



Other Viewpoints

Death penalty still under review

Under Kansas' death-penalty law, it takes a unanimous vote of 12 jurors to hand down a death sentence, but as Kansans learned last week, a 20-20 tie vote in the state Senate lets the death penalty itself off the hook.

Because of a lack of interest in the House, that likely is the end of this year's effort to end the death penalty, starting with crimes committed July 1 and beyond, replacing it with a new charge of "aggravated murder" with a sentence of life without parole.

Still, the Senate's emotional debate Friday revealed that support for capital punishment has weakened some since it passed the chamber in 1994 on a 22-18 vote. This time, 12 of 31 Republicans opposed the death penalty, compared with 7 of 27 Republicans in 1994.

Sen. Carolyn McGinn, R-Sedgwick, deserves credit for bringing up the issue last year, framing a repeal as one way to help the state's fiscal problems. She suggested Friday that the savings could be invested in solving "cold" cases. Capital punishment's costs are secondary to other concerns — such as justice — but they aren't irrelevant, especially now with the state in a budget crisis....

And while the guilt of all of all the condemned men on Kansas' death row seem unequivocal, the state is not immune to the problems that have led to exonerations and otherwise dogged the death penalty process in other states — including poor legal representation and inconsistent application of the law.

During Friday's debate, McGinn asked a question of her fellow "pro-life" senators that still deserves an answer: "We pass abortion laws because we say 'child of God,'" she said. "Please, somebody — although these people become terrible people — tell me at what point in time did they lose that status and who made that decision?"

That line of inquiry caused U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., to say several years ago that his view of the death penalty "has tightened a lot to where I only support capital punishment in cases where we cannot protect the society from the individual," mentioning only Osama bin Laden by name.

There will be more than passing interest in Brownback's narrowed view should he become governor next January and the repeal be reconsidered next year. (Interestingly, Brownback's newly announced Democratic opponent, Sen. Tom Holland, D-Baldwin City, was the only Democrat to vote against repeal Friday.)

Capital punishment is final, but the Legislature's 1994 commitment to it should not be. At least current Kansas senators now can say they've gone on record about whether the state's death penalty statute is working and whether it is worth the expense.

— *The Wichita Eagle, 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.

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Free speech sometimes uncomfortable

One of the most-commented-on articles in the paper I have seen in my time here is a classified ad that's been running the last couple of weeks — a challenge to God.

Some, of course, wonder what caused this person to make such a statement. Quite a few have made an effort to respond to what they see as an individual crying out in need of answers. Our "From the Pulpit" column for Friday is a response by Pastor Carol Rahn.

Others, however, have been quite indignant that the *Colby Free Press* would print that ad in the first place. I find that disturbing.

A newspaper, after all, is in the first line of defense when it comes to our most precious right, freedom of speech. We have to be careful that what we say is true. We would not knowingly defame anyone — including, for the record, God — but we also have an obligation to society to give a true and fair picture of what is going on in our town.

If a couple of the pillars of our community decide to have a shootout on the courthouse steps, we couldn't pretend it didn't happen.

If embezzlement charges are filed against some major personality in our town, you will read about it here.

You would expect nothing less from your community newspaper.

That ad, of course, was not a breaking story. It was one person's opinion, and that person paid to have it put in the notices.

We have a place for opinions, too, on this



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

page. The Opinion page is forum for exchanging ideas that can, hopefully, contribute to maintaining and improving a great community and a great society. The news staff contributes editorials and columns. We select a few from other sources as well, which express different viewpoints on topics we believe may want to read.

We print letters. This time of year, we have trouble getting in all the letters you send, so sometimes a regular column is set aside for a week to make room for more. (I confess that sometimes MY column is set aside for a week because it's hard to come up with something to write about that I think you'll want to read, though I always try to give you an interesting substitute.)

Letters to the editor are sometimes wonderful little pats on the back. Sometimes they are wake-up calls. Sometimes a letter is a thoughtful analysis of a current event or issue.

All letters, in any event, are signed. That's important, so readers know whose opinion is being expressed in our pages. We don't print

letters without a signature, or letters that break other rules for free speech, or laws, such as those against defamation. We don't print form letters, because they are not your personal opinion, they are just a sign of your agreement.

So why would we accept, and print, an anonymous attack on God?

A. It's legal. It's angry, but not libelous (how can anyone really libel God, anyway?).

B. It's paid for. As long as it's legal to print, that little space on the classified page is bought and paid for and the property of the person or persons who bought it. As long as they don't expect us to violate a law, they can say whatever they want. That doesn't mean we print any and every classified ad that comes our way, but we need a good reason to turn one down. An opinion we, or you, might disagree with doesn't qualify.

C. Because it's a classified ad, the choice to sign, or not sign, the opinion belongs to the person who bought the space. An identical letter to the editor would have to meet different standards.

So, when you're busy wondering why our standards have fallen so low, step back and applaud the fact that the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights are still held so high.

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.

Food shopping, farming have changed

While food safety will always be the cornerstone of our production process, allegiance is making inroads into why and where consumers buy their products.

Sure, the majority of today's shoppers enjoy and often take for granted the expanded menu in supermarkets. They look forward to shopping in a meat case filled with dozens of new cuts, pre-packaged, oven or grill-ready, custom portioned, "natural" and pre-cooked products. Today's shoppers can't wait to get their mitts on the marinades, dry rubs, cooking bags and other specialty items designed for time-strapped, two-income families.

There's also another growing group of consumers who are buying products based on trust and nostalgia. This notion of nostalgia, or pining, harkens back to the good old days — a time when events and lives were perceived as simpler, more wholesome, just downright better.

Many in this new group of consumers want to share in the story behind the product they are buying. They wish to establish a direct link and cultivate a relationship with the farmer who provides them with tomatoes, asparagus, corn or that special leg of lamb for the upcoming Easter holiday.

A growing number of shoppers yearn to develop a trust with farmers and ranchers who they believe and demand will provide them with a quality, consistent, wholesome product time after time.

Tapping into this ever-changing consumer landscape, today's food producer — especially those located near large-population, urban areas — must not miss the opportunity to reach the hearts, minds and stomachs of consumers who feel strongly about their food.

Some consumer-savvy farmers already are honed in on this concept. They've retooled operations from a conventional commodities-on-



John Schlageck

• Insights Kansas Farm Bureau

ly business to one that includes pick-your-own sweet corn, pumpkins, flowers and strawberries. They're giving people what they want.

Others now provide home deliveries of fresh produce or sell their produce at farmers' markets. Still others have added a corn maze, day-on-the-farm activities, ice-cream socials and chuck-wagon cookouts — while inviting everyone from school-aged kids to wedding rehearsal parties — all to enjoy the farm and ranch way of life.

This new direction is being driven by farmers and ranchers who are attempting to depend less on cheap land and vast acreage. This pioneer is tapping into the population surge and wealth of consumers who shop online, drive a couple of cars, including a big pickup, and don't mind paying a premium for the food they feed their families.

Another common element of this nontraditional farmer is the belief that this shift in production style may not make them rich, but will keep them out in the open spaces, running their own business and doing what they enjoy and want to do. A large percentage of those willing to try something new are younger farmers. And in many cases, a young farmer is often considered someone who has yet to reach the half-century mark.

For some, traditional farming became too expensive. Others decided traditional farming was no longer worth the effort. Whatever the

reason, any farmer will tell you that farming is a difficult business. Still, most would agree they are glad they bought their land, and glad they're doing what they enjoy and want to do.

No doubt, more and more farmers will be looking at a different direction to stay on their land. The land will continue to be farmed. There will no doubt be fewer farmers, but those who are determined to stay in this business will find innovative ways to farm.

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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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

