

Other Viewpoints

Meddling state taxing to locals

Nothing riles state officials, in Kansas and elsewhere, like an edict from on high, meaning a mandate handed down by the federal government.

But that doesn't stop state lawmakers, at least in Kansas, from passing, or attempting to pass, mandates of their own along to local officials, who generally are just as overjoyed with them as state officials are of those handed down from Washington.

Nothing we say here is likely to change the level of government meddling from above. The practice has almost become a tradition, at least at the federal level, and it isn't going to stop anytime soon, regardless of which political party controls the reins of government.

We will note for the record, however, that the best government is that closest to the citizens, and each level of government has enough to do without trying to extend its reach and control over matters those citizens have elected others to deal with.

That would seem to be especially true of our Legislature this year, which has been considering significant changes in the state's income tax code, legislative and congressional redistricting, Medicaid reform, changes in the school finance formula and an overhaul of the Kansas Public Employees Retirement System.

Final action hadn't been taken on any of those matters when legislators went home for an extended spring break, but lawmakers still found time in their schedule to discuss issues some local officials look upon as state mandates. Those issues haven't been passed, either, but legislators will return to Topeka later this month.

The issues of concern to some city and county officials include a state law limiting local governments' ability to ban concealed carry guns in public buildings not equipped with security guards and metal detectors and property taxes.

Granted, simply placing signs banning concealed carry guns on the doors of public buildings won't make the buildings any safer or deter someone bent on mayhem. But if the constituents of a county commission, city council or board of education would prefer concealed-carry weapons were allowed in all buildings operated by those entities, they could make their wishes known to their locally elected officials.

The property tax issue involves offering cities and counties about \$90 to reduce property taxes and a requirement that local governing bodies would have to take a vote to raise property taxes if they planned to collect additional revenue generated by an increase in property values.

There's no denying many Kansans think their property taxes are too high, but they have the right to speak up – regardless of whether a governing body is raising the property tax mill levy or declining to reduce the levy as property values increase – when local officials are preparing the annual budgets, or at any other time they choose. If taxpayers think they are being ignored, they can protest at the voting booths.

Linking issues with specific governing bodies makes it easy for the taxpayers to identify who to hold responsible for actions or decisions they don't like. There's no reason to blur the lines of responsibility.

– *The Topeka Capital-Journal, via the Associated Press*

We encourage comments on opinions expressed on this page. Mail them to the *Colby Free Press*, 155 W. Fifth St., Colby, Kan., 67701.

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@nwkansas.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.

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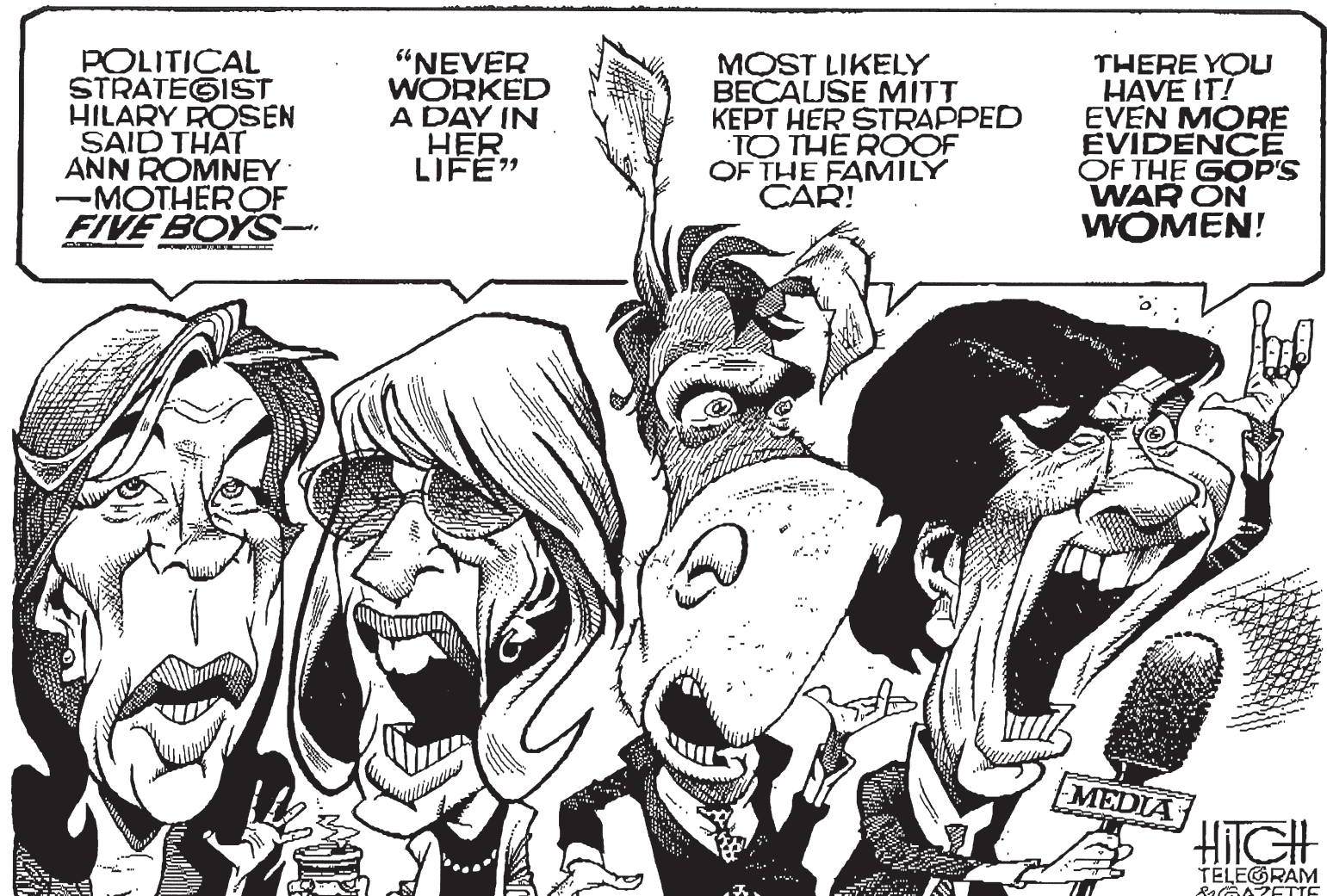
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THE COLBY FREE PRESS (USPS 120-920) is published every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, except the days observed for Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day, by Nor'West Newspaper, 155 W. 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



Southern girl in search of catfish

The chuckle I hear means I must have slipped back into my Southern accent.

Some days it just happens. All I have to do is hear something Southern and the accent is back. Last week I had to make a call to Seymour, Texas, and that pretty much guaranteed the accent being back at least for the day.

I swear there are some words that make even the diehard Yankee sound Southern.

When I moved here and folks would ask where I came from I would answer, "Sweetwater, Texas." Try saying that and not sounding Southern.

Food discussions usually show how Southern I really am. When my husband and I went to the fund raiser in Brewster for the Community Grocery Store they served catfish, slaw, fries and dessert. I could have stayed there for hours and enjoyed the catfish. The cook obviously must have had some Southern in him because it was delicious.

My husband asked if I wanted dessert and I said no, just more catfish. He went to get it for me on the way to get his dessert and the ladies teased him about wanting it for his wife. They said, "sure it's for your wife," wink, wink. I pigged out and told my husband that they should open a restaurant serving catfish. Boy, would I be there.

There was another fund raiser at the Ameri-



Sharon Friedlander

• Musings

can Legion and it was biscuits and gravy, another Southern staple. It is no wonder that Southern folks carry some extra pounds. We either put butter or mayo on just about everything. My mom was a great cook and she shared all those bad habits with me. If it isn't rich, it ain't Southern.

I have always loved the Southern way when it comes to manners. You didn't get to be disrespectful nor rude without incurring the wrath of momma. You also would never have thought to sass her because you just knew that wasn't going to be worth it. The mantra was, "rebel at your own risk." For a short woman, she could move really fast.

It is difficult to eat out at times because most restaurants don't use enough butter or mayo to suit my tastes. I also use a lot of herbs, so most food eaten out is pretty dull. I keep hoping that a good comfort food restaurant will open up with biscuits and gravy for breakfast and cat-

fish for dinner. Throw in a good selection of veggies and I will beat a path to their door.

Southern tastes are creeping out of the South a little at a time. Now you can get sweet tea at McDonalds and Sonic. A meal in the South is not complete if it isn't accompanied by a large glass of sweet tea.

Occasionally, you can find grits on the breakfast menu. I can understand why a lot of folks don't like grits because they have only eaten them in restaurants and they are usually lumpy and without flavor. Grits are not gourmet dining by any means, but you gotta know how to cook 'em. If you ever get the chance to have some speckle-hearted grits from Callaway Gardens, you will see why we love 'em.

All meals must come with big fluffy biscuits and plenty of the aforementioned butter. Gravy is a nice add on, but honey will do nicely. Meals like that usually make dieters turn a really scary shade of green with envy.

So, next time you hear my accent, or watch me pile butter on biscuits, just remember, I am a Southern girl.

Sharon Friedlander, publisher of the Colby Free Press, enjoys reading, hot rods and critters. Contact her at sfriedlander@nwkansas.com.

Environment central to farmers

Next week marks the 42nd anniversary of what many consider the birth of the modern environmental movement. The first Earth Day celebration began April 22, 1970.

This is also a special week for those farmers and ranchers who are involved with the production of food, fuel and fiber. The original premise of Earth Day was to promote the conservation of our natural resources. It is only fitting that on this day we showcase the progress of the Kansas farmer and rancher – but is there really any question most people who live on the planet Earth support its survival?

Begging the question – could any cause be more humane?

To help put Earth Day in perspective, this celebration of our planet really began gathering steam at the beginning of the '90s. It was at this time that almost everyone jumped on the bandwagon. It became a very "in" thing to bang the environmental drum.

Back then, I remember *Fortune* magazine proclaiming for the first time that the environment was a cause worthy of saving. Others shouted from the mountaintops that while Motherhood, apple pie, baseball and the flag all may be subject to controversy – saving our planet was beyond debate.

Noble, without question. But isn't there a big difference between the desire for clean air, clean water, clean places to hike and the passion by some who would overhaul this planet?

The entire concept of Earth Day is so popular because it appeals strongly to the "deep" longings shared by many people.

Flash back – 30 years and recall the generation who contemplated a world of natural beauty and harmony.

This same idea is back in vogue today. In this perfect world, people will fully understand the tools they use, and some believe they can provide for themselves without depending on



John Schlageck

• Insights

Kansas Farm Bureau

the professionals and specialists.

In this revamped world, life would slow down and be viewed as a whole. This ideology offers a sense of place – of being rooted. Ancient wisdom and grassroots democracy are essential. Quality and equality of life are where it's at. Much is said about ends but little about means. This ideology speaks poetically about much – plainly about little.

So what happens after Earth Day passes? Most folks go about their daily lives and forget about Earth Day. Some will focus on small things like recycling or changing their shopping habits. Some fringe environmentalists may be forced to re-think their radical positions of imminent apocalypse.

Protecting and caring for this old world we call home is often a struggle. Like each day's sunrise and sunset, we often take it for granted. Conservation of our planet can be a challenge because some regard the land as a private commodity.

Others, including farmers, ranchers and those who make their living from the land, view this planet as a community to which they belong. They love, respect and care for the land. They adhere to an ethic, which enlarges the boundaries of their community to include soils, waters, plants and animals – the land.

There is no other way for the land to survive the impact of modern man. We must always remember that while our land yields fruits, vegetables and grains, it also yields a cultural harvest – one we as inhabitants all share and

must nurture.

We must ensure our educational and economic systems are headed toward, rather than away from, an increased consciousness of the land.

Today, only a handful of people make their living from the land. Today, many middlemen, countless machines and sophisticated technology separate man from the land. Many have no vital relation to the land. For them, it is generally thought of as, "that space between cities on which crops and grass grow, or cattle graze."

Let's remember throughout the year, not only on Earth Day, that land is used right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the living community. It is used wrong when it tends to be otherwise.

We can never throw away or limit the tools which have provided so much for so many. Let's remember throughout the year our commitment to the successful and wise use of our life-giving land. Let's remember that we have not outgrown the land.

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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