

## Other Viewpoints

### Hi-tech textbooks could be the future

Northwest Kansas Technical College this week announced that, starting next school year, the school will be handing out Apple iPad computers to all of its students.

The college was going to use the smaller iTouch, but after the iPad was announced, they decided to go with the bigger version. The college is touting itself as the first in Kansas to offer this technology.

Who better than a technical college to be on forefront technology?

This is a wonderful way to incorporate technology in the classroom. iPads and other similar mobile devices can hold dozens of textbooks in one handy pad that can be held in your hand.

Imagine not needing a bulky backpack with six or seven heavy textbooks you need for class that day weighing you down. Instead, you whip out your minicomputer, touch the icon for English 101 and you're set. Then you head to the next class and you have that book as well right at your fingertips.

Upgrading to the iPad was a good decision. The iTouch is the size of a cell phone, and while it is a fun device with a lot of utility, for long hours staring at a textbook, students will need the larger display.

You could even take notes right on the iPad. Granted, many of us would still prefer a pencil and paper since the motion of writing helps keep you from falling asleep in class.

However, we can foresee some problems.

First, the iPad is expensive. The basic version costs \$500 compared to the basic iTouch, which is going for \$200. We hope the college got a good deal.

Next, we don't really know yet how fragile these devices are. A lot of them could get scratched or broken, and then what? Would it be the college's responsibility to replace it or the student's? There would have to be an ironclad policy and probably some sort of agreement each student will have to sign.

Last, many students look forward to the small cash infusion they get from selling back their used textbooks at the end of the semester. What will those poor students do without their beer money?

Potential problems aside, this should serve as a good pilot program for larger colleges. If it all goes well, we could see iPads or similar e-readers become standard issue in classrooms around the world. Plenty of students already tote their laptops to class, and this is a natural evolution.

When the iPad was first announced, we told you it probably wouldn't revolutionize newspapers, and that's still true, but it might just revolutionize education.

- Kevin Bottrell

### 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.

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

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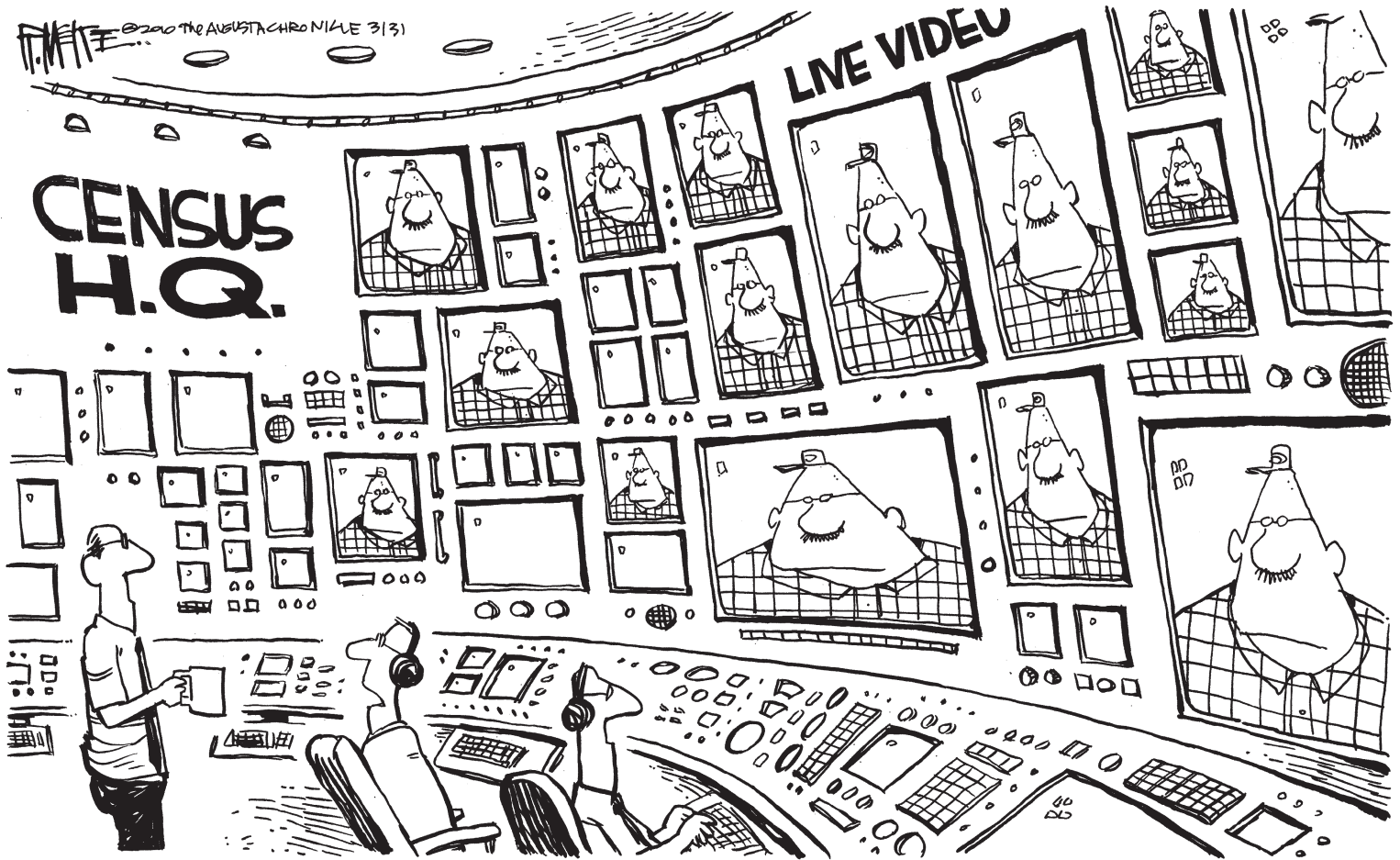
Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, Barbara Ornelas, Kris McCool

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



"SIR! STANLEY J. ROSENBLATT, SECTOR 7, QUADRANT Z, HAS REFUSED TO SEND IN HIS FORMS BECAUSE HE SAYS THE GOVERNMENT IS TOO INTRUSIVE..."

### Loan issue has two sides

Embark Health Care, the end-of-life services company operating downtown, has been a hot topic around Colby of late. People will be able to voice their support or concerns with the company when the City Council holds a public hearing at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday on whether or not they should give the firm a \$100,000 loan.

I have heard that many people are not in favor of the city giving Embark more money. I can see why they feel that way. After all, the city has already given Embark more than \$400,000 to help pay for renovations at the former Inlow Interior building.

To someone with only passing knowledge of Embark's relationship with the city, loaning the company another \$100,000 may seem risky and irresponsible. These people may also have a negative opinion about Embark because it appears the company is asking for another handout.

But as is the case in most situations, the relationship between the council and Embark is more complex than many people realize. Junelle Hills, Embark manager in Colby, said the company's president, Michael Brouters, was encouraged to ask the city for money by councilmen at a reception the company held on Feb. 18. Hills said the councilmen told them he could get the money through the city's sales-tax fund.

Embark would have never asked for a loan if they hadn't been encouraged by the councilmen, said Hills. Neither Brouters nor Hills was willing to name the councilmen who spoke to Brouters at the reception.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

I'm relieved I don't have to put in print something that might be embarrassing to certain people. While I'm glad Hills and Brouters refused to divulge the names, the fact that Embark wasn't going to ask the city for money until they were approached by the councilmen made me see the company in a whole new light. They have gone from being a company looking for a handout to a company being hurt by misconceptions shared by many in town.

I don't blame the councilmen for offering encouragement to Brouters and Embark. I just don't think they knew the guidelines for how the city's economic development sales-tax money could be used. City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said guidelines prohibited the money from being spent to refinance debt or to pay salaries or administrative expenses. The city made the rule, so they can change it if they please, but I suspect that if the councilmen had known these guidelines they wouldn't have encouraged Brouters to ask the city for money.

I'm not arguing this means Embark should get the loan. Personally, I don't think the city should approve it, because it could lead to a parade of businesses going to the council for

money. Any business that the city turned down would have plenty of incentive to accuse the council of a double standard. I do think Embark has a lot of potential and I hope Brouters is able to raise enough money to keep the company afloat.

The success of this company could revitalize the downtown area and the seven-page Advance Directive Solutions document offered by Embark could help thousands of families avoid having to deal with the stress and pain that stems from not knowing if a loved one would want to be kept alive in certain situations.

An Advance Directive is a legal document that defines the health care you want or don't want when you can't make decisions for yourself. According to the company's website, www.embarkhealth.com, the seven-page document explains a person's wishes if they are at the end of their life and unable to communicate. It identifies the person who would make decisions for them when they can no longer make them themselves.

Embark's program has the potential to help improve our downtown and give much-needed stress relief to families everywhere at the same time. Even if you oppose the company getting the loan, we should all be rooting for the business to succeed.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

### No computer? Not a person

Want to know your child's lunch options? Go online.

Constant updates are now available on your child's academic progress. Online.

Your check gets deposited directly. Want to know your deductions? Go online.

And now, when you file taxes, you need to file online? The Kansas Department of Revenue wants to charge a fee if you file that old-fashioned paper tax form — the paper forms that used to be distributed free through post offices.

There's an assumption here, a terribly wrong assumption, that everyone has or soon will have computers connecting them to the Internet at work and at home.

According to a direct marketing trade publication, after many years of increasing Internet access, the percentage of households with computer connections peaked in 2006 and has gone down for the last three years in a row. This is due to the economic downturn, of course.

Add together the monthly cost of a broadband Internet connection, perhaps an extra phone line, and the initial cost of buying the computer and hookup and peripherals (divided by the 3-to-5-year life of this rapidly-obsolete equipment) and each hooked-up household is paying close to \$1,000 a year to be part of the online generation. More and more households can no longer afford it.

Direct marketers such as Lands End and even Amazon.com recognize the downturn. Online advertising, while cheaper, has not been as effective as originally touted. While there has been a decline in all advertising formats, the percentage using printed direct mail



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

is now going up. Your mailbox is again filling up with commercial mail.

But government, business and education remain mesmerized by the computer-industrial complex into thinking that every American is going to be online in just a few more years. Most colleges and universities no longer publish catalogs or schedules. Yet one-fourth to one-third of rural Kansas students are without Internet at home and will have to go to schools or public libraries to get online. "Nontraditional" students, the unemployed, the elderly and the isolated rural residents become "non-persons."

It is true that to get around in America takes a car. And folks who do not have a car are handicapped in finding work and getting around. But we don't require you by law to have a car, or charge you a penalty for not having one. That is exactly what an extra charge for filing taxes on paper will do. Unlike driving, you are required to file taxes.

Sure, it's more costly for the state to process a paper tax return than one filed electronically. But that savings to the state has been bought by many Kansans paying far more for their electronics and connections. We use our electronics for more than paying taxes, of course, but our behavior should not penalize those

who cannot afford this expensive medium or choose not to use it.

Futurists who dream of every newborn baby being connected to the Internet need to write science fiction stories, not state policies. They also need to get out a little more and see that there is a significant population in Kansas who are not online — folks who actually have a life not tied to a computer screen.

"Life, liberty, and the possession of a computer" is not how the Declaration of Independence reads.

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.

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### Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

