



Free Press Viewpoint

No budget? Take a vacation

In an attempt to save themselves from crushing defeats, the United States Senate shirked their constitutional responsibilities this week to run home and try to get reelected.

En masse the senators decided to drop what they were doing so they could go to their home states and campaign. It wouldn't be so bad except for the fact that the senate was in the middle of some fairly important negotiations, namely the budget. Without a budget or a continuing resolution – a temporary bill that will keep government services operating – by today, the government would have been shut down in a “life imitates art imitates life” moment from *The West Wing*. Thankfully they remembered to pass the resolution before they skipped town. The vote was 84-14, so it wasn't just a one-party thing.

The budget itself included some increased spending, and nobody wanted to be labeled a big spender in the weeks before the election.

The senate had been scheduled to stay in session until next week. Now, however, they've put off a whole mess of bills including a decision on whether or not to extend the Bush-era tax cuts, which have been the big bone of contention for the past several weeks. To put that much emphasis on one issue, in effect saying the economic future of the country revolves around it, and then postpone the decision, is just irresponsible.

But never fear, the senate did get some important work done Wednesday: they passed a bill to require television stations to keep commercials at the same volume as the programs they interrupt. Nothing against this truly vital piece of legislation, but perhaps the Senate's time would have been better spent elsewhere before bolting to their home states.

The political effect of this decision is that important things will stay in a holding pattern until after the election.

To get anything done under this Senate, they will have to have a lame duck session, which is something of a gray area. Continuing to exert power in the short time between when the people vote you out and when the next guy is sworn in, is ethically debatable.

If the electorate is paying attention, the real effect of this will be to only increase the current dissatisfaction with our elected officials and hasten their departure from office.

– Kevin Bottrell

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774

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 or Fax (202) 225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 274-W, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

COLBY FREE PRESS

155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963
Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

Send news to: colby.editor@nwkansan.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.

Steve Haynes - Publisher
s.haynes@nwkansan.com

NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor
kbottrell@nwkansan.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter
aheintz@nwkansan.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansan.com

Vera Sloan - Society Editor
colby.society@nwkansan.com

ADVERTISING

Heather Woofter - Advertising Representative
hwoofter@nwkansan.com

Andrea Bowers - Advertising Representative
abowers@nwkansan.com

Kathryn Ballard - Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansan.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansan.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Robin Tubbs - Office Manager
rtubbs@nwkansan.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansan.com

NORWEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Lana Westfahl, Jim Jackson, Betty Morris, Jim Bowker, Judy McKnight, 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 NorWest 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



Writing tools a collector's treasure

I opened a box the other day that had been stashed, and found it was mostly full of paper and writing instruments. I say writing instruments because they run the gamut from chalk to permanent markers.

I need a small aside here to explain that, while it may be weird for you to stash such a collection, to me it's business as usual. I've always been fascinated by the potential of pristine, untouched paper and the potential it holds. I can browse for hours in an office supply store, just soaking up all the different kinds and applications of paper, from labels to super-white printer paper to poster board in wild colors.

Then there's the tools you use to put your very own thoughts on all that paper. Actually, the box I opened only had two pieces of chalk, which I conscientiously set aside for my grandchildren. They seem to think of sidewalks the same way I do paper, and go through chalk like crazy. Of course, my chalk is the kind made for blackboards, but I guess they'll have to make do.

The rest of those writing instruments took a little more effort to deal with. There are handfuls of the things, one or two of which I think I recognize from when my own kids were little enough to write on sidewalks.

They range from pencil stubs (which I'm too stubborn to throw out until they are too short to sharpen) to dried-up markers to fairly fancy ball-point pens.

Many of the pens are those freebies some places give away. I've even known people who had collections of the things. I like collections, but a cute coffee cup always works when I pick it up, unlike a cute pen, which eventually either dries up or runs out of ink.

Oddly, I've never acquired even one fountain



Marian Ballard

• Collection Connections

pen, another popular object to collect. Somewhere, I might still have the non-fountain pen I got once, along with a bottle of gold ink. That was one of those experiments that worked better in imagination than in reality.

It did teach me a couple of things. One, that writing with a nib is harder than it looks and that my penmanship was not really up to the task. Two, while one or two creative ideas for a fancy pen with gold ink had presented themselves, I didn't come up with three or four more creative ideas, so I was left with a mostly full bottle of ink and a pen which kept disappearing into the pile.

Dad loved fountain pens – almost as much as Mom hated them.

They leaked. Even with pocket protectors, he might wind up with ink stains on his shirt pockets. When he wrote, he might get ink on his cuffs, and was almost guaranteed to get it on his hands. Perhaps others are able to use fountain pens neatly, but my father seemed to have a predisposition to leaky pens.

Even laying one down in the wrong way or the wrong place seemed to offer potential for disaster. That's probably why fountain pens were among the “don't touch” items in our house. Not being allowed to touch them, I never got the habit of using them.

A pen, any pen, in the hands of a child is enough to create housecleaning (and kid-clean-

ing) nightmares. The potential for destruction to be found in a fountain pen, however, is exponentially greater than almost anything. For sheer mess, one broken cartridge can probably compete with a permanent marker in the hands of a preschooler with a whole freshly painted wall for a canvas.

I could be wrong about that, of course. If anyone out there is unfortunate enough to be able to offer a one-to-one comparison through experience, please feel free to share the results. After all, I'd hate to have someone else's perfectly valid catastrophe go to waste.

Speaking of markers, I've been sorting through some of them to get rid of those that are dried up. Have you ever noticed that the ones meant for kids to color with dry up the fastest? That's probably because they leave the caps off. This leaves adults with the fun job of going through a set of 40, testing each one. With crayons, at least, you can tell when they're used up because they disappear.

Testing those 40 markers isn't fool-proof either, because they might work one day and die the next.

My favorites, though, are the old standby Magic Markers. I always like the way they smell. I suppose that means they're highly toxic and will fry my brain. They remind me though, of one of the first tools I ever use to get clean paper messy – good old tempera paint, with a brush as long as my arm. I guess that might have been what started my love affair with paper. It's never worn out.

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.

Performance testing? Been there already

Thirty-three states have bought into the nationalized Common Core curriculum for math and language arts, several even before it was finalized, and mostly on the coasts and the South.

But the upper Great Plains states (except Nebraska) are holdouts to this latest educational “reform.”

To overcome widespread opposition to federalized education, purveyors of this reform are bragging that this will get away from fill-in-the-bubble tests. Instead, they will use performance testing. Instead of testing discrete facts, they will test for higher reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Kansas has good reason to ignore this advertising. When it comes to performance testing, Kansas has been there, done that.

Kansas implemented performance-based assessment in the late 1990s. It was a total failure.

The education gurus then and now live under the illusion there is a generalized way of thinking for problem solving. Once this magical system is internalized, they say, it can be used to solve all sorts of problems. The ignore decades of failure.

The 1990s Kansas science performance assessment posed several actual experimental questions. Schools had to know ahead of time which problem they would receive so they could order the materials their students would then “creatively” use to design and conduct tests. One question involved whether the mi-



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

croscopic holes in leaf surfaces would vary in different environments. Counting these holes required clear fingernail polish and tape, so the school would buy up the community's whole supply in preparation for the test.

Teachers could either chose to not prep their students for the specific underlying knowledge, or drop everything and teach about the leaf. Students who knew leaf structure scored much higher.

The take-home lesson for teachers was that there was no abstract higher level thinking without content knowledge. You have to know how to play chess to solve a chess problem. You have to know how a car works to solve a car problem. And knowing how to solve a chess problem does not aid you in solving a car problem.

We also asked whether it is reasonable or desirable to expect all students to gain skills in analysis, interpretation and synthesis of science ideas (which are still great simplifications of complex thought). This is as unreasonable as expecting all students to become skilled artists. Some are Einsteins and some are Picassos.

Some are neither. And it is wrong to pressure the system to make each student all of these.

Kansas science teachers were frustrated. Kansas put a moratorium on the science performance-based testing that consumed a week for teachers to administer and another week to grade (though the grading was not reliable). Kansans know, “the more you weigh them, the less time you have to feed them.”

Today's “new” tests are computer-based, faster and impersonal. But these so-called high-level reasoning problem-solving tests will only drive the teach-to-the-test fever that is narrowing our curriculum, making learning tedious, and driving our college students to fields other than teaching.

No testing is needed that is external to the teacher's class. We only need those quizzes and tests a teacher finds useful in moving forward each student's unique learning.

Tests should be the responsibility of the professional teacher. And if teachers write their own tests and keep them to a minimum, as they should, it is difficult for the administration, media and government to misuse them.

Finland, recognized as the best school system in the world based on the college success rates of its graduates, long ago decided: “less testing, more learning.”

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.

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

