

## Free Press Viewpoint

### Be very careful of the party label

How do we go about readjusting America? Land of the free, home of the brave, and might we add, home of the broke. We are in a fiscal mess of nightmare proportions. We seem shy to point the finger where some of the blame rests — the halls of Congress. They make and pass the laws. “We the people” only get to express our approval or disapproval at the ballot box. They go about their business with what appears to be only limited regard for “we the people.” After all, we are their bosses. Right? Ah, that’s a stretch. Don’t they set their own salary? Sure they do. It’s currently \$174,000 per year. And like it or not, there’s nothing “we the people” can do about it. Set the length and number of their own vacations? “We the people” can’t do that?

Work on site just three days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday? Friday is travel time back home and Monday is travel time back to D.C. Is that the schedule “we the people” operate under?

If Congress is really serious about cutting expenses, why don’t they limit their weekly *back home* travels to just one a month? That would save a bundle, and keep them on the job longer. They could save another bundle if they would reject — r-e-j-e-c-t — collectively, their next pay raise. Bet they won’t. Bet you don’t even know when it is they take up their pay-raise issue.

If you are frustrated about the way our Congress acts, and this year has been the pits so far, there’s something “we the people” can do about it. After all, we are partly to blame.

How? Kick the habit! No, not the smoking habit. The voting habit.

Simply put, break yourself of the habit of looking at the initial next to a candidate’s name on the election ballot — (D) or (R) — before marking it. That’s not important.

What is important is what you believe, not what your party’s candidate says he or she believes. Educate yourself about the candidates, put their feet to the fire, don’t just take them at their word. After all, they speak ‘politician,’ often a deceptive form of communication.

We need to get out of the box and not be led by the nose. In other words, be Republican if you wish. Be Democrat if you wish. Nothing wrong with that.

But for safety’s sake, stay away from the quicksand!  
— Tom Dreiling

### 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. Thank-yous from this area should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality.

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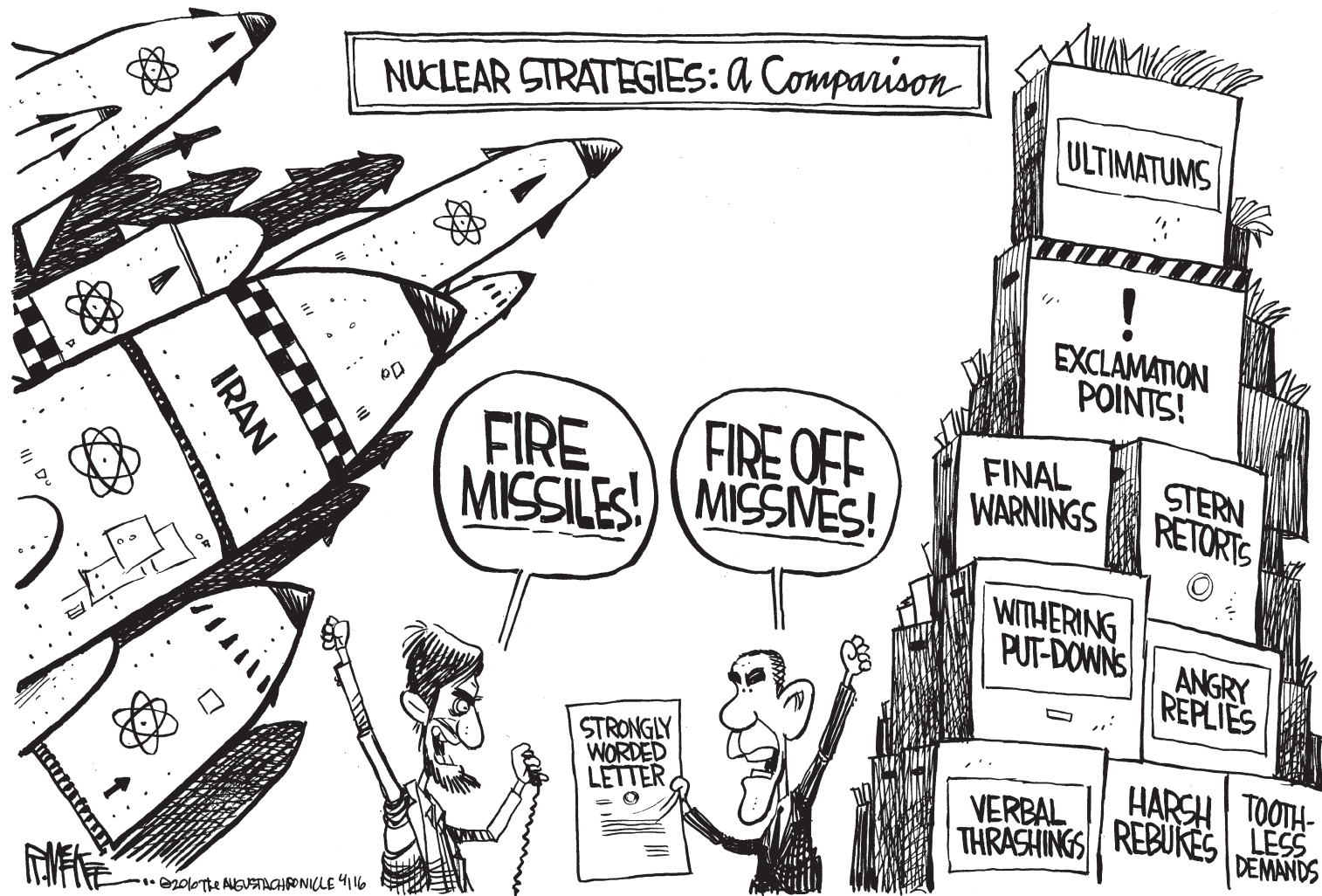
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### Potluck tradition still going strong

It’s tempting to use a weekly column to play a one note song — going on about how the world is going down the tubes, or taking the opposite extreme of seeing nothing but sweetness and light.

Since I frequently find myself focusing on traditions, it’s a challenge to avoid moaning about the good old days, especially because I honestly feel there are certain values which have been pushed aside to our detriment.

Most things, however, are probably worthy of at least mixed reviews. One of these is the potluck dinner, at least as it’s practiced today.

For those who may have been living on a different planet, the potluck operates on a simple premise. A group — church, club, parent-teacher association, political club, what-have-you — decides to get together and eat. Often the food is an incentive to get people to show up for a meeting they might otherwise ignore.

But there is no time, cook, budget and/or cooking space to prepare the common meal at a central location. Instead, each person brings one dish to share. (This differs from the brown-bag plan, where each brings their own meal.)

I’m happy to say that the potluck seems to be doing fine in Thomas County. Event planners just need to get the word out, and everybody will show up with something.

Sad to say, that’s not the case everywhere. Some young adults — gasp — don’t even know what a potluck (or carry-in dinner, or whatever



**Marian Ballard**

#### • Collection Connections

the local term may be) is. They’ve never been to one, never seen one and quite possible don’t like the idea of eating food cooked in many kitchens. That doesn’t mean they never eat together; it just means they are more likely to order a stack of pizzas to go.

They don’t know what they are missing.

The potluck, after all, is a wonderful opportunity for both cooks and eaters. It’s a chance to show off a favorite, fancy recipe that never gets made at home because a) it’s too big, b) everything gets old after you’ve had it 500 times, or c) Uncle George is allergic to almonds. For the adventuresome cook, it’s a chance to try a new recipe, knowing that you won’t be stuck with a lot of leftovers if it’s a dud.

On the eater side, where else do you get to eat three different kinds of fried chicken, lasagna, green bean casserole, three kinds of salad and four different desserts at the same time when it’s not even a holiday? (Though today, too often, the chicken came from a deli and not from the home range.)

Then there’s the conversation. Meal times at home range from solitary affairs to “Please pass the salt.” Parents who ask, “How was your day?” hear “fine” in response.

At a potluck, on the other hand, kids tend to sit together — just try to stop them! They get wild and silly and joke and learn and have fun.

Parents get to sit together, too, close enough to the kids to stop any food fights before they get going and far enough away to compare notes and have an adult conversation.

The rest of us get into conversation on things new and old — the weather, the town cleanup, the kids and parents.

Occasionally — more than occasionally — the talk turns to memories that unite us. Sentences start with “do you remember...” and “did you ever hear about...” and “I’ll bet you never knew...”

The most important tie uniting a group, whether it be a church or a neighborhood, is often shared history. The most important way to share history is through conversation, and those conversations are the key to a potluck. The meat just serves as a side dish.

Let’s keep this tradition going.

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.

### Say it loud; say it proud

A successful farmer said it best when he talked to me recently about his obligation to give the public an understanding of his profession.

This western Kansas farmer has always known how important it is to help consumers understand agriculture. He believes that if the people who buy his products have a better appreciation for the food produced on his farm, the future of his business will remain bright while he continues to provide high-quality, low-cost food we Americans all enjoy.

How do farmers help consumers understand their profession?

It begins with the commitment to tell your side of the story whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself. Whether farmers talk to grade-schoolers, members of service clubs or state legislators, they should practice the art of relationship building between rural and urban, between producers and consumers of agricultural products.

Today, most consumers are at least two, three or four generations removed from the farm. But just about everyone has a lawn, garden, flowers, plants or shrubbery. These same consumers enjoy, and most cherish, their ties to a father, grandfather or great grandfather who tilled the soil.



**John Schlageck**

#### • Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

It’s easy to find a common denominator with your urban cousins. You can begin by noting that the fertilizer they buy for their garden or lawn is no different from what you use — as a farmer — to put on your wheat, corn or milo.

The rose dust, herbicide or insecticide used to control scab, dandelions or mosquitoes is similar to the chemicals you use to prevent damage and disease on your crops.

Sometimes the common ground revolves around nutrition. A good analogy could be the parallel between a person’s need for healthy food and a cow’s need for a well-balanced diet.

It’s easy to move from nutrition to some of the more difficult challenges facing agriculture today, topics like access, availability and conservation of water, groundwater contamination, food safety, animal care and even health care affordability.

Take the groundwater contamination issue, for example. Begin by telling them your shared concerns for chemical run off into lakes and streams. As a farmer, you cannot afford to overuse these expensive products. You can also explain to them that with minimum- and no-till farming practices, the residue helps keep the herbicides and insecticides in the field, where they control weeds and pests.

Let them know that you, more than anyone else, are concerned about the land where you and your family live and work. Public understanding of how today’s farmer runs his or her operation is only half the challenge. Perhaps equally important is the need to be sensitive to the concerns of the rest of the world.

Remember that people, most of them living in towns or cities, are the ones who call for regulations and new laws. It is the public who will suffer if these laws hamper this nation’s food producers and our food system.

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

