



Other Viewpoints

Clock is ticking; finish redistricting

Drawing a few maps shouldn't be this difficult, and it wouldn't be if not for the partisan politics involved. But that's like saying it would be easy to travel to a neighboring galaxy if it weren't so far away.

Redistricting in the wake of a census — apportioning the state's population among four congressional districts so each has about the same number of residents, then doing the same with 40 state Senate districts and 125 House districts — is always a partisan process and the current effort appears to be more contentious than most.

Regardless, it's time for legislators to get on with it and tell the state's voters in which congressional, House or Senate district they live.

House redistricting, where conservative Republicans hold all the cards hasn't been much of a problem. Senate redistricting has pitted Democrats and moderate Republicans against conservative Republicans, which thus far has resulted in a stalemate, one that House Speaker Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, has threatened to help resolve if senators can't get it done. O'Neal didn't say it out loud but he meant get it done to the satisfaction of conservative Republicans.

Congressional redistricting has proven equally difficult. Several maps have been drawn and rejected. The latest offering would split most of Topeka out of the 2nd Congressional District and put it into the 1st District. Topekans, including the Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce and some legislators, have objected, but that doesn't mean it isn't going to happen.

Legislators are scheduled to return to Topeka next week and redistricting is one of many major issues still unresolved. They shouldn't let it remain that way much longer.

Elizabeth Ensley Deiter, Shawnee County election commissioner, has informed county commissioners that the primary election filing deadline for state and federal offices would be moved to June 10 from June 1 if legislators haven't approved new maps by May 10.

Secretary of State Kris Kobach says the Legislature's inaction creates difficulties for potential challengers who still don't know what district they will live in when the dust settles.

The delay, he said, aids incumbents, whether they be Republican or Democrat.

Incumbents have sufficient advantage in normal times and don't need additional help from the redistricting process. Citizens are best served when elections draw multiple candidates capable of explaining and defending their positions while debating issues.

Challenges to incumbents are playing a role in the Senate redistricting process, where a map backed by that chamber's moderate members was rejected by Senate conservatives because potential candidates for some seats held by moderates were moved from the district in which they planned to seek election.

Conservative senators drafted their own map, but opponents said it was a blueprint for the defeat of several Democrats and moderate Republicans.

How all that's going to be resolved, we don't know. But we think it is time to get it done.

— *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, or e-mail colby.editor@nwkansas.com.

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 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.

Judge © 2012 KANSAS CAPITAL STAR / judge@kzstar.com 4/27



CONGRESS TAKES A POSITION ON THE SOCIAL SECURITY CRISIS.

First year yields reflections

An anniversary is a milestone — a time for reflection and introspection. For that reason, July 31 is forever burned onto my brain.

Almost 19 years ago on that date, I was fortunate enough to marry the love of my life. Truthfully, I remember very little about the day except that it was very hot in south Alabama and the air conditioning quit working that morning at the church. As for our first anniversary, I recall even less ... nothing really (sorry, dear).

Similar to July 31, April 16 is remarkable for me. On that day one year ago, I arrived in Colby to assume my current role at the college. I actually left Mississippi on April 15 and 17 1/2 hours later I arrived and settled in after midnight, after fighting wind and dust for hours in central Kansas and then struggling to remain awake for the last 100 miles. An extra-large coffee in Ellis kept me going. I then couldn't sleep when I finally reached the Sleep Inn — oh the irony — but that Saturday evening, I attended the Chamber of Commerce Banquet, and since then, time has passed all too quickly.

As I reflect on the past year, I am most surprised at how easily I found myself becoming a "local." I comment on the moisture with everyone else, praising amounts that in the humid South would be summarily dismissed as a trace. I also muse on the differences between those of us in western Kansas and the rest of the state, which seems to be anyone east of Russell. And I see no problem in jumping in the car and driving 60 — 90 — 250 miles to reach my desired destination. In moments of introspection, I have also learned quite a few things about myself and my role as president at the college during the past 12 months.

I learned just how important it is to keep the college in the forefront of the community. Communication, a skill which always can be improved, is underrated. As supporters of the institution, you should want and expect to hear



Steve Vacik

• From the president

often the significance of the college to northwest Kansas.

I shared my firm belief with a great group of ladies Monday evening (thanks PEO) that culturally, economically and educationally, the college is indispensable. From the Pickerill Lecture Series and Art Walk to the nurses, physical therapist assistants and dental hygienists graduated by the college — not to even mention the money put back into the community through students and employees — the impact is felt by all. So I will keep telling the story to all who will listen of what is often the best-kept secret in higher education, your community college.

Further, I can happily report that people are generally the same wherever you go. Many people both here and back in Mississippi have asked about the cultural differences, and there are some to be sure. I am like Sharon, if you read her column a while back — I love grits and no decent breakfast is complete without them, though I have yet to find them on a menu around these parts. Football is also not quite — OK, nowhere near — the "religion" that it is in the South, for better or for worse. But, our community, like ones in which I have previously lived, is full of hard-working people who care deeply for their families and friends, want the best for their children and believe that our nation is still the greatest the world has yet known. Helping students learn to think, to dream, to grow holistically and become more than they thought possible is also universal — and it is at the core of the college mission here

in Colby.

For me personally, I have found that no matter how much I might fight against it, the reality is that limitations exist which cannot be overcome. I cannot be everywhere I would like. Not only am I constrained by time, but also by ability. In a given week, I can only go so long before my mental and physical acumen are spent. Some events, though profitable, may be missed.

I cannot please everyone, either. I am confident that even if I could grant Miss America's wish for world peace, there would still be a general out of a job who would not be happy.

Doing the best that we are able is all that anyone can do. And I cannot keep from being frustrated at times. Often, what needs to be done is obvious, but for various reasons, sometimes it does not happen. As a person to whom some look for encouragement and direction, I strive to rise above it. I do not beat myself up about it like I once did, though. Being human, full of emotions, can be a limitation but also a terrific gift.

As I enter year two of my tenure, allow me to express thanks to the trustees, faculty and staff for their support of the college and me during the past year. Change is never easy, but the patience displayed by so many is very encouraging.

Thanks to each of you as well for welcoming my family and allowing us to be a part of such a special community. And thanks to divine providence for bringing me thus far — and for the future yet to be written. My hope is that, as time passes, such an anniversary will become just another day of many spent in long-term service to Colby Community College and northwest Kansas ... unremarkable to everyone but me.

Dr. Stephen Vacik is president of Colby Community College. Vacik is a native of Fargo, N.D., and was vice president of instruction at East Mississippi Community College before

League warns of pitfalls in tax proposals

Other Opinions

• Kansas League of Women Voters

The League of Women Voters of Kansas urges fellow voters to let their legislators know that they oppose a state tax system that is balanced on the backs of the middle class and the lower-income Kansans.

Tax bills by the Kansas Senate and House (currently in a conference committee) both do just that. (Senate Substitute for House Bill 2117 and House Substitute for Senate Bill 177)

The league points out that these bills would shift a major share of the state budget to the most regressive taxes, property and sales taxes. Under the Kansas Senate plan, the only group that would see taxes increase is the poorest 20 percent of Kansans, those with an average income of \$11,000, while the wealthiest Kansans' taxes would drop \$21,087 on average.

The Kansas House plan's ultimate outcome would be to completely repeal the least regressive taxes: the individual and corporate income tax and the financial institutions' privilege tax. Though no one is saying so, the state would have to raise other taxes or cut services such as education to make up for the revenue loss. That makes the House plan even more regressive than the Senate's bill.

Two standards of the league's position on taxation are equity and adequacy. Equity means that the ability for citizens to pay the tax should be the primary basis of a fair bal-

ancing of the tax burden.

A broadly-based tax system includes a mix of income, sales and property taxes to reduce the regressive nature of taxes on middle and lower-income citizens. Diverse sources of revenue broaden the tax base, assuring widespread sharing of costs.

To find legislators, go to www.ku.edu/pri/ksdata/vote/.

"Our work helps to bridge the gap between voters and elected officials," said league president Ernestine Krehbiel. "We study state issues such as taxation and funding of public services to assure that Kansas has the best government practices for all."

"After studying the tax proposals, the league opposes the reduction or elimination of income taxes and supports the exemption of food and drugs from the tax base. We support a broad-based state tax system that has diverse sources

of revenue and that is equitable, provides adequate revenue and is effectively and economically administered."

League leaders in Kansas are working to inform the public about issues such as the proposed tax plans, issues that impact lives, and to give voters avenues to express their opinions with elected leaders.

"The most basic and important avenue of citizens' power is by voting and then by contacting your elected officials with your views," she said. "It is our hope that everyone will make his or her voice heard now on this tax matter and in this election year by 'powering the vote.'"

"In Kansas, League members will be assisting citizens in this process this year by registering voters, providing candidate and election information online at www.Vote411.org and by hosting candidate debates and forums."

The league, a nonpartisan political organization, does not endorse or oppose any candidate or political party but encourages informed and active participation by citizens in government. The league works to increase understanding of major issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy. Membership is open to men and women of all ages. Go to www.LWVK.org to learn how to contact or join your local league.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

