



Free Press Viewpoint

Newspapers still a vital force in U.S.

Since this is National Newspaper Week, it's a good time to talk about newspapers today and the future. Newspapers have been a vital force in American democracy since Colonial times. Their importance in public affairs was recognized by the Founding Fathers, who placed newspapers second only to God when they wrote the Bill of Rights. That has not changed, nor is it about to. Newspapers have been around for nearly 400 years, and they will be here for the foreseeable future.

You may have heard that newspapers are dying, about to be replaced by the Internet, or that newspapers are broke, about to disappear, neither of which are true.

Many bigger papers, dailies in the cities, are struggling. Several large publishing firms are in bankruptcy. That is only vaguely related to technology or competition.

Larger dailies are under pressure from electronic competition, it's true, but their real problem is the shift to the suburbs which began after World War II and the resulting fragmentation of urban communities.

Most grew up serving a single city with a single mayor, school board and City Hall. Now, dozens of suburbs and suburban schools split the urban pie. There's little sense of community. City newspapers have struggled to keep up for decades.

The big bankruptcies stem mostly from leveraged takeovers that left newspaper companies unprepared to meet new competition and most of all, short of cash to pay their inordinate debt loads. Venerable names like the Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times and other major papers are part of parent companies dealing with bankruptcy, competition and a recession. The papers can't help those firms pay their debt. It's sad, but it's not an indication of health or outlook of the newspaper industry.

Outside the cities, where more than three-fourths of all American newspapers do business, things are going much better. These operations, known as community newspapers, are alive and healthy. Their balance sheets look nothing like the red-tinged reports of the big dailies.

So, what of the future? We think community newspapers will be around for a long time, because they do something no one else can or will: produce local news about a town or county or neighborhood that people who live there just have to have.

Without newspapers, our towns would be in the dark about public affairs, social events, neighborhood doings. It seems like slow news to city folk, but it's the stuff of community.

You hear talk of websites taking over, but no one has figured out how to make a website pay, at least not the way newspapers pay. They can't sustain themselves.

One plan would have foundations and government put up money to replace newspapers with nonprofit websites. Without economic justification, though, it's hard to imagine those ever having much punch or lasting long in the market. It's just not realistic, and besides, any news organization that relies on public money can't maintain independence.

No, newspapers will remain – and thrive. There's nothing on the horizon to replace them. They may become more electronic – we've succeeded in converting the entire process except the printing on paper to electrons so far – but their basic form and function has proved both enduring and important.

Newspapers have survived other challenges – from King George to radio news to the loss of all their national ads to television in the 1950s – and come out more vital than ever, because we need them.

— Steve Haynes

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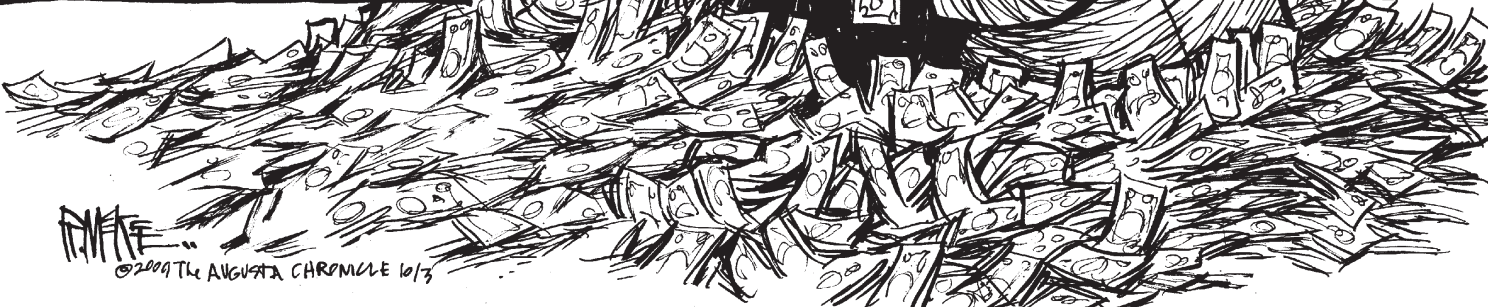
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Health-plan scares are misinformation

I hope everyone heard the president's speech on health-care reform Sept. 9. Perhaps, now that he has clarified what is actually in the bill, I will stop getting all of those frightening e-mails about what it contains.

When I get that type of e-mail, I always go to snopes.com and look it up to see if the e-mail is true. The information in these e-mails is almost always false. I used to write back to the person who sent it to me and tell them it wasn't true, but since they continue to send those types of messages to me, I decided they really don't care. They are just hoping that some of the many people they are sending these messages to will believe them.

I also hope that everyone who belongs to the American Association of Retired Persons will read the latest copy of that organization's newspaper, because the article entitled "The Assault on Truth" by Patricia Barry clarifies a lot of the misinformation that is being sent out in e-mails and on television.

One of the scariest e-mails I received said that the proposed new health-care plan will encourage euthanasia to save costs, and some even went so far as to say that the president wants to kill off all our senior citizens. Barry's article says this myth came from Betsy McCaughey, a former Republican lieutenant governor of New York who said on her talk show, citing page 425 of the new health-care bill:



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

"Congress would make it mandatory ... that every five years, people in Medicare have a required counseling session that will tell them how to end their life sooner ... all to do what's in society's best interest."

The article also quoted Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, leader of the House Republicans, as saying on July 24:

"This provision may start us down a treacherous path toward government-encouraged euthanasia if enacted into law."

Now I don't know if these two people don't understand what they read, or if they just want to scare us, because, according to Barry, this is what the bill actually says:

"The clause on page 425 would require Medicare to pay doctors for their time if beneficiaries chose to consult them for information on advance-care planning, such as making a living will, appointing a health proxy and hospice care (already covered by Medicare). Medicare would pay for these sessions only once every five years."

The article also says:

"AARP described McCaughey's claims as 'rife with gross – and even cruel – distortion' of legislation that 'would not only help people make the best decisions for themselves (on end-of-life care), but also better ensure that their wishes are followed.'"

I think AARP is a trustworthy organization, and I am hoping that people will read the article, because it also clarifies several other parts of the health-care bill that have been distorted and misrepresented.

Whether we are Democrats or Republicans, I feel that we have a responsibility to read everything we can about this plan, and to find out what our government is actually doing to make this a better world to live in and to weed out for ourselves all of the misinformation out there designed to scare us into protesting against what our government is trying to do, so we can make educated decisions.

As someone who was a registered nurse for 20 years, and as a senior citizen, finding out about the new health-care plan and keeping up-to-date on its progress is one of my priorities.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

Medicare has faced changes before

To the Editor:

What many people don't know about Medicare is that it is a permanent insurance plan, and if a person leaves Medicare to join another insurance company, they cannot return to Medicare.

Many members were dissatisfied with the American Association of Retired Persons over the "doughnut hole" and other mistakes in the bill a few years back that was supposed to "modernize" Medicare.

The group, in addition to having senior members as well as anyone who wants to join, is also an insurance company. Many members abandoned the group – kaput. After that session of Congress, Sen. Max Baucus of Montana wore a simulated black eye on C-SPAN. That was the "late-night, early morning" session when the "blue-dog Democrats" and Republicans wore out the Democrats and we ended up with Medicare payments being taken out of Social Security at a terrific rate.

The automobile industry is picking up and creating jobs. This will put money back in the Social Security fund, money that was "borrowed" for the Iraq war. Let's hope we can educate youth for other endeavors than wars that deplete our health-care money.

Edna A. Hatcher, Colby

Spend tax on walks

To the Editor:

I have been a resident of Colby for almost 15 years and I am fed up with people picking on the disabled people.

They want to build a new pool now, but the sidewalks around town go untouched and they say that there is no money to fix them. Yet a new pool is what is to be built. What's wrong with the old one? Nothing is wrong with it.



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

If the kids want a slide in the pool, then just build a slide in that one. Why spend all that money on a new one when it will be enjoyed for a couple of years and then they will say that it's boring.

The sidewalks will not be done because there's no money to do them. I said a year ago we are in violation of federal laws when it comes to sidewalks around town. (It seems like) no one cares how disabled people feel about the sidewalks going undone and money that comes from our pockets will pay for a new pool. We get less than \$1,000 a month and we have to pay property tax and food sales tax out of that money, a once-a-month check, and still live on nothing as it is.

But yet you want to bleed us dry for something that is not needed. I think people should look for other resources to pay for the pool, like fund raisers.

I think the city should change their minds on building the new pool. If they want to raise the sales tax to pay for sidewalks, then I would accept that, but not for the new pool.

If the town has any heart at all, people will say the same thing. It is time for the children and the disabled to have safe walkways that are all handicap-accessible. Vote "no" for the pool and vote "yes" for the sidewalks.

It's time to think about the safety of everyone in the city and not look at a new pool. When the college asked for the new stadium

and dorms, you said "no" to the stadium and "yes" to the dorms. I ask you to think about the disabled who are in wheelchairs and put yourself in their shoes.

Look around the town and see what I'm saying. I'm not in a wheelchair myself, but if I was, I would be suing the City of Colby for not being in compliance with federal laws. That's my thought, but take it for what it's worth. I hope you will at least look into it, and see for yourself that I'm not lying on this one. Please vote no on the new pool.

George Aumiller, Colby

Cap-and-tax costs more than it helps

To the Editor:

The latest "cap-and-tax" proposal introduced by my Senate colleagues from Massachusetts and California might sound good on the coasts, but to those of us who live and work in Kansas, this bill would raise the price of gasoline, diesel, fertilizer, natural gas and coal.

If this bill were to pass, Kansans, and all Americans, including those in cities that depend on the food and fiber we grow, are likely to see an increase in utility bills, transportation costs and basic consumer goods in exchange for little to no reduction in carbon emissions.

It is not in the best interests of the United States to have mandatory carbon reductions until countries like China, India and Brazil agree to the same. As a member of the Senate Agriculture and Finance committees, I will continue to fight against proposals that limit our ability to compete in a global marketplace, ration domestic energy and result in greater government bureaucracy.

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, Dodge City

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

