



Other Viewpoint

Strong warnings saved people's lives

The weekend was a fresh and scary reminder to south-central Kansans that tornadoes come with the territory. But it also demonstrated that early, accurate warnings can be lifesavers. The meteorologists used their high-tech tools and the resulting data to warn people days ahead of the potential for a massive tornado system to target Wichita and other parts of Kansas on Saturday.

Thanks to traditional and social media, residents had plenty of specific information at their fingertips and on their TVs and radios about what could happen.

As the storm system's deadly severity became clear, south-east Wichita was ablaze with red on the radar maps and the tornado sirens wailed accordingly.

Most important, the majority of people paid attention and took shelter.

Even many of those jaded plains dwellers who act as if the sirens' howl is the official signal to head for the front yard eventually chose to ride out Saturday's EF-3 tornado in places that would have made meteorologists Merril Teller, Jay Prater and Dave Freeman proud.

Then another defining characteristic of the south-central Kansan took over – the urge to step forward and help others.

Thanks are due the firefighters, law enforcement officers, government officials, charities and churches that responded to the need, even as late evening became middle of the night.

And it's hard to imagine how things might have been different if not for the storm shelter at the Pinaire Mobile Home Park, near 52nd Street South and Clifton – and the willingness of residents to use it.

Too bad so many people in the Wichita area later acted as if the destruction was meant for sightseeing rather than search, rescue and cleanup. Their curiosity ended up clogging the streets and making it harder for emergency crews to get around.

As the winds of up to 165 mph mangled houses and belongings, they robbed many of a way of life. The affected neighborhoods and businesses will be in the community's thoughts and prayers for the months to come.

And how frustrating that the tornado damaged the facilities of three of Wichita's planemakers, adding to their challenges amid the economy's slow-motion recovery. Spirit Aero-Systems, Wichita's biggest employer, expected to be closed through at least Tuesday to assess damage.

As those in the parts of Wichita and the rest of Kansas that were untouched by the weekend storms count their blessings, they can be confident that nature will have more storms in store for the region. We can't stop them from coming. We can only be as ready and safe as possible when they get here.

– *The Wichita Eagle, via the Associated Press*

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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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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.

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Storm spotter classes help avoid storms

I knew going to all those storm spotter classes would pay off some day.

No, I didn't see an EF-5 tornado, call in an alert that saved a town or take any cool storm-spotter pictures.

I did see, for a minute or so before it dissipated, what I'm pretty sure was a tornado. At least it looked like a cloud-to-ground rotating column of cloud. Spotters north of us reported a confirmed tornado right before that.

But let me back up a little.

We'd been in Lincoln for the Nebraska Press convention, a meeting we make most years. Mostly, we go to see old friends, but since I'm still on the board, we help represent the National Newspaper Association.

We'd planned to stay until the pre-dinner reception, then take off for home. But the National Weather Service had issued one of the toughest tornado forecasts ever for Saturday afternoon and evening. Cynthia and I talked about it, and decided that if we had to dodge severe storms and even tornadoes on the way home, it's be easier to deal with them in the daylight.

At the same time, many of our friends and neighbors to the north were walking toward the football stadium for the spring game. That's where 70,000 people dressed in red sit together for a couple of hours and yell their heads off for their team, despite the fact that it's just playing itself.

No one ever said people in Nebraska were sane.

About the time we had decided to leave, the people wearing red started walking back south,



Steve Haynes

• Along the Sappa

away from the stadium. Seems the officials and coaches had heard the forecast, too. At the same time, the first of several thunderstorms ripped through town, scattering thunder, rain and lightning.

We said our goodbyes after a short tour of the press association office and started driving west. While the post-game traffic had thinned out – most of the cars from the stadium lots seemed to be turning left, into the “entertainment” district of downtown Lincoln – Interstate 80 in the rain proved to be more than we could take. While Cynthia napped, I cut over to U.S. 6 and fixed a course for McCook, one eye cocked for the clouds.

We passed through some storms on the way to Holdrege. There, we stopped to buy popcorn and Cynthia ran into a couple of friends from Oberlin. While she was talking, the dispatcher was sending storm spotters out west of town.

A few miles to the southwest, after leaving Atlanta, we saw the storm they were waiting for: big, ugly and black, and headed right across the line of U.S. 6 to Arapahoe.

In storm-spotter class, they tell you never to drive into the front of a storm. That's where you find the heavy rain, big hail, high winds

and lightning. And driving my “new” truck, I wasn't too eager to jump into whatever might be there.

The other thing about going into the storm is you can't see whatever's coming through the rain. And if that's a tornado, you might not have time to get away.

We decided to detour south through Oxford, which was already past the south end of the storm. And lucky we did. While we were rounding the south end, spotters reported a tornado touching down near the highway we would have been on.

Looking north, we could see what appeared to be – it was hard to know for sure – a rope-like tornado hanging from the base of the storm. Then it was gone.

All kinds of loopy-loos and amateur storm spotters were racing around, too late to do much but get in the way. You can really see the impact of all the storm-chaser shows on television.

Used to be, the wags said tornado sirens sounded out here so people knew when to stand on the porch and look for the twister. Now, I guess, they mean it's time to go tearing up and down rural roads.

Me, I'd just as soon stay out of the way. If I ever see a Big Tornado, I'm sure it'll be the experience of a lifetime. But I've lived in Kansas most of my life, and I haven't seen one yet. Saturday was as close as I've been – or need to be.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

Tax increases looming

Every April, millions of Americans gather at their kitchen tables with receipts and pay stubs and attempt to fulfill their legal obligation to pay their taxes.

Navigating the complexity that is the U.S. tax code is both challenging and intimidating. Decades of special exemptions, deductions and loopholes paid as political favors leave Americans pulling out their hair while they try to fill out their forms. On top of that, years of reckless spending and borrowing leave many Americans scratching their heads as to the effectiveness of Washington's expensive pursuits.

However, nearly half of all Americans pay absolutely no federal income taxes. In fact, millions of Americans will view April 15 as a great day. According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, in 2009 about 30 percent of those filing tax returns actually received more money from other taxpayers than they paid in income taxes. This is not a refund on what they are paid – this is net income from the government.

But come 2014, filing taxes will be even worse for taxpaying Americans. When the Bush-Obama cuts expire at the end of 2012, all taxpayers will be subject to higher rates. Those in the lowest bracket will see their rates increase by half, from 10 percent to 15 percent.

Earners whose incomes fall into every other bracket will also see their tax rates go up as well. On top of those increases, the marriage penalty will return, family-friendly deductions like the child-care tax credit will decline precipitously and the death tax will climb to 55



U.S. Rep. Tim Huelskamp

• Capitol Notes

percent. And, we cannot forget about a surge in taxes from ObamaCare scheduled to take effect in 2014.

Many in Washington argue that tax increases are needed to balance the budget. But, based on decades of past experience, tax increases will only result in trillions of dollars more for the government to spend – or waste – not deficit reduction.

I know Washington can do more with less. In my first year in office, we cut more than \$130,000 from our own budget – on top of voting to cut our budget by over 10 percent over the past two years. I have introduced a bill to make sure that the Bush-Obama tax rates are made permanent, and have also voted to cut spending back to levels before the stimulus.

Simultaneously, holding the line against tax increases and reducing spending keeps more money in the hands of families and out of the hands of politicians and bureaucrats.

Here are some key points to consider as this massive tax increase looms around the bend:

- It is economically devastating to increase taxes during a recession. It was not that long ago that President Obama himself said: “You don't raise taxes in a recession.” Though he seems to have abandoned this belief, I agreed

with him then.

- Cutting marginal tax rates can actually increase revenue. President Kennedy championed major tax cuts in the 1960s as did President Reagan in the 1980s, frequently making the case that the federal government can actually take in more money when taxes are low and certain. Kennedy and Reagan were proven right – revenues increased as tax rates were reduced.

- Most Kansans want fundamental tax reform – and I agree. We want a simpler, fairer, flatter tax code where politicians in Washington aren't using the tax policy to pick winners and losers. And we do not want a system where political access and favors mean special tax privileges for just a few.

Like many Kansans, I am not concerned that Washington's problem is that it has too little to spend. Its problem is that it simply wants to spend too much. At that same table where American families attempt to navigate the U.S. tax code, they make decisions – sometimes tough ones – about what they can and cannot afford. American families have had to do more with less; it is time that Washington does the same.

Congressman Tim Huelskamp of Fowler represents the First District of Kansas. He serves on the Veterans' Affairs, Budget, and Agriculture Committees.

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

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

