



Free Press Viewpoint

Does full moon bring out activists?

'Tis the season for crazy activists. The latest in a long line of useless stunts is the hanging by the environmental group Greenpeace of a banner on Mount Rushmore which reads "America honors leaders, not politicians. Stop global warming."

We can applaud their mission, bring awareness to the – hotly debated – issue of global warming. However, this issue doesn't really need more awareness, does it?

Pretty much the whole country has picked a side on this one. And as far as leaders go, well they are already talking about it, even if they aren't yet making decisions. There is a climate bill before the U.S. Senate right now, though debate has been pushed back until after the August recess.

Whatever you may think of that indecision, the issue is on the burner. People are, in fact, aware of global warming, whether they accept the premise or not. So what did the banner accomplish? Probably what stunts such as this usually do: it will push people further into either camp. Those who already believe in global warming will agree with the sign, and those who don't will disagree. It won't convince anyone of anything they didn't already believe. If their goal was to sway people one way or the other, a stunt isn't going to do it.

What will persuade people is well-reasoned argument backed up by incontrovertible science, not with insulting banners hung from national monuments. That won't work any more than the people who make a spectacle of climbing tall buildings for one cause or another.

That's the trouble with a stunt: it will be remembered for two days, maybe three, if you're lucky. People have short memories. They tend to forget these things quickly. And if they do remember anything, it would be the stunt itself, and not the issue.

The likely story behind this latest Greenpeace stunt is that the environmental movement has taken a back seat in the last year or so, overshadowed by other issues such as the presidential election, the economy and health care. This was a publicity stunt, plain and simple. They needed to be back in the news.

The solution for Greenpeace? Get elected to something! Maybe the environmental movement would get more traction if they actually had some hard-line elected officials. Even Al Gore wasn't elected on a global warming platform. That's the way to change things, from within the system. And you know, mid-term elections are coming up....

— Kevin Bottrell

Write us

The Colby Free Press encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of general interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise. Nor do we run form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

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.

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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 NorWest 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, Kan., 67701.

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, Thomas County and Oakley: three months \$35, one year \$85. By mail to ZIP Codes beginning with 676 and 677: three months \$39, one year \$95. Elsewhere in the U.S., mailed once per week: three months \$39, one year \$95. Student rate, nine months, in Colby, Thomas County and Oakley, \$64; mailed once per week elsewhere in the U.S. \$72



Here's a few words about writing

How to write 500 words, in 500 words or less.

I'm sure it doesn't often occur to you, the reader, how a column makes it into the newspaper. If you are like the "average" adult, you probably were not fond of writing assignments in school, and breathed a sigh of relief when that final report of the year was handed in.

Well, I thought you might like a view of the other side. I'm one of those odd ducks who never quite decided I knew enough. I kept going to school, and being in school meant I kept getting writing assignments. Enough of my teachers were misguided enough to compliment my writing that I came to believe I had some talent.

Then I hit some classes where the first assignment was: get a notebook, and write 500 words – every day.

Some of what I wrote in those notebooks was read by teachers. Some was not. But I learned, through actually doing it, that it's possible to write 500 words when you actually have nothing to say. Not only that, but doing it every day actually made me a better writer. It gave me more to say, and more ways to say it. It taught me to notice the craft of writing in what I read.

There's a curious side effect of this. I read a lot. I read many different kinds of books. And I compare authors. Some have different ideas, but sound the same. Some have similar ideas, but come across in totally different ways. It's



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

made a big point with me in understanding that what we believe and accept about the world often has more to do with how we learn than it does with what we learn.

Any parent knows this. A preschooler told by Mom and Dad that a new shirt looks good on them usually believes it and wears the shirt proudly. If the third-grader next door happens to say, "Where'd you get that ugly shirt?" the garment in question will disappear into the back of the closet.

When I write, then, I think about the emotional effect I want to give. That matters with all writing. An example: the first front-page story I wrote for the *Free Press* was a summary of the year's weather. It was basically a collection of facts, yet the presentation included an emotional component – was the weather good or bad for the reader? A news writer strives to give a balanced view, but feelings are always present.

What else is there to the craft of writing? One thing that is taught in different ways to different types of writers, but is especially important

in the news business, is to use words sparingly. Say what you mean, and say it concisely.

The specialized field of resume writing – ever more important in the present economy – teaches the use of action verbs and specific descriptions.

The rules for writing an organizational mission statement are that it must be a single, understandable sentence.

Writers of all sorts break this rule, of course. Some are too lazy to focus a broad idea into a clear message. Some try to hide their lack of ideas behind a panoply of extravagant multisyllabic technical terminology ... well, you get the idea.

As for me and my 500 words? I'm a better writer now than I was 20 years ago. I hope I'm a better writer next year.

Writing with clarity and precision takes practice. My job gives me more opportunities to read the writing of others than to write myself, but that's OK. I'm still learning from whatever I read, and I hope I'm helping to pass on both knowledge and understanding as well. There's more, but that's my 500 words for today.

Editor's Note: The computer says that's actually 631, even after the editor took out a couple of adverbs!

Marian Ballard has collected careers as counselor, librarian, pastor and now copy editor for the Colby Free Press. She collects ideas, which are more portable than other stuff.

In praise of socialist institutions

The health-care debate has some politicians railing: "we don't want government running our health care; look at how they run the post office."

Well, compared to companies that only offer the high-priced overnight and box shipments, I think the post office does a great job of getting my letter across country for 44 cents. But Americans don't stop to think that local, state and federal governments are in charge of many more "businesses": police, fire fighters, public health, roads, agricultural extension, courts, the military, state colleges and public schools.

Under this political rhetoric, we have "socialized" law enforcement, "socialized" fire fighters, "socialized" military, "socialized" courts, you name it. By this logic, I have worked – along with my teacher colleagues in public schools and universities – in socialist institutions all my life. All were public, not private schools.

So wake up, Glenn Beck and the other pundits shedding tears over our drift to "socialism." The American government has been providing goods and services ever since we declared independence.

That is what governments do. The alarm of free-market extremists comes more from their realization that the Madoff affair, the collapse of banking, overpriced real estate, and devastated stock markets has shown that competition and greed have a downside. They have temporarily stopped touting moving money out of that "socialist" Social Security system and into the stock market.

Police officers, fire fighters, soldiers and similar professions do not belong in the private sector. We do not want private companies



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

of armed police running around competing for our business. And who would pay them for solving a crime – the victim?

The concept that holds these "socialized" public services together is that they serve for the "public good." That is a term we should use more often.

When a police force solves a crime, we all benefit from the level of security we obtain. When firefighters put out a fire and save another's house, we benefit because it does not spread to the rest of us. When we support road construction, even if we do not drive all of those roads, it benefits us in the commerce and products that can be brought to us, and that supports our economy. These are all "public goods."

Education is likewise a public good. The rich landowner who has no children but who pays substantial taxes toward public education, benefits greatly by living in a society that is well advanced in civility above the feudal existence that would exist without an educated citizenry.

Proposals for vouchers and school competition are flawed. There is a shortage of teachers. Move to competition, and you merely redistribute the teachers. This parallels the conservative Cato Institute proposal to make all U.S.

roads into toll roads. Most of us can imagine the consequences: roads to the wealthy areas get paved and the rest of us get potholes. Likewise, privatizing K-12 public education just leads to pothole education for the poor.

But public universities are being privatized, lamenting that they have moved from state institutions to state-supported institutions to state-located institutions. As tax support decreases, university tuition continues to skyrocket. Education is now perceived as a private benefit, rather than a public good.

Kansas regents schools used to be funded at a significant level for staying within an enrollment corridor and offering their unique programs. Now, each university gets to keep its tuition. And being tuition-driven has thrown Kansas universities into the free market model, seeking every warm body to bolster market share. Student "customers" are on their own to underwrite their own education costs. With scholarships (most were based on stock investments) decimated and the stimulus Pell grants only lasting for another year, many students are realizing a college education is a costly and risky gamble that may never pay off.

Conservative pundits who are fretting any move toward socialism will be comforted to know that our universities are rapidly moving to "free market." If we get socialized medicine, we may end up with a very healthy but ignorant population.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

