



Other Viewpoints

E-filing taxes not for everyone

Get the eraser. Maybe even warm up the shredder. A proposal for the state of Kansas to charge an extra \$25 to process a paper income tax return has some serious problems. The plan's most alarming flaw is that it threatens to disadvantage two groups of taxpayers who could least afford the extra fee — elderly Kansans who aren't comfortable with computers and may be living on a fixed income, and low-income residents who may not own a computer or have access to one. Lawmakers should protect those people from the extra fee. That said, the motivation behind the proposal isn't all bad. What's at stake for the state, and for Kansas taxpayers at large, is money. Steve Stotts, director of taxation for the Department of Revenue, said the state spent about \$800,000 last year to print, mail and process paper returns. Officials would like to shave some of those costs by encouraging Kansans to file electronically. E-filing, the choice of about 1 million state taxpayers last year, is far cheaper for the department to process.

Stotts said about 360,000 returns last year came from taxpayers who used computer programs to tabulate their figures but sent the information to the state on paper.

Officials believe those Kansans wouldn't be too inconvenienced to file electronically, and the fee was aimed at giving them a reason to do so.

The problem is, about 140,000 taxpayers prepared and filed their returns the traditional way last year on paper. Presumably, many of them are Kansans who are either uncomfortable with computers, are pinching pennies by necessity or must file by paper for some other reason.

It would be wrong to penalize them.

So perhaps there's a way to encourage computer users to e-file short of charging an across-the-board fee.

Actually, revenue officials have already taken a far more reasonable step toward solving the issue by promoting a free service that allows low-income taxpayers to get help from volunteers to e-file.

The service is offered through a partnership between the department and the Internal Revenue Service's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. Taxpayers making less than \$49,000 generally qualify.

Revenue officials deserve credit for trying to find ways to shave costs from their operation, especially considering the depth of the state budget crisis.

But digging deeper into the pockets of some of the state's most disadvantaged taxpayers is not the way to go.

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

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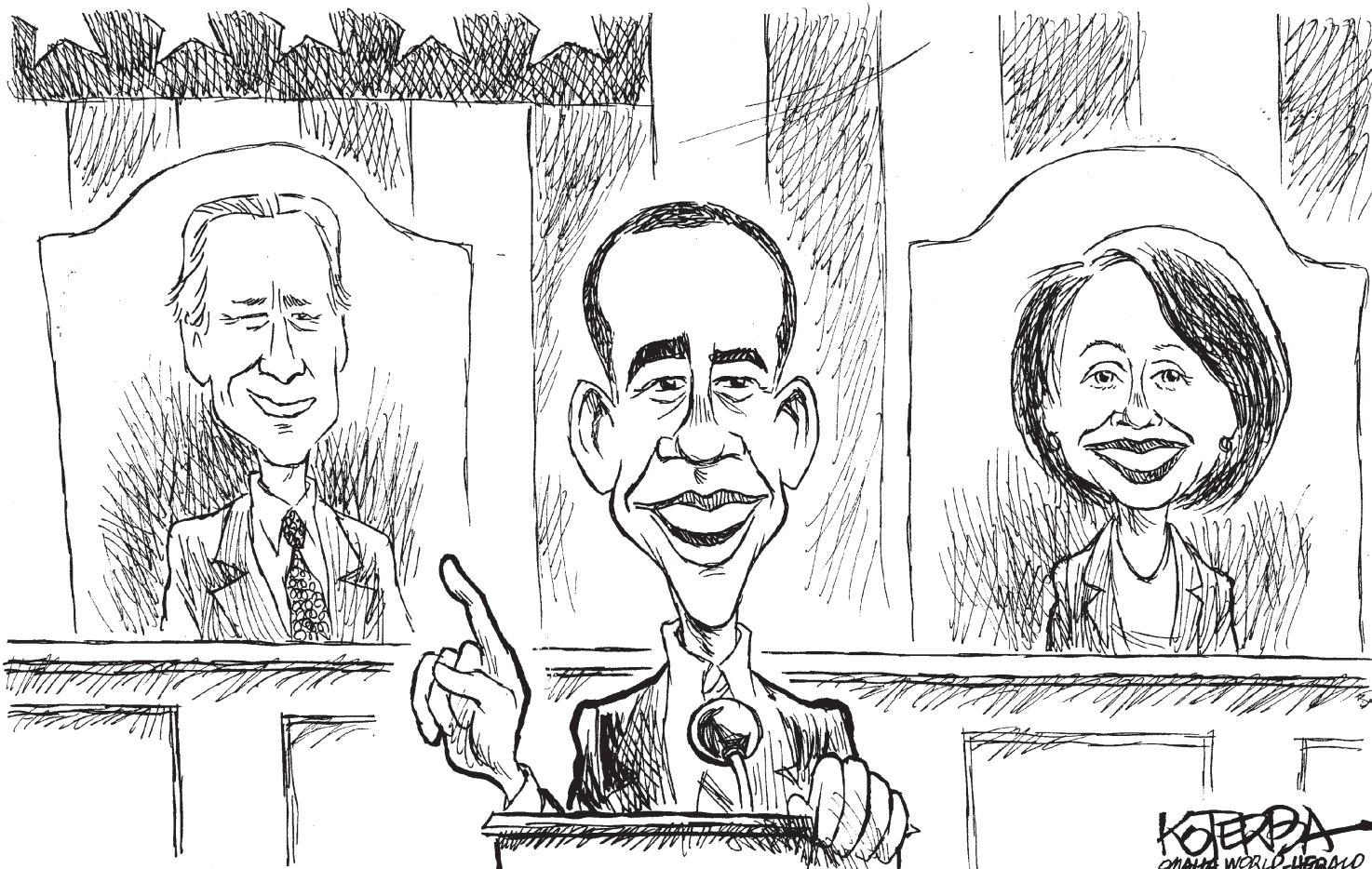
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"NOW HOLD ON. YOU THOUGHT THE FIRST YEAR WAS FOR REAL? THAT WAS JUST PRACTICE."

Soggy basement reveals window to past

Who says you can't bring back the past? A little trip (soggy, as it was) to the basement of the *Colby Free Press* brought back at least a little of our history.

The oldest verifiable object is a 1923 edition of the paper, then published but once a week, and by my math that is 87 years of "past."

It's strange that cleaning the deep, dark places of our houses and offices can be put on the back burner and turned into a "round tuit" thing. And it's strange, too, that when there's a calamity like the broken water main in front of the *Free Press* on Jan. 9, the "round tuit" can get upgraded to a "this minute" event.

Old items of "who knows what" were dragged up the muddy stairs and buried in an undignified heap in the huge special-order dumpster. Others were spread out to dry, left for us to ponder on what in the world they were and how old they might be.

The news room fell heir to a couple of yardsticks that on one side bear the inscription: McCormick-Deering Farm Machinery and International Motor Trucks. The other side is more interesting. It reads: Knudson Bros. — Colby, Kansas — Phone 31.

How long has it been since a two-digit phone number changed to four, with a prefix in front of it? I wonder how many can remember when Colby used HO 2 in front of a four-digit number. If my thinker is accurate, the HO stood for Hobart.

We also found stacks of posters announcing basketball schedules, county fair schedules and other public events, all nestled on a dusty shelf above the waves. The interesting thing about the posters is that they recycled them by turning them over and printing some other schedule on the back. Who says recycling is one of the newer ideas?

I especially like to browse old newspapers,



Vera Sloan

• After Thoughts

and I found the front page of the July 12, 1923, newspaper to be pretty newsy myself. I also love old ads.

The front page featured three obituaries, a couple of thank-you notes, two large ads, a story about the Colby Golf Club voting for a five-year lease on the "Ackard land" as their future location for golf links and a club house, along with other small articles, plus an unusually interesting letter to the farmers in "this part of Kansas."

The letter said: "If there is any one thing that will hurt the future of this country, it is the raising of but one crop ... too much wheat will bankrupt this county." I just had to chuckle at the well-intentioned writer.

The inside pages were full of information, too. There was an ad from the Lassen Hotel in Wichita, claiming "nearly everybody stops at the Lassen." I can see why — a room with a toilet was \$2; a room with a private bath was \$4. The place boasted over 300 rooms with varying degrees of privacy, and I thought they'd probably need that many rooms if "everybody stopped at the Lassen."

Another interesting ad was the "new low price" for a Ford one-ton truck chassis for \$380. You could buy a new Hudson Speedstar for \$1,375 and a new Essex for \$1,045.

There was even an ad that said if you put \$5 down on a new Ford car, the money would be deposited in the bank at interest. "You can add

a little each week. Soon the payments, plus the interest paid by the bank, will make the car yours. No wonder people talk about "the good old days!"

The biggest ad was the re-opening of Colby Baseball Park. The local team secured a lease on the ball grounds just south of the county high school (the old St. Thomas Hospital), and set a big game against the railroad team from Goodland. The front page story said, "Be there if you want to see a real good game."

I'd love to have been able to find the next edition, to see who won and what the score was on that July 15, way back in 1923.

The most nostalgic ad was one telling of the sale of the Halford Mercantile Co. to new owner W.H. Chambers. He had a sale to reduce inventory. He sold Goodrich and Firestone tires, 30x3 1/2 for \$9.99; inner tubes for \$1.59 and binder twine for 15 cents a pound. He urged all to come to Halford (population, 4?) to save prices at harvest time.

Now, contrary to what some folks think, I'm really not older than dirt, but I do remember W.H. Chambers, even if his inventory reduction sale was way before my time. I called him Mr. Chambers. Dad called him Howard. I was pretty young when he and his wife Hettie retired, but his store and all the stuff he had in it was a point of fascination for a kid who thought everything in the store looked old, including the owners.

It was great going through the old *Free Press*. I have a copy of an old newspaper at home that has the story of the feud between the Deweys and the Berrys. I think I'll have to get it out and read it again.

Vera Sloan thinks life should be fun, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as *Society Editor*.

Wikipedia's convenient, not trustworthy

Wikipedia entered 2010 under a new policy. At its founding in 2001, Wikipedia allowed anybody to post and modify content. Recently, the website stopped anonymous users from entering new articles. Now it is requiring editorial review for any articles about living people.

"We are no longer at the point that it is acceptable to throw things at the wall and see what sticks," said Chairman Michael Snow.

Reversing its view that anyone had a right to modify entries, only experienced and trusted editors will now be gatekeepers, Snow said.

Any new U.S. entries by noneditors will be flagged and not available until approved. This procedure will be applied for articles on living people first; false and malicious information there can cause harm. The German version of Wikipedia currently uses approved editors to inspect submitted changes on all topics.

It had been easy to insert false information — a fact well know to the audience of the cable comedy show *The Colbert Report*. (Star Stephen Colbert suggested listeners increase the elephant population in Africa to an astronomical number on Wikipedia on one show.)

Some contributors have simply entered information that was just wrong, with or without possible malicious intent. Entries for Sens. Edward Kennedy and Robert Byrd were altered last Jan. 20 to say that they had died. Another entry incorrectly linked a writer to the John and Robert Kennedy assassinations.

While this new policy may keep away law-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

suits, the quality of Wikipedia remains a concern for teachers. Over 60 million Americans click on Wikipedia entries each month. A large number are students.

Students use Wikipedia as a convenience — you can retrieve a lot of information after you have put off to the last moment actually doing some substantial research in the library. But Wikipedia is very uneven in the quality of its entries. If a bona fide scholar has decided to be a contributor, the entry can approach an academic treatise in accuracy. Other entries are neither accurate nor complete.

I recently handed my students two unlabeled versions on the same topic, one by an authority and the other from Wikipedia — both in the same font and format. Every student easily separated them. The Wikipedia entry stood out as a sort of "pop" account while the academic version was obviously "deeper" in understanding.

Wikipedia has made a big deal about avoiding "POV," or point of view. But there is no way to avoid a "point of view." All words and

phrases are more or less value-laden. What you want is a point of view from a scholar who has carefully studied the field.

Sensitive to quality concerns, Wikipedia added "citation needed" to the end of any un-cited sentence. This is not a bad trend if it eventually directs the reader to an authoritative source. But it is that source that the student should be reading and citing.

I am often asked by my teaching colleagues in the field what to teach students about Wikipedia. I point them to colleagues at the history department at Middlebury College, who voted recently to bar students from citing Wikipedia as a source.

Professor Don Wyatt, chair of history, explained: "As educators, we are in the business of reducing the dissemination of misinformation. Even though Wikipedia may have some value, particularly from the value of leading students to citable sources, it is not itself an appropriate source for citation."

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher's college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701, or e-mail kbottrell@nwkansas.com.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

