



Free Press Viewpoint

How do you feel about Afghanistan?

President Barack Obama says he'll announce his decision on Afghanistan within a matter of weeks.

Of course he's been saying that for a matter of weeks. His hesitation is puzzling.

He has the brightest minds available, military and civilian, helping him reach a decision. But maybe he has too many voices involved. And that can be a problem.

His trip to the Far East might be just what he needs to clear his mind and formulate a plan that's in the best interests of our country — and Afghanistan. Some of his advisors are wanting 40,000 or more troops; other advisers seem to think 20,000 will do it; and still others are talking withdrawal.

Time is running out. President Obama most certainly knows by now what he's going to propose. Propose? No, what he's going to order. He is the commander-in-chief and what he decides goes! Maybe the hesitation has something to do with the fact this is now "his" war.

The president made his share of promises during the campaign, but what wannabe president hasn't? And when they move into the Oval Office, we the People expect them to stick to those promises, even though we know well that some of them will never materialize. Afghanistan ring a bell?

Now Mr. President gets the opportunity for the first time to look like a commander-in-chief and give the order:

- Send 40,000 more troops to that country.
- Send no more than 20,000.
- Gradually reduce the number in preparation for withdrawal.

None of the choices is easy. All involve more bloodshed, more injuries, more loss of life. It's all there. It's on the president's shoulders.

With his approval rating falling below 50 percent for the first time — it was 48 percent at mid-week — the president can expect another dip with his decision on Afghanistan. We are a divided country on that issue, much as we were on Iraq.

How do you feel? Send your e-mail comment to the address at the close of this commentary. It'll be interesting to see how our community responds. Brief comments, one to four sentences — won't need an ID. If longer than that, it becomes a letter and will need to satisfy those requirements.

Here's this writer's two sentence comment: Gradually reduce the number of troops in preparation for withdrawal. Enough is enough!

— Tom Dreiling
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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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Share a day with someone different

'Tis the season of excess.

The stated goal for this week's holiday is giving thanks. For many who have given up on of faith in any power seen as worthy of gratitude, it has deteriorated into little more than another excuse for overindulgence.

This year, I predict, there will be even more gluttony exhibited on "Turkey Day," as Thursday will be called by many. Worries over health and the economy will block out ideas of travel or gatherings, so families will sit in front of the television and eat instead.

In spite of tight budgets, most won't lack for food, even if they cut back on variety. So there might be one kind of pie instead of three, and cornbread stuffing instead of oyster stuffing. (I'd rather have cornbread anyway.) Still, the likelihood of overindulging in more than one thing is there.

Schools are closing Wednesday. The Senior Center is also closing.

As I took note of that, I was reminded of two of the best Thanksgiving holidays I ever had, all things considered.

One took place at my home church. It was a noon meal on Thanksgiving Day, planned to include all members of the church family, past and present. Those who came into town for the holiday were included, so several generations of old friends seldom seen could visit with each other. A reunion, if you will.

Also included were those in the church who would otherwise have spent the day alone. There were widows and college students, career singles and others by themselves for one reason or another. It was a great get-together. (It would have been even better, except my



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

80-something aunt was hospitalized the day before with a broken wrist. Without the church dinner, however, we would have had only sandwiches as we rushed to make arrangements for her care.)

The other Thanksgiving dinner I remember came when my family and I were living in Kansas City as I attended seminary. The school closed, and a few students went to visit relatives or other destinations. Many, though, were still around, too far from home to travel quickly, and too busy to take extra time off. Those who remained co-opted the kitchen and dining hall, and cooked ourselves a wonderful multicultural feast.

Why multicultural? We didn't just have students from the Midwest. They weren't all from the U.S. We had a student from Ukraine, one from Japan, a couple from Taiwan, a missionary couple just back from Thailand, and probably several others who just don't come to mind right now. Each and every one of those international students loved the idea of a day set aside nationwide for giving thanks, and they pitched in with enthusiasm to claim our Thanksgiving for their own.

I remember many Thanksgiving dinners. In my childhood, they invariably involved

grandparents, the families of my father's three brothers, and my mother's sister — the same aunt who spent one Thanksgiving in the hospital. They were fun, and gave me probably the best chance I had to get acquainted with aunts and uncles and cousins.

Since I've grown up, though, the holiday has changed shape nearly every year. There are other people to consider, and the family is far more spread out than it used to be. And, to be quite honest, sometimes it's more fun to gather with friends than to gather with family. I love my family, but it's nice to talk to someone my own age, or someone who likes the same music I like.

What are you doing to give thanks this week? Are you overeating and staring at football games? Are you overspending at Christmas sales?

Look around you. See if one of your favorite people is spending the holiday alone. Maybe you are spending the holiday alone. Small towns like Colby are a hard place to be alone on a holiday, when everyone around seems to be with family.

Try making your family a little bigger. Share the turkey with one or two more people. Is a neighbor new to town, and cast adrift? Make him or her an honorary family member.

And give thanks, that even in a hard year, we have schools and streets and clean water — and friends.

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.

Look ahead, not back to 'good old days'

Some proponents of organic, labor-intensive farming contend we should go back to the days when every family owned 40 acres, farmed with hay burners (horses) and applied no chemicals.

You remember the good ol' days when people were self sufficient, owned a couple of milk cows, tilled a garden and butchered 40 or 50 fryers each spring?

Some of these zealots propose that each nation should also strive for self sufficiency. No imports. No exports.

Should this occur, you may want to prepare yourself for milking your cow each morning instead of enjoying that piping hot mug of coffee. Forget about sliced bananas on your bowl of corn flakes. These goodies we import into this country, and a lot more, won't be on the kitchen table anymore. Count on it.

God forbid we adopt these policies. If we cave in to those who spread hysteria about unsafe food and giant farms, be prepared to do without the services of all the nonagricultural types. This includes carpenters, painters, nurses, doctors, teachers, writers, musicians, everyone else. In case you haven't heard, labor-intensive farming doesn't permit time for most other pursuits. Neither does production agriculture.

Today's farmers run nonstop, from early morning to late at night, planting and harvesting crops, tilling the soil, feeding and caring for livestock. Their work seldom ends. It's foolish to assume everyone would want to leave his or her job in the city to move to the farm. It ain't all "Green Acres" out there, folks.



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

And who's to say all these people from other professions would become productive farmers?

While pheasant hunting in Ellis County opening day, a city friend remarked to me that he does not want to be a farmer. He contends he couldn't feed himself, much less the rest of the country or the world.

"I'd starve to death and so would the rest of us," he told me. "If you want to till the soil, go for it. But that doesn't mean the rest of us want to, thank you."

If we return to a system where everyone farms, brace yourself for even more uncertain economic times. Manual labor and animal power could spell the return of food shortages and famine. A nation of farmers translates to a nation even more vulnerable to depressions and disease could trigger such tragedies because we'd have no chemicals to fight them with.

Today's mechanized farmer provides us with the safest, most abundant food in the world. He works closely with crop consultants when applying herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers. He has cut his use significantly in recent years — up to 50 percent in some cases.

Farmers work years to leave a legacy of beneficial soil practices. The farmers I know would give up farming rather than ruin their land. They are proud of the crops they grow and the land they work.

Farmers and ranchers continue to work to conserve water, plug abandoned wells, watch their grassland grazing and continue to adopt sound techniques that will ensure preservation of the land. City residents also should look at new ways to protect the environment where they live.

There's an old saying that rings true today: "You can never go home." Yes, we can never return to the good ol' days. Besides, were they really all that good?

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.

Write us

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

