



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Society must hold users accountable

In this age of increasing Internet use by kids and adults alike, we all need to remember to be responsible users.

In the news this week is a federal judge's apparent decision to throw out the conviction of a Missouri woman who helped teens use the social networking site MySpace to bully a 13-year-old girl, resulting in the girl's suicide.

For those who don't know the case, the girl had (in real life) been mean to this woman's daughter, a classmate. The woman then created a fictitious boy and used the persona to befriend the girl. They developed a close relationship, which the woman then intentionally turned nasty. In her final message to the girl, she wrote that the world would be better off without her. No doubt she thought this to be fitting revenge for being mean to her daughter. Then the girl took her own life.

A jury rejected one felony charge of using a computer to intentionally harm a child and deadlocked on a felony charge of conspiracy, eventually settling on computer fraud. And now a judge wants to throw out even that conviction. This in itself is a startlingly timid approach to what should be regarded as a terrible crime. At the very least, this woman should have been charged with negligent homicide.

Think if this had all been in real life. What if this woman had instead gotten a real boy to get close to this girl and then break her heart. Would they have gotten off scot-free then? People need to learn that misusing the anonymity of the Internet has consequences. It had real and irreversible consequences for this girl and her family.

No doubt, the woman hadn't intended to cause this girl to commit suicide, and the girl had been suffering from depression. But the fact remains this woman used the Internet to prey on the insecurities of a child. We lock people up for that behavior when sexual abuse is involved, and the consequences this time were no less dire.

The Internet is an incredible invention, maybe one of the most incredible in human history. It unites the whole world in a single place. It lets us see images of Iranian protesters struggling with an oppressive regime or live images from a probe circling the moon. But we can't forget the power that it can have when used for malicious purposes.

We must be responsible users and we must hold people accountable for their actions while under the anonymity afforded by the Internet. — Kevin Bottrell



### Love is the antidote to dirty politics

Love is the only thing capable of conquering hate.

In the world of politics, love is a word that is rarely heard. Those who support more empathy and tolerance in politics are quickly dismissed as naive idealists who are ill-equipped to handle the ugly realities of the real world. But I think more love could be the perfect antidote to what ails this country.

While competition is key to continued American innovation and ingenuity, it can create an amoral atmosphere if people are determined to win by any means, even illegal or unethical. Greed and ambition are good up to a point, but both of these human qualities can produce catastrophic problems for our country if they are not held in check by an unwritten code of ethics revolving around caring for our fellow human beings.

The United States is more than just individuals attempting to accumulate as much wealth as humanly possible. We are a diverse people with different dreams and systems of thought. In a country with such diversity, we should be promoting an atmosphere that cultivates tolerance and togetherness instead of insatiable greed and narrow self-interest.

Liberals and conservatives would be doing this country a big favor if they rejected partisan rhetoric in favor of constructive dialogue. This could lead to the shattering of simplistic stereotypes held by people in both parties.

Democrats wouldn't be so quick to depict



**Andy Heintz**

• Wildcat Ramblings

all Republicans as greedy, racist white people, and Republicans would think twice before accusing liberals of being hedonistic, anti-American bent on corrupting family values.

I think this would be a welcome change from today's political atmosphere. People would be encouraged to play to the public's better angels as opposed to courting our worst impulses. But this would take a lot of dedication from both the public and our politicians. It is all too easy to fall prey to the politics of polarization.

Human beings seem to have the idea that do be a part of something, we must be against something else. This way of thinking seems to be ingrained in the human psyche. Some exceptional people, like Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi, have been able to overcome this human weakness, but most of us succumb to this way of thinking at some point in our lives.

I certainly have been guilty of aiming hostile rhetoric at the Republicans when it would have been wiser to offer respectful criticism. I'm slowly learning that it's not always healthy

to use sarcasm and anger as tools to oppose the opinions of people who hold views that I'm diametrically opposed to. Now I realize that most of the time it's better to respond to others' beliefs in a way that firmly expresses my opinion without disrespecting and degrading the opinions of others.

I think there are times when we should be polite toward the views of others, even when that respect is not reciprocated. There are certainly limitations to this kind of tolerance. When someone's opinion is influenced by discriminatory beliefs, people should first try to reason with them. But if this strategy fails, the respect that was previously given to the person should become optional and their views should be rejected.

Our government is tackling some big issues, including hostile relations with Iran and North Korea, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the unstable condition of our ailing car makers, a weak economy and a broken health care system.

In the coming months, our country must get the best the Republican and Democratic parties have to offer. For this to happen, both parties need to reject the hostile, partisan rhetoric that has polarized our country for far too long.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

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### This vacation, remember agriculture

All across our country, Americans are checking their automobiles, studying road maps, printing off directions from MapQuest and adding another item to their "to do" lists in preparation for long-awaited summer vacations.

Anticipation will soar and expectations will rise as husband-and-wife teams take to the American highways and byways in search of rest, peace and tranquility. Children will ensure this dream remains only partially fulfilled with road whines like: "I'm hungry, I want a hamburger and fries." "Mommy, Billy is teasing me." "Are we there yet?" and "I don't want to go on vacation, I want to go back home."

Regardless of such noise, mom and dad will remain true to their plans and push ahead. After all, the money spent for the family vacation usually represents cash left over after paying for the family's food, clothing and other necessities.

Oftentimes, vacations go on plastic and are paid for later with interest. Parents will think to themselves, "We worked hard for this time off. We deserve it and we're going to enjoy it."

Americans remain the luckiest, most pampered people in the world. Try to imagine what it would be like if we had to be self-sufficient.



**John Schlageck**

• Insights  
Kansas Farm Bureau

What would happen to leisure time if others did not produce the many things families need?

Although we all work throughout the year, we should not forget those people who also work hard and help us free up time so we can vacation with loved ones. One such group is the Kansas farmer.

Farmers and ranchers help meet our food, fuel and fiber needs. These needs are met without worry of availability.

The next time you walk into your local supermarket, remember milk comes from carefully cared for dairy cows on someone's farm. Remember the butcher performs a service in cutting and packaging the hamburger, chops and steak you and your family eat. Don't forget the Kansas farmer and rancher cares for and produces pork and beef.

Styrofoam cartons only hold the eggs which are laid by hens on the farm.

No other nation of people on this planet enjoys the amount of free time we do. No other country can claim that so few people feed so many.

Today, less than 2 percent of our nation's population are farmers. They are capable of supplying the other 98 percent with most of the products we eat, wear and use to fuel our vehicles.

Remember as you plot your vacation course this summer, and as you motor across the state's highways, to notice the fields of corn, soybeans, milo, alfalfa and recently harvested wheat. Take a look at the cattle, hogs and sheep grazing in the many pastures.

Don't forget Kansas farmers and ranchers help fulfill our food, fuel and fiber needs. These professionals also care for the livestock and crops you see as you drive by. They do so with care and compassion.

John Schlageck of the Kansas Farm Bureau is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. He grew up on a diversified farm near Seguin, and his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

