



Other Viewpoints

Senate candidates both are catering to right-wing votes

It could be a long seven months. That's the time left until the Aug. 3 Kansas primary, when the GOP race for U.S. Senate between Reps. Todd Tiahrt, R-Goddard, and Jerry Moran, R-Hays, will be decided.

In the meantime, the two candidates will keep competing to sound the most ultraconservative. Kansans who think potential U.S. senators should be statesmanlike and concerned with more than just one segment of the electorate will be out of luck.

Moran and Tiahrt are trying desperately to appeal to the type of Republicans who faithfully vote in the August primaries. As a result, hardly a week goes by without the lawmakers sending out press releases about some right-wing grievance, real or imagined.

In the past couple of weeks, for example, Moran pledged to repeal the "government takeover of health care" and objected to President Obama's supposed (though unspoken) support for granting amnesty to illegal immigrants.

Not to be outdone, Tiahrt called for Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano to step down and credited "an act of God" for stopping the underwear bomber (which prompted commentators to ask why God didn't stop the Sept. 11 bombers). Earlier Tiahrt press releases and campaign e-mails called for repealing the federal stimulus bill (not going to happen) and claimed that Moran had been endorsed by the Communist Party USA (not true).

And when the pair aren't issuing press releases, they are accommodating some rather extreme views at town hall meetings. At a gathering last week in Salina, one woman told Tiahrt that the U.S. military should be soaking its rifle shells in pig fat because Muslims are afraid of coming in contact with it.

Tiahrt acknowledged to *The Wichita Eagle* editorial board this week that he and Moran are playing to conservatives. And the Congressman said that, assuming he wins, his press releases will start being more statesmanlike on Aug. 4.

That's a common pattern in politics. Tiahrt noted how Barack Obama was more openly liberal during the Democratic presidential primaries than he was during the general election.

Tiahrt also acknowledged that he hasn't always had his facts straight when criticizing the health-reform legislation at "town hall" meetings, and that some of his claims about cuts to Medicare might be misleading.

But he also contends that he isn't being inconsistent in his beliefs (unlike Moran, Tiahrt argues). Tiahrt said that he has always stood for conservative principles of smaller government, lower taxes and individual freedom.

Tiahrt and Moran have been capable congressmen who have championed various issues of importance to a broad range of Kansans, such as the Air Force tanker project and rural health care.

Still, if already are trying this hard to pander to ultraconservatives, imagine what it could be like when we get closer to the primary and they start advertising.

Talk about the dog days of summer.

— *The Wichita Eagle*, via *The Associated Press*



After tragedy, the only way is forward

Several years ago, I discovered first-hand the effects of the news cycle on our perception of natural disasters.

During a business call to someone in the southeast part of the state, I asked him to e-mail me some information, and was told, "We haven't had any electricity for two weeks." The papers and television, of course, made much of the tornado or blizzard or whatever event it was that had hit his community, but it seemed to me that it was ancient history since it hadn't been in the news for several days. I was wrong. The media had moved on, but the crisis remained for local residents.

Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in 2005, flooding 80 percent of the city and killing more than 1,800. It was in the news for a long time, relatively speaking, but there again, the media moved on.

The failure of the levees, the failure of the emergency response system, the conundrum of building a city below sea level — these and other issues made fodder for late-night talk shows and various second-guessing pundits, but eventually they moved on. Yet a year and a half after the hurricane, volunteer groups were still going into houses that had been sitting empty all that time and cleaning up — stripping out wallboard and carpet, hauling out refrigerators and baby books. These efforts were not much publicized, they were just done by people who cared enough not to stop looking when the cameras moved on.

Hurricane Mitch in 1998 left 11,000 dead



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

in Central America and 2.5 million homeless. Relief efforts went on for years, and included everything from homes, schools and hospitals, to road-building, to donations of goats and chickens and vegetable seeds in order to restore some self-sufficiency.

Tsunamis, tornadoes, blizzards, earthquakes, fires — and our own personal water main break here at the *Free Press* on Fifth Street — all make great headlines and sound bites. People around the world (or the town) shake their heads at the shock, give some money or send food and other supplies — and then move on. It's only those on the front lines, the victims and survivors, who feel the full impact.

Permanent change comes from catastrophic events. It's easy to think while getting through the first hours and days that sooner or later, everything will get back to normal. The patterns by which everyone lives on a daily basis will be restored. There will be a time to sleep, and a bed to sleep in. There will be a time to eat, and food, and a means to prepare and serve it. There will be school, and work, and play times.

Yet, when all you have left is the clothes on your back — muddy, ragged, smelly clothes at that — there really is no going back. The front step you sat on is gone. The favorite cooking pan is gone, along with the one you never quite got around to getting rid of. The hammer and screwdriver are under a pile of rubble. The window that caught the morning sun is gone, and the view that remains is mostly piles of debris.

What remains is to move forward. New homes will be found, or built, to replace old ones. Piles of trash will be collected, sifted, shifted out of the way for new construction. Supply lines abruptly interrupted will be gradually restored. Injuries will heal, or their victims will die.

Much is lost along the way. Memories of lives, and of past generations, are often preserved in the things surrounding us. Total destruction takes everything, from World's Fair souvenirs to family Bibles carefully preserved for a hundred years. Great-grandmother's quilts and Junior's report cards are equally gone.

That's a part of life. Sharing the stories of the past, so they survive in spite of circumstances, remains important. And looking forward to what rises out of the rubble is simply the optimism inherent in the human spirit.

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.

Cold winter a misery for stockmen

Old Man Winter came early this year. He arrived with a vengeance on Dec. 9, and wouldn't go away more than a month and a half later.

To date, Kansas has experienced three major storms packing up to two feet of snow in the northeastern part of the state. The last two included blowing and drifting snow and subzero temperatures.

This bitter cold — ice cold — even steel-breaking cold — has made this extended cold snap miserable for stockmen, who find it more difficult to care, feed and water their cattle, hogs and sheep.

Pottawatomie County farmer/rancher Glenn Brunkow and his father tend to 120 head of cows and 15 head of sheep. The sheep are his children's, but the responsibility remains shared.

Brunkow says the cold is the most difficult to deal with.

"After the temperature hits zero, I quit looking because it doesn't make a difference," Brunkow said. "It's just plain cold, and it gets so diesel engines don't want to crank over. Heck, gas engines are even hard to start."

The Brunkows exercise caution and dress warmly when they look after their stock. Glenn says they were fortunate not to be calving during the subzero spell.

Two ewes did lamb during the bitter cold. Brunkow went out every hour or so to check on them.

When the lambs came, he was there, and the babies were dried off, brought inside to make sure their core temperatures were elevated and there were heat lamps in the pens.

Time slows to a crawl during these frigid periods. Feeding, watering and just looking after the stock takes more time.

"It takes all day to feed," Brunkow says.



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

"First you have to clear your way to your stock. Then you have to feed them, make certain they're all right and if you have any mechanical problems with your feeding equipment, they'll be sure to show up at this time."

This slower pace makes for long days, especially when Brunkow and his fellow livestock producers begin before daylight and go all day.

If there is a silver lining during these cold winter days, it has to be resiliency of the livestock. After hundreds of years, livestock and Kansans have adapted to the state's weather.

His cattle also get hay and a "little bit of grain" at this time, Brunkow says. This gives them more energy and helps keep them warmer.

"They're a lot tougher than we are," Brunkow laughs. "As long as you can move them out of the elements and behind a windbreak, whether it's trees or even a draw in a pasture, they generally make it through the cold."

The northeastern Kansas stockman hasn't had to haul water so far this winter. Except for a couple mornings when they had to break ice in the stock tanks, he said, the automatic electric water heaters have held up.

Brunkow's cattle are on his farm, but his 66-year-old father lives 13 miles away.

"That was stressful for me," Glenn says. "I couldn't make it down to help Dad for a few

days. I think the next time we have this kind of weather, I'm going to have my son stay with Grandpa and help."

In spite of the long, hard winter, Brunkow is crossing his fingers and hopes he's seen the last of these conditions this year. Unfortunately, he says, a couple "old-timers" he knows are predicting one or two more major storms.

"One thing I know for certain is I have a hard time believing this 'global warming' idea," Brunkow says.

Incidentally, several ewes on his farm delivered healthy lambs after the subzero weather moved out during mid-January.

It's been a long, hard winter. The weather has taken its toll on everyone — equipment, livestock and the stockmen who care for them. Still, it's what farmers and ranchers do.

Across the state, hearty dedicated livestock producers are hoping and praying for warmer temperatures and an early spring. With the changing season will come newborn calves, lambs, piglets, other livestock and the promise of bountiful crops.

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.

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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@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 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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