



Free Press Viewpoint

Census Bureau drops ball on press

The 2010 Census moves on to the difficult stage now, with workers trying to track down those who did not return or complete their forms.

If a lot of forms don't come back, one reason might be that the Census Bureau bungled the opportunity to communicate with its audience by using community newspapers and broadcast stations.

Concerned apparently that someone might say the wrong thing, the bureau changed its rules and forbade workers from giving any interviews this year. Last year, the same area supervisors could and did give interviews, and people had a much better idea of what was going on.

Perhaps big-city newspapers have a better shot at finding someone who could or would talk. We wouldn't know. The people on the ground out in our towns, while mostly knowledgeable, had been told not to share with the public.

What a way to get a message out.

Worse yet, the Census had no budget for advertising except, apparently, on national television, reaching mostly the large markets. Out here in the nooks and crannies of America, where people can get lost, there was not a dime.

Community newspapers and broadcasters could easily have pushed the Census message to every corner of this and every state. Instead, we got nothing.

None of this should be a surprise to rural Americans, who are used to being overlooked in the country's metro-oriented culture. There's a sense that the millions of people out there beyond the smog and city haze just don't count for much.

And maybe we should be used to that by now.

But the Census Bureau had an important message to get out. We could have helped.

Not only did we get no ads; we couldn't even find someone to talk to us for a news story. The people out here had their mouths taped shut, and the "public relations" offices knew nothing about what was going on here.

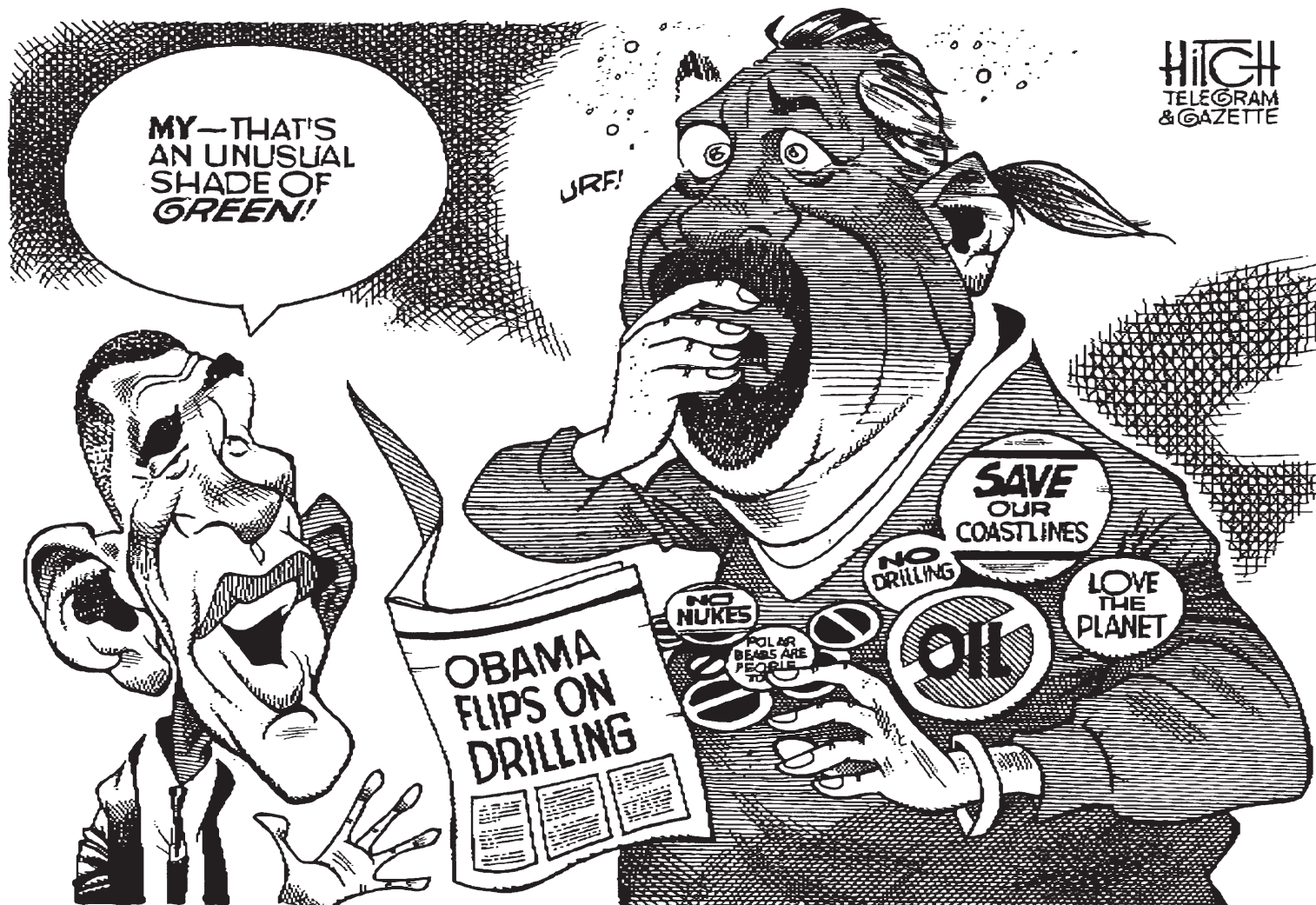
When we did reach someone who would comment, for instance, she told the reporter that Census forms would be "in the mail" that day. When they appeared on door knobs around town the next day, many were surprised.

You'd think an agency that has 10 years to plan its every move would be ready to move with confidence. Such is the state of federal competence, however. The bureau obviously had no idea how to handle information. None at all.

The agency should have empowered and trained its employees to spread the word. It could have directed just a fraction of what it spent on television for effective ads in community media. But it did neither.

Since the chance won't come again for a decade, that's truly a shame. The opportunity is lost, but the problem remains.

— Steve Haynes



HIGH TELEGRAM & GAZETTE

Spring followed her north

I'm so glad that spring is here.

Actually, we sort of rushed the season. We took off March 19 and drove to Augusta, Ga., to see our new granddaughter and her assorted relatives — mother, father, aunt and uncle.

Georgia is in the south. It's a lot warmer there than here. The fruit trees were all in bloom. There were flowers — daffodils, tulips and even a few irises — along walkways. The grass was green and the trees were starting to leaf out.

A spring storm had chased us out of Kansas, first with flakes, then with rain. It was cloudy in Missouri and Illinois. Kentucky was overcast and it didn't start to clear up until we hit Tennessee.

Georgia was a miracle. The sun was shining. The air was warm. And everyone in Augusta was out working on their lawns and homes.

It turns out this is an annual ritual as the town readies itself for the Masters Tournament, a golf event so exclusive most of the inhabitants never get a glimpse of the course, which is protected by miles of fence and hedges.

We were a little early for the azaleas, the area's most famous and showy flower. The azaleas, like the Masters, show up the first few



Cynthia Haynes

• Open Season

weeks of April. I'm not sure if the golf tournament was scheduled to coincide with the flowers or the other way around.

But we couldn't stay for either the azaleas or the Masters. We had to get home, so we said goodbye to the world's most beautiful grandchild, her parents and our other daughter and son-in-law, and headed north as March neared its end.

It rained on us in Tennessee but the sun came out as we made a run for the Mississippi at Memphis and kept on smiling down on us as we got on U.S. 36 at Hannibal, Mo., and prepared to cross most of two states to get home.

Back in Oberlin, the sun was shining, the daffodils were blooming and the trees are thinking about leafing out.

We don't have fruit trees in bloom here yet,

and the tulips haven't appeared. I don't expect to see any irises until May. But spring snuck in while we were down South.

Easter Sunday afternoon we spent cleaning garden beds and sorting seeds. I've got plenty of lettuce, radishes, beans, peas, carrots and corn but I'm short of spinach, zucchini and yellow squash, as usual. The tomatoes, green peppers, cucumbers and broccoli will be purchased when the plants appear at the local emporium.

As I worked in the yard, I listened to the excited squeals of the neighbor's grandchildren hunting Easter eggs, watched the little girls down the block ride their scooters up and down the sidewalk and watched a couple of fat robins hopping around in my garden-to-be.

I love spring, and I've already had an extra two weeks of it.

Thank you, Mother Nature.

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

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkans.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

New rules don't have to open door

To the Editor:

It was with great interest that I read Andy Heintz' balanced column entitled, "Loan issue has two sides" (Colby Free Press, Friday, April 2). I appreciate his efforts to communicate the issues fairly.

However, I would like to point out what I believe is a misunderstanding in his personal conclusion about making the loan. His concern that making the loan could lead to "a parade of businesses going to the council for money" is erroneous. You see, the city attorney made it very clear the council has the right to modify the policy as it wishes.

Therefore, the policy does not merely have to be that the funds can or cannot be used for issues like salaries and other operational imperatives, but rather conditions can be imposed on a loan. Two examples:

1. A firm is eligible for an operational loan at least six months after it has received sales tax funds for building purposes and then only to the extent of a maximum of 25 percent of the funds already approved for building purposes, or

2. A firm is eligible for an operational loan but only to the extent it can show that it has raised private capital for the same purposes at x times the level of the requested loan.

Either of these examples keeps the "parade" from forming and allows the city to help fund worthwhile operational initiatives. And clearly, these are not the only policy examples. There are many more possible scenarios to prevent the "parade" from happening.

The decision on the loan should be, in my opinion, based on whether or not the loan has a chance of helping to make Embark successful. As you so succinctly stated, a successful Embark has many positives both for Colby and society.

If you feel the loan could help us succeed, I urge you and others to support it. If you feel the loan is meaningless as a part of the success equation for Embark, I would encourage a negative vote.

But don't vote negatively due to a misunder-



Free Press Letter Drop

• Our readers sound off

standing of the power and flexibility the council has in modifying policy.

Michael Brouters
Chief Executive Office, Embark Health
Denver

Editors note: We received this letter too late to publish it Monday, before the City Council vote Tuesday night. We thought it was still both important for the town to see.

Are parents aware of drinking danger?

To the Editor:

On March 29, the Thomas County Coalition offered people an opportunity to become more aware of the reality of underage drinking and its consequences. As I sat in a sparsely filled Frahm Theater, I mostly saw students, most of whom were probably there because they received extra credit in a particular class. I began to wonder "Where are all the parents?"

It seems like yesterday that I was in high school, even though it has been 18 years since I graduated. However, the challenge of underage drinking hasn't diminished.

Here are a couple of things that stood out: the cost of hosting a party for underaged kids and the risk of having a breathalyzer in your family car.

Hosting (parents allowing underage drinking in their home) was not a penalized activity when I was in high school. Now it is, and the first offense will be a \$1,000 fine.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

