



Other Viewpoints

Board of healing needs to get healthy

A cry went up last year for sweeping reforms associated with the state Board of Healing Arts, and with good reason.

In the spring of 2008, *The Topeka Capital-Journal* exposed a number of alarming problems within the regulatory body. In an investigative series, the newspaper spotlighted a number of situations that were equal parts heartbreaking and infuriating, including one case in which board attorneys stood idle for more than a year until federal prosecutors indicted a Haysville physician in connection with at least 15 deaths.

To their credit, Kansas legislators demanded reforms, including greater transparency and more aggressive investigation of complaints from patients....

All seemed to be going well until ... *The Capital-Journal* published an update on one of the cases the newspaper had highlighted in its 2008 series.

That case involved Douglas Geenens, a Johnson County psychiatrist who had drawn complaints that he issued prescriptions to patients who weren't directly under his care, engaged in a sexual relationship with a female patient, made false statements about medical professionals and committed other breaches of professional ethics dating to the 1990s.

The good news from the update was that a state administrative hearing officer had determined Geenens was guilty of all 23 allegations of unethical conduct lodged against him by former patients and colleagues.

The bad news from the story, which was based on a document obtained through the Kansas Open Records Act, was the hearing officer's recommendation on Geenens' "punishment."

The quote marks are no accident. That's because the recommendation was for Geenens to be ordered to reimburse the cost of the investigation into his actions and receive a public censure from the board....

Before the situation boiled over last year, a history of wrist-slap sanctions had helped cripple the board's credibility and erode the trust between Kansans and regulators who were supposed to protect them from unscrupulous or unqualified medical practitioners. A national advocacy group had ranked the board 36th among states in terms of sanctioning problem doctors.

A slap on the wrist in the Geenens case would be a setback in the strides the board has made since *The Capital-Journal's* series highlighted its many shortcomings.

In December, board members have a chance to prove they heard the cries for more stringent oversight.

— *Topeka Capital-Journal*, via *The Associated Press*

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. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses not pertaining to a public issue.

Before an election, letters (other than responses by a candidate) will not be published after the Thursday before the polls open.

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OBAMA'S PAY CZAR CUTS PAY FOR EXECUTIVES OF BAILED-OUT COMPANIES.

THOSE EXECS THEN QUIT TO WORK ELSEWHERE--LEAVING THEIR OLD POSITIONS UNFILLED BECAUSE THE JOBS DON'T PAY SQUAT.

WHICH EXPLAINS HOW DOUGIE PAHDOOKA FROM THE MAILROOM ENDED UP BEING THE CEO OF CITIGROUP.



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Information doesn't cut the fog

We had a foggy day last week, more fog than I've seen in a long time. It brought to my mind a poem I remembered from years ago, "The fog comes / on little cat feet."

Of course that's all I remembered, so I immediately turned to my most valuable reference source. I "Googled" it.

For the younger generation, that needs no explanation. Others of us remember when "google" was a word for a really big number that was mentioned in math class once or twice, and then forgotten about. Who, after all, needs numbers that big?

Well, it turns out that Internet searches sometimes need really big numbers. If you are not careful what you ask for, you can easily end up with millions – or billions – of hits. ("Hits" is another term with a new meaning: items that match the search criteria.)

Information management and mismanagement are more and more the issues that occupy our lives. We have a glut of information on every subject imaginable. Twenty years ago, if you wanted access to a poem, you needed a book of poetry with an index of first lines. Today, you need a computer.

Before, if you needed medical information, you hounded the doctor and haunted the library. Today, you log on to the Internet.

It's the same story for agricultural forecasts, sports trivia or political ping-pong. Check out the web site. In fact, you've probably noticed that many *Colby Free Press* articles include web addresses.

Two problems. First, a web search can lead



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

you on an endless wild goose chase. Second, how do you know what to trust?

Look at that wild goose chase. A search for "fog" and "cat" yields 5.6 million or so results. Changing the search to "fog little cat feet" lowers the number to just over 100 thousand. Looking at just the first ten, I found poetry, photography, a blog, and a quotation site. Investigating bartleby.com, I found the poem "Fog" by Carl Sandburg, along with the entire contents of "Modern American Poetry," edited by Louis Untermeyer and published in 1919. Looking a little further, I found a lot more, such as Bartlett's "Familiar Quotations," Strunk's "Elements of Style," and the entire contents of "The Harvard Classics." I'm an information junkie; it was hard to stop there.

Knowing what to trust is a tougher problem. I was raised to be skeptical of chain letters, yet the ease of e-mail has popularized chain letters to the point of the ridiculous. I stopped even opening messages from many people, because I knew they had nothing personal to say, but just forwarded what had already been forwarded a dozen times. I don't trust, or read, those items, whether they are religious or political or

simply say "I love you."

Other areas are more difficult. The information I found in my poem search led to a recognized publisher, and a number of books I have seen in print, or even own, in all their paper-and-ink perfection. It also led to a story about someone's new kitten. While I have no particular reason to doubt it, I wouldn't base a friendship on that story, either. It could be true, or it could be fiction.

A number of photos turned up on my search, primarily of fog or of cats. Even the photos could be totally false, of course. It's fairly easy to create the appearance of fog with a little photo touchup. Studio photographers have done it for years, and anyone with a computer program can now do it for themselves. It's fun, it's creative. Whether or not it's honest, however, is another story. (Just a note, for those who wonder: the photos in the *Free Press* are adjusted for printing quality and trimmed to remove unimportant background, but beyond that, what you see is what the camera saw.)

In the end, though, it's not how much information you have, but what you do with it. Carl Sandburg knew that, when he wrote the six-line poem "Fog." Ninety years after its publication, a foggy morning can still bring his verse to mind. Now that's value.

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.

Environmental critics 'unfair to farmers'

Some ideas championed by environmental groups have been less than kind to agriculture.

These groups have bombarded the public with figures on soil loss, pesticide-related mishaps and alleged failed attempts at using pesticides to reduce infestation. Their figures are oftentimes unverifiable.

Technology has often been labeled the No. 1 environmental enemy by some groups. Food producers, farmers and ranchers, view technology as the application of knowledge. As humans, we survive by adapting the environment to our needs.

Take away technology, and man would be just like other primates – confined to tropical regions and subject to extinction due to environmental changes. To survive and progress, we must disturb the environment, conserve resources and continually produce new food and fiber.

Some would argue that resources are made, not born, and I agree. Land, ores, petroleum, etc. – the raw materials of our planet – are not inherent resources. They do not inherently further human purposes.

Man determines what is useful and how to use it. Topsoil becomes a resource when a farmer tills it and plants wheat seed, for example. Ores become resources when metals are extracted from them.

During the past two centuries, technology has been creating resources more rapidly than humans have been consuming them. By every measure of price and availability, resources have become more abundant.

Without science and technology, today's farmers and ranchers would be unable to feed



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

the masses outside of the agricultural industry. Farmers use technology responsibly. They constantly learn new methods and practices by attending training sessions and courses.

Using minimum and no-till farming practices and incorporating grass waterways and buffer strips, farmers have improved water quality and increased wildlife habitat.

But new farm technology is expensive. It is in the best interest of farmers to use it carefully and sparingly. Misuse would add to the cost of production, which would result in an even lower return on their investment.

Food produced in the United States is safe. More than four decades of Food and Drug Administration testing has shown the majority of our fruits and vegetables have no detectable pesticide residues. This underscores that American farmers use pesticides properly.

Countless laws help ensure our food is safe. Billions of dollars annually are spent to support food and agricultural safety and quality inspection. The private sector, combined with state and local governments spend additional billions on similar activities.

Farmers and ranchers support efforts to evaluate and enhance the current regulatory and food-monitoring system. They want to work with all parties toward maintaining safe

food, but this industry and our society must avoid policy changes that are based solely on fear or false information.

Decisions affecting the course of agricultural production in the future are critical and will have far-reaching implications on our quality of life. We must be careful in determining long-term policies. Farmers and ranchers must continue to maximize their production capacity with an ever-watchful eye on food safety, quality and the environment.

So by all means, let's have this conversation about food safety and public health. Let's also make sure this conversation is complete, fair and factual.

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.

Where to write, call

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

