions of the Unemployment Modernization Act, which requires states to make permanent changes to unemployment standards. Details have yet to be released by the Department of Labor, but this provision has resulted in several governors refusing to accept the money. For states who abide by the modernization requirements, \$68 million is available.

Kansas can get an additional \$40 million in energy efficiency grants if the state adopts a utility rate system that encourages energy con-



### Ralph Ostmeyer

State Senator

servation and implements energy efficiency standards in building codes while holding utility companies harmless for loss of revenue.

Over \$100 billion in competitive grant opportunities are available for states, but there are more than 30 grant categories, with the largest amount dedicated to education incentive grants. Full guidelines are supposed to be posted at www.grants.gov by March 19.

One of the most problematic issues surrounding the stimulus package is the role of the legislature in the distribution of money. Transportation dollars must be allocated by Tuesday and the stimulus package is mute on the role of legislatures.

February Revenues: For February, tax revenues came in \$12 million below projections. Revised consensus revenue estimates had predicted tax collections of \$251 million for February but the actual amount was \$239 million.

Update on the SB 208, Abolishing the **Death Penalty**: On Wednesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted to send SB 208 for interim study. On Thursday, the committee, on a motion to reconsider, voted 6-5 to pass the bill out of committee. This bill is now up for a vote by the Senate.

SB 108, Economic Revitalization and Reinvestment Act: SB 108 revises the Economic Revitalization and Reinvestment Act to expand the definition of an eligible aviation business and to allow wind and solar energy manufacturing businesses to qualify for benefits.

Under the bill, aviation businesses that have an average annual gross Kansas compensation of more than \$150 million are eligible to the incentives. Wind and solar energy businesses that pay an average annual salary of at least \$32,500 in the manufacturing sector can take advantage of the bond opportunities provided in the act. SB 108 passed 40-0 on Thursday.

SB 147, HIV Screening for Pregnant Women and Newborns: SB 147 requires doctors to screen pregnant women for HIV during the first trimester. The bill allows for women to refuse the screening. Children born to mothers who did not consent to HIV screening must undergo screening after birth. Parental consent is not required but where the screening conflicts with religious beliefs, the child is exempt. Passed 37-3 on Thursday.

Senate Sub for HB 2014, Comprehensive Senate Energy Plan: HB 2014 enacts new law regarding energy efficiency standards of stateowned and leased buildings and equipment, amends law authorizing large electric cooperatives to be deregulated under certain situations, creates renewable energy standards, enacts the Net Metering and Easy Connection Act, and amends portions of the Kansas Air Quality Act concerning the decisions and powers of the Secretary of Health and Environment.

Passed 31-9 on Thursday. Contact Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer at (785) 296-

7399 or ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us.

### Mallard **Fillmore**

Bruce Tinsley





2-opinion CFP 3-12-09.indd 3/12/09 11:42:19 AM