



Free Press Viewpoint

Penny's existence makes little 'cents'

Not many people seem to know this, but there's a new penny out.

It has a little bit different design than your average penny. The heads side has the familiar visage of Abe Lincoln, but the tails side has a shield with the words "E Pluribus Unum" emblazoned on it and a banner reading "One Cent" in front of it.

It's a nice, simple design, but why did they redesign it in the first place? To make it more artsy, as part of the same Artistic Infusion Program which gave us the 50-state quarters.

A better question might be why do we still have pennies at all. We've had pennies in circulation since 1793, but their buying power is a tiny fraction of what it was then. Even gum-ball machines take nickels now. The prevalence of credit and debit cards has shrunk the penny's usage even more.

Think about when in your daily life you use pennies. Having a hard time? Most of us only see a penny after a purchase when we get change. It goes in a pocket or purse, rarely to be heard from again.

We don't pay for much with pennies. Not a lot of people stand at the checkout counter pulling penny after penny out of their purses to pay for a big screen TV. And besides, the people behind them in line would get really mad.

How many of us have change jars at home in which we fish out the quarters and leave the rest to get taken to the change counter sometime down the road?

The *Colby Free Press*, in fact costs exactly \$75 cents. No pennies needed there.

It costs more than one cent to make a penny. In 2006, the U.S. Mint estimated that it costs 1.23 cents per penny. This fluctuates based on the price of metal used.

Of course, simply getting rid of the penny might cause a few small problems, namely change. Buy something with cash most anywhere in the United States and you're likely to be charged sales tax. Sales tax percentages (7.3 in Colby) rarely make a price come out even, even if the item started out at an even price. So to fix that, retailers would have to round up or down to the nearest multiple of five. Another solution is change the sales tax everywhere to 10 percent, but no one's going to like that.

It's not a new idea. Jim Kolbe, a congressman from Arizona introduced the Legal Tender Modernization Act in 2002, which called for several measures – including rounding – to reduce the usage of pennies. Kolbe pointed out that rounding would be fair to both consumers since a price has a 50/50 chance to round either up or down.

Another criticism of the anti-penny initiative is that it would hurt the zinc industry. Pennies are 97.5 percent zinc, quite a bit of which is mined in Tennessee. But there are a million uses for zinc such as battery fuel, pipes, chemicals and even roofing.

Simply put, the penny causes us more trouble than its worth. So let's get them all together, melt them down and make a little money back. Hey, maybe it could help pay down the national debt.

– Kevin Bottrell

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Changing world needs changing view

I think one of the hardest things to do in life is to believe what you don't want to believe.

Most of us embrace a world view at some point in our lives. This view influences the way we act, dress, vote, eat, communicate and view the actions of other people. Maybe this view has helped us overcome obstacles and avoid catastrophes in the past, so we reason it will work just as well for us when we confront new conflicts in our lives. But the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it," strategy can yield horrible results if our world view is not designed to solve current problems.

Different problems require different ways of thinking. A world view that worked in the past may need to be reformed or discarded in exchange for a new way of thinking more in tune with today's problems.

Countries are similar to people when it comes to the importance of carefully scrutinizing whether or not core beliefs will help or hinder their ability to tackle new problems.

The U.S. is currently at a crossroads where we have to decide whether continuing to embrace certain core beliefs is a good idea. Right now, there is a battle of ideas over the identity of our country. Many conservatives and tea-party activists seem worried that the America they know is in decline and being replaced by a new country they don't like or understand. The extreme anger on the right over issues like health care reform, the bailouts of automobile companies and investment banks and the problem of illegal immigration reflects the growing uncertainty and fear being felt by many Americans.

I think a lot of this fear is because, for the first time in history, America has a black president. I'm not saying all those who disagree with President Barack Obama's policies are racist, that would be simplistic and unfair. But I do think much of the hysteria over his mostly centrist policies stems from people being afraid of change.



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

Whether you agree with the bailouts of investment banks and car companies or not, they were hardly radical. President George W. Bush, arguably the most conservative president America has had in the last 50 years, also supported bailouts while he was in office. The current president's health care plan is very similar to the health care bill Republican Mitt Romney got passed when he was governor of Massachusetts.

Criticizing the administration's slowness in fixing our deficit is perfectly legitimate, but I have a feeling the angry rallies across the country would not be happening if Arizona Senator John McCain was elected president even if he embraced some of the same policies as Obama.

I think the other problem people have with the president is that Obama doesn't fully embrace the individualistic, super-masculine, "take-no-prisoners" attitude that shapes the way many conservatives see the world.

To put it simply, Obama is not President Ronald Reagan. He doesn't look, act or think like the former president who did so much to promote the individualistic, nationalistic atmosphere that his supporters fear is currently under attack. This is why you can turn on your television and hear people in conservative activist groups talking about the need to take this country back.

While there is nothing wrong with loving your country and believing in self-reliance and rugged individualism, these values often allow businesses and politicians to adopt no-holds-

barred policies that lead to environmental hazards, financial crises and foreign policy actions that tarnish our reputation in the world.

While American individualism is essential to a healthy society, it doesn't have to blind us to the dangers in allowing investment banks, mining companies, oil companies and other big businesses to regulate themselves. Not all people who run big businesses are evil, but those willing to cut corners to make a profit need to be restrained by common-sense regulation.

There is also nothing wrong with being against most forms of wealth redistribution, but surely people would admit that Americans who are working two jobs should not have to decide between paying for their children's medicine and paying for rent. Self-reliance is admirable, but it shouldn't cause us lose empathy for our fellow citizens who are struggling despite their best efforts to lead self-fulfilling lives.

Finally, there are times when it's necessary to go to war in order to protect our country from those who want to do us harm. That being said, there is nothing wrong with disagreeing with the government over what tactics should be used to prevent attacks. Those opposed to foreign policies like preemptive war and torture for moral reasons should not be demonized as weak or unpatriotic. Allowing these people to explain the reasons they hold beliefs will only make discussions over foreign policy more inclusive and democratic.

Super masculinity, extreme individualism and knee-jerk nationalism are remnants of the Reagan era that should be reformed or discarded in order for our country to have a brighter future.

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.

Television music confuses the issue

OK, I know I am well past the age of being an official senior citizen, however I am sure I am not the only person my age who is having a little more trouble hearing than they used to when they were younger. Nor is my husband.

It seems that it is even more difficult to hear when there is a lot of background noise going on. One problem we are having is with all of the loud sound effects and music in the television shows now days, and it seems like the problem is getting worse all the time. Actually, I have had my hearing checked and have been told that it is pretty good for someone my age; it's just that background stuff that sets me wild.

Another problem is the fact that actors and actresses actually whisper to each other while the music is playing louder than they are talking. Whatever happened to performers being trained to speak loudly and distinctly so they can be heard in the back row?

I know there must be a lot of other seniors who are experiencing this same difficulty. In fact, according to the 2004 U.S. Census, 12 percent of this country's citizens are over the age of 65, and by 2050 they predict 21 percent of U.S. citizens will be over the senior mark, so doesn't it stand to reason with such a large number of older people sitting at home watch-



Marj Brown

• Marj's Snippets

ing in the evenings, because they are too tired or too lazy to go out and run around town and party, that the producers should start taking the state of our hearing into consideration when they plan their shows?

And while I'm at it, and in the mood to gripe, I would like to talk about something else that bothers me with television programs now days. That is the loud commercials. They not only have loud background music and noise, but the volume is set up so much higher for the commercial than it is for the program it is interrupting that they just about knock you out of your chair when they come on.

The people who are doing this are making a big mistake, because I have mentioned this to a lot of my friends and they say they do the same thing Jim and I do when these loud commercials come on ... they mute them. Sponsors actually are not getting their money's

worth for their advertising dollar ... because no one is listening.

While watching a show a couple of nights ago, I started feeling nervous and a little upset and just couldn't pinpoint the reason. Then, when that show was over, we turned to "Law and Order" – you can always find a "Law and Order" – and even though it opened with a horrible scene of a dead body being found behind a dumpster (as usual), I suddenly felt much better.

Then I realized why I felt better ... "Law and Order," has no background sound effects or music; you simply hear what the actors are saying. What a relief.

Marj Brown has lived in Colby for 62 years and has spent a good deal of that time writing about people and places here. She says it's one of her favorite things to do.

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

