



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Locals lacking in election fervor

The sometimes-heated competitions in the statewide elections have left us disappointed that there is little competition this year on the local level.

In the general election Tuesday, there are no Thomas County candidates with opponents. Commissioner Byron Sowers and Register of Deeds Lora Volk are running unopposed for re-election. Nine people are running without opposition for township clerk. There are four townships that don't even have official candidates for clerk.

There's some competition elsewhere in northwest Kansas. To the north, incumbent state Rep. John Faber lost in the Republican primary to Ward Cassidy. Cassidy now faces Democrat Bob Streyve. To the west, Sherman County Commissioner Chuck Thomas had been unchallenged, but now faces write-in candidate Larry Enfield. To our knowledge, no such write-in campaigns exist in Thomas County.

The statewide races have a lot of competition; sometimes it's downright nasty. Not a day goes by that the newspaper doesn't get a press release from one campaign attacking another. At the only televised debate between U.S. House candidates Alan Jilka and Tim Huelskamp, the pair spent the first 20 seconds of their 90-second answers attacking each other.

While we sometimes might wish for a little more civility between candidates, these debates and forums are good because competition is good. Competition is how we find out what the candidates really believe and why. If a candidate is forced to defend his positions, you find out if he really has a good reason for holding them.

Competition in the political arena is how we know we're getting the best man or woman for the job.

So why isn't there more competition here? It isn't that we don't care about government and what government is doing. When Rep. Jim Morrison and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer held a town-hall meeting here during the last legislative session, the place was packed to overflowing. The pool initiative last year got a lot of people interested on either side of the issue.

We've had competition in the past, the most recent being the county sheriff race in 2008.

There is typically less interest in mid-term elections. Voter turnout is always less, and until this year media coverage was always less. Presidential races tend to get people fired up, and although we've seen a lot of rallies in big cities this year and a lot of shouting on cable news, we haven't seen that level of interest here.

Beyond voting, to really change something in government, you need to run for office. It's the people in power who can really make a difference, and you get in power by starting at the bottom, with a township clerk or county commissioner race. The greatest responsibility we have as citizens in a self-government is participate in that government.

So hopefully we'll see more candidates turn out for the next election, in the meantime, make sure you vote on Tuesday.

— Kevin Bottrell

### 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. Nor do we run form letters.

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155 W. Fifth St. (USPS 120-920) (785) 462-3963  
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Steve Haynes - Publisher  
s.haynes @ nwkansas.com

#### NEWS

Kevin Bottrell - News Editor  
kbottrell @ nwkansas.com

Andy Heintz - Sports Reporter  
aheintz @ nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor  
mballard @ nwkansas.com

Vera Sloan and Shelby Pulkrabek - Society Editors  
colby.society @ nwkansas.com

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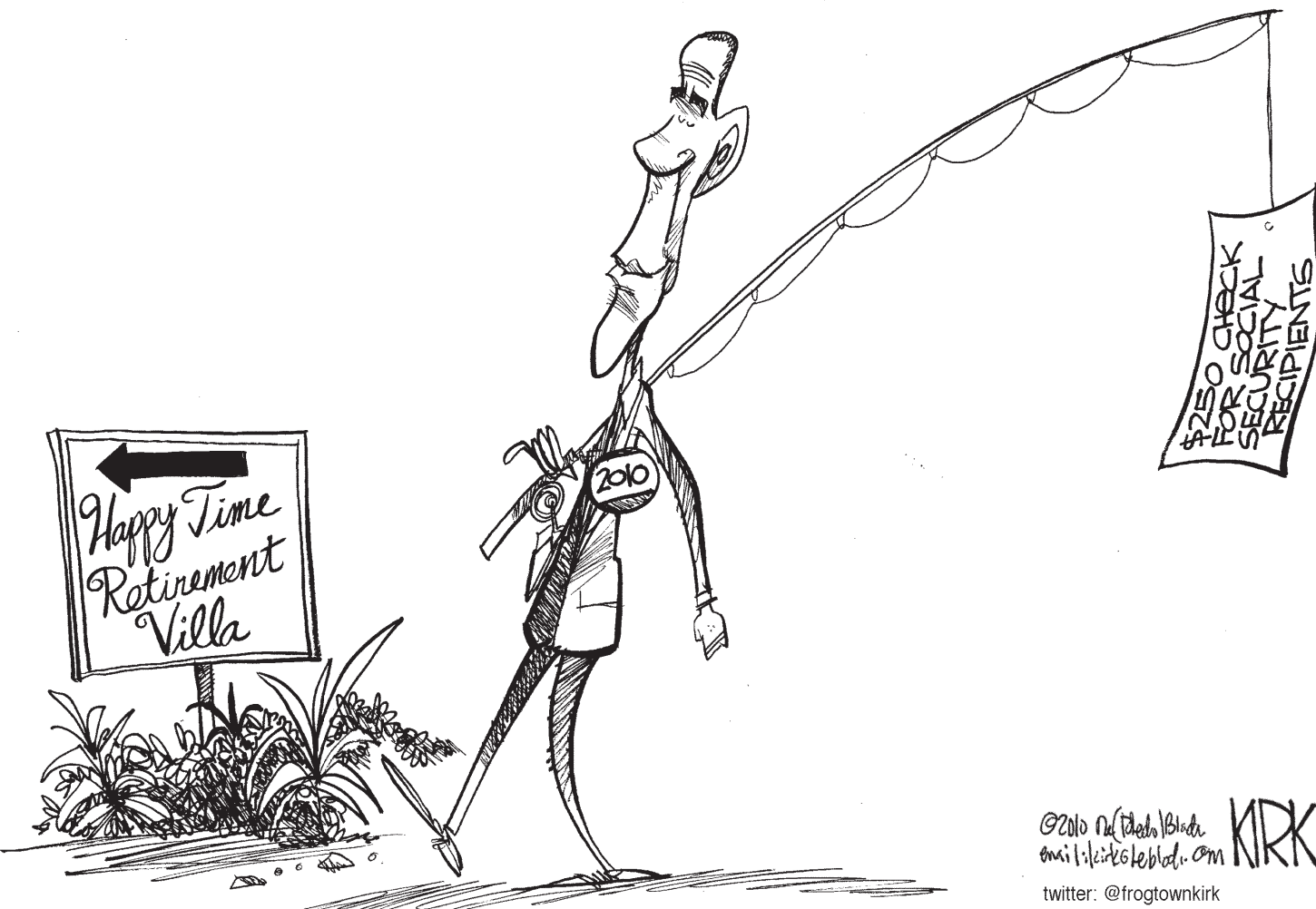
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### GOING FISHING



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Email: kirk@kirk.com  
twitter: @frogtownkirk

## Kitchen seasonings reflect life's seasons

Nothing tells me that my children have grown up and gone off on their own like looking around their kitchens.

My kitchen has a coffee maker, toaster, blender and microwave on the counters. There's a knife block with an assortment of mismatched blades and salt and pepper on the stove. I also keep Nature's Seasoning and Lawry's Seasoning Salt close at hand. These plus some garlic from my garden are the spices I use 90 percent of the time.

Visiting the girls in Georgia, I discovered that they don't cook like mother.

Oldest daughter and her husband just upgraded to a home in Old Town Augusta. It's got lots of windows and trees and is just six blocks from Felicia's office downtown.

Their kitchen sports a fancy fridge with an ice maker and water on the door. This is an big upgrade for them. Their old house had an apartment-size fridge that was always so over-stuffed you couldn't find anything.

Their new stove is a glass-topped electric like mine. I love my stove. They are planning to switch theirs to gas as soon as they can afford it.

On top of their stove are four kinds of pepper — white, ground cayenne, crushed red and whole peppercorns; peanut oil; gumbo filé; dried tomato sprinkles; garlic powder and salt; paprika; Mrs. Dash and something called Chef



Cynthia Haynes

### • Open Season

Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blends.

On the counter, they have an all-purpose toaster-oven and a microwave. The blender must be hidden.

Over at youngest daughter's, who lives in the suburbs with husband and baby girl, you can find four kinds of cereal on top of the fridge.

Spices are all put away, but there is an amazing variety of baby food items sitting out. It seems that youngest is making some of her own baby food. Granddaughter, we are told, adores squash and will be trying peas next week.

Both girls have hanging baskets with fruit, onions, garlic and potatoes. I have those things, but in my kitchen they clutter up the counter or kitchen table in wicker baskets I got with a gift basket at some convention somewhere.

Son is the minimalist in the family. He's a bachelor who works at two fancy restaurants. There are no spices on his counters. His fridge

has a minimum of necessities. I know he cooks at home, but he tends to eat out a lot, too.

Whenever we visit, I try to take him an ice chest filled with frozen food — chili, green chili, swiss steak, steak soup and so on. Things I make in large batches and have in my freezer.

When we visited this last week, I noted he still had a lot of containers in his freezer. They are all chili, he said. He's waiting for cold weather to have that.

Different styles for different folks. At oldest daughter's we had a Cuban dish with hamburger, green peppers, garlic, olives and raisins over rice. At youngest daughters, we will have fried chicken. She doesn't make it much, but her husband adores it.

We took son out for barbecue. When they come to visit us, we'll cook a steak on the grill and finish off the meal with twice-baked potatoes and green beans. The boys don't always get that at home, either, but for us, it's a family tradition.

One thing for sure, it's all good, and I'm not losing any weight this week.

Cynthia Haynes, co-owner and chief financial officer of NorWest Newspapers, writes this column weekly. Her pets include cats, toads and a praying mantis. Contact her at c.haynes @ nwkansas.com

## Electronics make us dumb

Ask your teenager to recite the months of the year. We always assume our children learn the order of months right along with the alphabet, numbers, and other conventions. But an observant veteran Kansas teacher reports that some of his high school students no longer know that February comes after January or August after July.

If that sounds strange, it is because you and I still flip through a paper calendar.

Many youngsters today get their time, day, month and year from their cell phones. With instant access to a digital "now," they never see the layout of a whole year or a whole month. As a result, some of today's students assume every month has 30 days (a 31st day appears so rarely). Without a calendar "time map," they do not notice February is missing 29 and 30.

Before you start bemoaning some youngster's loss of a sense of time, consider the car GPS. They supposedly replace a road map. Remember when car dials that registered oil level were replaced by warning lights that only came on when the it dropped to a danger level — my dad called them "idiot lights." GPS is an "idiot map" that never provides us the knowledge we get from genuine maps. We mindlessly "turn left" and "turn right" to get to our destination. But we never know where we are. If we have to return on our own, or describe where we are in an emergency, or direct someone else to this location, we cannot.

We have abandoned learning for electronic convenience for several decades.

Need a square root; hit that key on a calculator.

Need a logarithm; hit the "log" key.

If we originally learned to calculate the square root, we still have a concept of "square root" from that early hand calculation even if we no longer remember the steps.



John Richard Schrock

### • Education Frontlines

But logarithms are a problem. What were they anyway? If you played with a slide rule, you actually had your hands on logarithmic scales: equal distances marked off for zero to one, one to ten, and ten to 100. By sliding these scales back and forth you could multiply by adding and divide by subtracting. Even when the slide rule faded into memory, the "log" concept remained as you hit the calculator key.

But take away that experience of calculating square root by hand or playing with a slide rule and the square root and log keys on the calculator are just some form of magic. Just like relying on the GPS to get us somewhere or the cell phone to give us the time, relying on the calculator has made us dumb.

And don't forget the clock. Is yours still an "old" analog clock with hour and minute hands that sweep out a circle? In the northern hemisphere, water goes down a drain and hurricanes and tornadoes rotate "counterclockwise." But in a world with only digital clock numbers, the words "clockwise" would no longer have any meaning. Teachers would be unable to describe rotary motion.

Those expensive white "smartboards" that are showing up in classrooms as a badge of techno-superiority are just as guilty. At one push of a button, it will generate random numbers. No need for the rich experience of students putting their names in a hat and drawing out one name by random. All the questions

that students would naturally pose about randomness never occur.

Hitting electronic keys is convenient. It is accurate. But in many cases, it replaces the experiences that make the world meaningful for our students.

Don't expect new research concepts. Bye bye Nobel Prizes.

Thanks to mis-use of electronics, some of our children won't even know the order of the months in the year. Because it is new technology, we mistakenly think it must be a better way to learn. It is the new dumb, and we are proud of it.

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.

### Where to write, call

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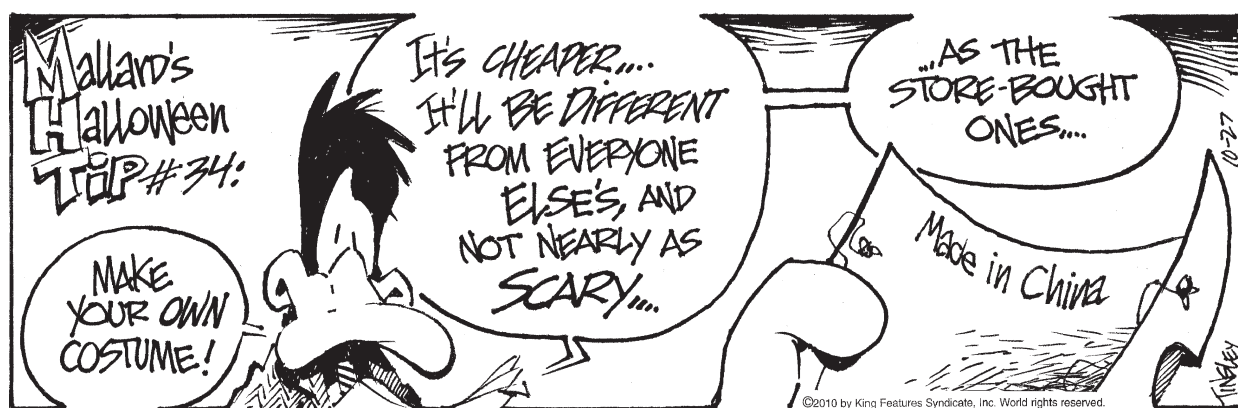
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State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Room 274-W, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785) 296-7676 e-mail: jmorrison@ink.org

### Mallard Fillmore

### • Bruce Tinsley



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