



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Does prayer harm a public meeting?

It's quite remarkable to see a city government start a meeting with a prayer in this day and age. It's not remarkable, however, to see them get challenged on it.

That's what the Wichita City Council spent much of their weekly meeting talking about. The council opens each meeting with an invocation, which has rubbed some groups, especially the local chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the wrong way. They want the tradition stopped.

Public opinion – or at least the opinion of those who took the *Wichita Eagle's* online poll – doesn't seem to favor the prayers. Out of 2,819 polled, 81 percent said there's no place for prayer in city council meetings, 17 percent said there is a place and 2 percent said they didn't care.

But whenever there's a church and state combination, the question we all really need to ask is: is it harming anyone?

In this case probably not. Taking a few moments for a prayer probably doesn't threaten the separation of church and state like, say, posting the 10 Commandments in a public school. In that case, the school as a government agency would be promoting a specific religion and specific moral concepts from that religion to all of its students regardless of their personal beliefs. In this case, the prayer is really more for the council members than the public. Maybe they need to draw strength from a higher power to deal with their meeting agenda.

What the council needs to do is make sure the prayers are inclusive to all the faiths represented in Wichita, which, according to them has been done. The city lets Interfaith Ministries handle the coordination of the invocations. That organization does have member churches from the Christian denominations as well as Bahá'í, and Jewish congregations. The group said it gets a lot of interest in performing the prayer.

According to the *Eagle*, the Wichita city code says: "The presiding officer shall announce the invocation to be given by a member of a rotating panel invited for such purposes from all the religious faiths in the community." If they stick to that, what's the problem?

At the same time, organization such as Americans United are entitled to their opinions and we're glad the council took the time to hear them.

We should take a page from the Wichita council in that allowing church and state to mingle doesn't always hurt, doesn't always threaten freedom. By all accounts, council members and the public are free to simply ignore the prayer.

There is nothing wrong with promoting religion. Religion can be a powerful force for good in our communities. What we must remain watchful for is those who want to include religion in public policy. Federal, state and municipal law must be the law of the land and religion the law of soul. Each has its place.

— Kevin Bottrell

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- U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521
- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715

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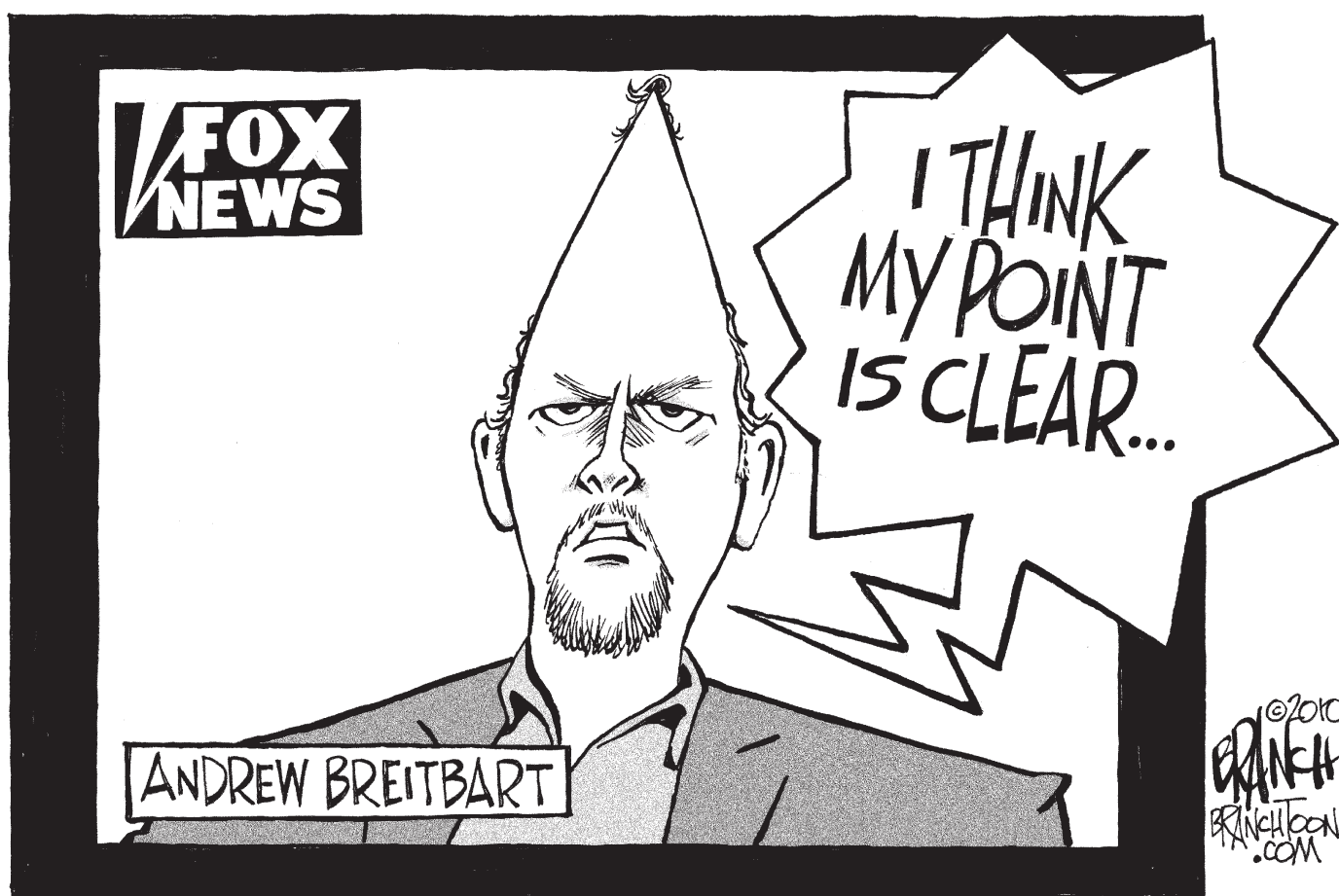
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### BLOGGER DEFENDS SHOWING EDITED VIDEO OF USDA WORKER...



### News of police doings a universal hit

A traffic stop for a broken tail light leads to a major drug bust. A history lesson for the kids leads to discovery of a treasure.

It's amazing how starting out to do one thing can lead you in another direction entirely.

That happened to me this week when I asked my favorite Internet search engine a question about my home town, and came up with an article from the *New York Times*.

To say I was surprised was putting it mildly. After all, small towns in sparsely populated states seldom merit the notice of such a power hitter.

Though it had nothing to do with what I searching for, I had to check it out. The article, published in September of 2007, was about what was always one of my favorite features in *The Chadron Record* – a regular item called *The Police Beat*.

Sound familiar? *On the Beat* is still a favorite of mine, and from comments I hear, I'm not alone. It's my duty and privilege to take the raw information provided to us about the daily grind at the Law Enforcement Center – and by those hard workers throughout the county – and help us all stay in touch with the nitty gritty of what goes on through the eyes of the Colby Police Department and the Thomas County Sheriff's Office.

There are days when six calls about a dog on the loose finally lead to an actual sighting. There are days when six calls reveal a vandalism spree clear across town – or the county.



**Marian Ballard**

#### • Collection Connections

There are days when the cows don't come home – instead they seem determined to hang out where the grass is greener, on the wrong side of the fence – the road side.

Then there are the days when tragedy strikes, and everyone on both forces turns out to work a big accident or to find a child or a wandering grandparent.

Most of the items are understated. After all, the main reason for the blotter is so there's a record of what happened when. What happened at 1436? That was when the call came about the 10-47 at Fourth and Range. That would be – after decoding – a non-injury accident at 2:36 p.m.

Names seldom show up. They really are not the point, on the newspaper's side of things, anyway. The story told in these lines is rather the background story of a quiet, peaceful small town. This is the team that keeps it a quiet, peaceful small town.

Once in a while, I see the badge numbers of Police Chief Randy Jones or Sheriff Rod Taylor and let you know that they are out there on

the front lines. They are on the front lines far more than you will see in the paper, though. After all, their job is to keep the community safe, not to make headlines. And while any law enforcement department needs a leader to handle administration duties, that leader also needs to be in touch with what's going on beyond the office.

You may have notice that *On the Beat* has been missing for a few days. That's because everyone needs a vacation now and then, including the people handling the paperwork for law enforcement. No names, because I don't have their permission, but it doesn't take much imagination to realize that those who answer the phone and see that the paperwork gets done are as important as those driving patrol cars. Their jobs may be less obviously exciting – though chasing cows out of the road is exciting only when they don't want to go – but dispatchers and secretaries do their part to keep you safe as well.

*On the Beat* will be back next week. We hope it will be a quiet week, in spite of the fair going on. And we want all those on the front lines – and the front desk – that we appreciate them.

*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.*

### Develop college pool as an asset

I don't know all the details yet, but I'm really happy to hear the Colby Community College Board of Trustees made a decision at Monday's meeting to keep the college pool open.

The possible demise of the pool was apparently included in a list of possible cost-cuts for the board's consideration.

I applaud the college for keeping the pool in its budget, and hope the board and administration will see the pool with a different view – as an asset, rather than a liability. I would hope there will be a better attempt to market the pool, which I think is probably the only indoor pool between Hays and Denver. Who knows, it might even help pay for itself some day.

I can see marketing as being targeted to user groups, swim clubs and families. I can see making the pool available to groups coming into town for special events, such as the Orange and Black tournament, kids' wrestling, college and high school rodeo, soccer events, conventions and every other event that brings people to Colby, period.

It should be possible to plan competitive water games with other colleges to coordinate with various college events that bring future students to town. The fact that other colleges may not have a pool doesn't have to keep aquatic events from happening. If they can swim at home during the summer, they can swim in Colby during the winter.

An olympic-size pool should attract even summer tourists who would prefer its size over the nice, but smaller, motel pools. They just have to know it's there and available.

It's positively a shame that through such blatant neglect the pool has been allowed to deteriorate over the last 20-some years. Maintenance should always be less costly than re-



**Vera Sloan**

#### • After Thoughts

placement.

A good beginning might be to start with a thorough cleaning by taking out the resting benches that have rusted out at the base and are simply lying where they landed – tipped against the wall; the rusted-out wall thermostat is unsightly and barely recognizable as a thermostat – it needs to go; and the lifeguard chair stand looks unsafe from the state of rust at the base. Then there's the mold or mildew or whatever that is, crawling up the walls, the peeling paint that covered last year's peeling paint – and the list goes on.

I can't really say if any of the board members have ever actually walked around the pool perimeter, but it isn't pretty, and certainly not a point of pride on our nice campus. There's a whole lot that needs to be done before any attempt to market it to out-of-towners.

A dream would be to remodel it someday, to have indoor slides, a zero depth entry, keep some lap lanes, and add an exercise and therapy area.

I encourage the board to take a look at the remodeled indoor pool in the north part of Boulder to see what it would take to make the pool into a smaller version of an indoor water park. It never hurts to look.

And I would encourage them to talk to Chadron State College in Nebraska to learn what it is they do in the agricultural town of 5,700 to

keep their pool busy. In spite of the town's new multipurpose activity center, Chadron State is revamping their pool and will keep it open. I have been told by a former Chadron resident that if you have a public library card in Chadron, then you are welcome to check out books from the college library as well, and students can use the city library. That spells "community" to me.

Personally, I feel the college helps make the community, and the community helps make the college. There are some who feel the college needs to be more community minded, more visible, more direct and open with the community and more neighborly. Whether that's fact or not, I can't say. It's in the mind of the beholder.

But it can be done, and should be done. Families traveling through, or coming into town should have an opportunity to really see the college, when otherwise they would have no reason to take a second look.

I'm reminded of a corny little poem from longer ago than I care to admit. It goes like this: A fish will never cackle 'bout it's million eggs or so; /the hen is quite a different bird – one egg, and hear her crow! / And that is just the very fact that leads me to surmise; / don't hide your head, but blow your horn, it pays to advertise.

I vote in favor of a big friendly sign that says, "Welcome, we're glad you're here, we invite you to be a part of us."

*Vera Sloan thinks life should be fund, and enjoys all the parts of it she sees as Society Editor.*

### Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

