



Free Press Viewpoint

Democrats get First candidate

The race for the next congressional representative from the Kansas 1st District now has a Democratic entry in former Salina Mayor Alan Jilka.

Jilka was mayor for three one-year terms, presiding over city commission meetings, and a commission member three two-year terms. He graduated from the University of Notre Dame and spent time studying in Brazil and Argentina before returning to Salina to work at his family's furniture business.

Up till now, we've only had Republican candidates in the race. Everyone was waiting to see who the Democrats would pick. A challenge was a foregone conclusion, though, because neither party can pass up an open seat.

Whichever Republican candidate emerges from the primary will be heavily favored, so what would a Democrat have to do to win this district?

The only Democrat to ever hold the "Big First" seat won only one two-year term. Howard Miller of Morill was elected in 1952. According to the Congress' Biographical Directory, Miller was a lawyer and farmer who was 74 when elected. During his time, Congress passed a law outlawing the Communist Party, established a tax to pay for unemployment insurance and got shot at by Puerto Rican nationalists.

There are many differences between then and now. Then, Republicans had only a slight majority. Kansas' population gave it six congressional districts. Of those, Miller was the only Democrat. He beat Republican Albert Cole, who had served four terms, for the seat in 1953 and lost to Republican to William Avery in 1954.

There are also some similarities. The 1952 election came at the end of President Harry Truman's term, and his low approval ratings were counted as the main reason his party lost the majority in the House, much as President George W. Bush's end-of-term unpopularity is considered a cause of his party's defeat in 2008. In 1952, the nation was entrenched in the Cold War, fighting in Korea. Today, the nation faces a global war on terror and ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Miller died in 1970, so we can't ask him how he won, and there's not much information available. It was a narrow margin, 68,909 votes for Miller to 64,963 for Cole, according to a book of election statistics printed in 1952. The state went pretty heavily for Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower (about three quarters of everyone liked Ike).

About the only information available on Miller's positions, according to the Kansas State Historical Society, is that he was opposed to the Tuttle Creek dam and reservoir - a major federal project going on at the time - which he amusingly called the "Big Dam Foolishness."

A Democrat who was not in favor of a spending project. Perhaps that's what today's Kansas Democrats need to get elected: a dose of fiscal responsibility. In this economic climate, that is certainly not going to be a strike against them. People are looking for someone who won't go out and spend their money like crazy, and conventional wisdom says that is exactly what Democrats do.

Is it hopeless for a Democratic candidate in rural Kansas? Hard to say. But what a Democrat should really do to impress voters is be their own person. Show they have an informed, unique opinion and that they have the courage to break with their own party while the Republican candidates do not. Kansans, and really all of us out west, like to see that kind of independent spirit.

- Kevin Bottrell



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Eagles have a chance to take out Goliath

If the Eagles varsity football team defeats Smith Center on Friday, it will elevate the team to a whole new level. But if they lose to this football powerhouse, it shouldn't blind us to the fact that we have a good football team this year.

I will admit that I didn't think the team would be very good this season. I thought they had lost too many stars from the year before. I thought the offense would be weakened without Heath Stephens, and I thought their defense would struggle without linebackers Corey Sager and Tanner Kriss.

After watching the Eagles barely escape with a victory at Goodland this fall, I thought my feelings about the season had been confirmed. The team played hard, but they got too many penalties and they failed to put any points on the board in the second half.

At that point, I didn't think Colby would have a chance at beating a team like Smith Center. But something has happened to this team over the last three weeks.

The team that beat Phillipsburg last week was not the same team that barely beat Goodland three weeks before. They were more clutch during key situations and much more dangerous on offense. They also seemed to have gained a confidence that was lacking at the beginning of the year.

I felt like I was watching a team that expected to win as opposed to a team that was hoping to win. Their offense was crisper, their defense was getting to the other teams' quarterback more often and their offense had developed an array of weapons that prevented opposing defenses from honing in on one or two players.

The Eagles backfield has become a four-



Andy Heintz

Wildcat Ramblings

headed monster capable of hurting defenses in several different ways and the offensive line improves a little more each week.

Junior Corbin Stephens' great hand-eye coordination and soft hands have played a big part in giving the Eagles a decent passing attack. Some of the big plays he has made this season can't be taught or emulated by just anyone. You simply can't teach someone to have good hands.

After Colby got by the Cowboys, I felt the Eagles had been lucky to escape with a victory, but after last week's game, it was clear that Colby was the better football team.

I have no doubt in my mind that Colby has a chance to break the Redmen's 72-game winning streak. Smith Center seems primed for a loss. They have barely won their last three games and they only managed to beat Phillipsburg by two points.

After several years of dominance America's small town football Goliath no longer looks invincible, and the Eagles look like a team that is more than willing to play the role of David and fire the fatal slingshot that puts an end to the longest high school football winning streak in the nation.

But the Redmen will not go down without a fight. There is a reason they have won 72

games in a row. Their team has become something that has transcended high school football.

The Redmen have become a symbol of small-town American culture. An award-winning *New York Times* sports writer spent a year in the town, then wrote a book that has been favorably compared to the book "Friday Night Lights" and the movie "Hoosiers."

In the long run, who wins or loses on Friday is not as important as the role small-town football teams like those of Colby and Smith Center play in the American imagination. To many Americans, small-town athletics represents an alternative to the big money and commercialism that many feel has tainted college and professional athletics.

The teams and the communities that unabashedly support them have been portrayed in the media as representing a declining way of life that champions simplicity and hard work. This sort of characterization is probably a little exaggerated, and it's true that people can never seem to get enough stories about the good old days, but it does contain some truth.

I would guess life in Smith Center and life in Colby are not all that much different. Both football teams both epitomize the role athletics play in the culture of small-town America.

Tonight should be a great game between two solid teams. May the best team win.

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.

Spending smarter can save taxes

All levels of government are struggling to make ends meet these days, and the deliberations often come down to one of two bad options: raise taxes or eliminate services.

Higher taxes always lead to economic decline, and it's easy to say "cut the services that someone else uses, but not those that I want."

But there may be an option that provides the proverbial best of both worlds. Our research indicates there are tremendous opportunities to reduce spending and taxes without cutting necessary services. The answer lies in efficiency studies and implementing "best practices."

Let's start with state spending. Amidst all the struggles to balance the state budget, we discovered that state agencies finished the fiscal year ended June 30 with nearly \$2 billion in unencumbered carryover cash balances.

The General Fund only had about \$40 million, but it is just one of 1,658 separate funds. Amazingly, most legislators were not told that the money existed. Some of those ending balances may be legitimate, but the sheer fact that no independent analysis of the appropriateness of those balances has been conducted is good reason to believe that a fair portion of taxes collected over the years may not have been necessary.

Taxpayers routinely check their personal and business spending to see if they are making the most efficient use of available resources, but it's rare that that takes place in government. We won't know how much can be saved until independent efficiency studies are performed, but the potential is substantial.

Other Opinions

Dave Trabert Flint Hills Center

There is also tremendous potential for saving in local government. Crossland Construction, headquartered in Columbus, analyzed the budgets of nine counties in southeast Kansas. They calculated spending on a cost-per-resident and other apples-to-apples basis to determine which counties had the "Best of Class" spending on a variety of government services. They found that if each county were at the "Best of Class" cost, they could have reduced their 2009 budgets by 57 percent!

We are replicating this study across all 105 counties, and while we can't yet say how much could be saved statewide, the total county budget is about \$2.4 billion. The "Best of Class" savings could be much lower than 57 percent and still amount to serious money. And that is just county budgets; the same is likely true of our 1,979 cities and townships.

There is also potential to wring hundreds of millions out of school budgets. Per-pupil budgeted spending for the school year ended June 30, 2009, ranged from a low of \$7,986 to a high of \$45,278 (excluding USD 422 Greensburg that was rebuilding from tornado damage). We further analyzed spending among

similar-sized districts and found that budgets could have been reduced by \$612 million (not counting capital outlays and debt service) if the high-spending districts could have been at the median cost for each category of expenditure.

There may be good reason why some schools or government agencies can't match the spending of others, but we would only have to achieve a portion of the collective potential to have a dramatic impact.

Before we consider raising a single dollar in additional tax or cutting a service, shouldn't we first see how much unnecessary spending we can eliminate?

Dave Trabert is President of the Wichita-based Flint Hills Center for Public Policy and he can be reached at dave.trabert@flinthills.org. The center is an independent think tank dedicated to limited government, open markets, and personal responsibility.

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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@nwkansan.com
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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 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, 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

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